

## RELATIONSHIP IN MOTHER'S PERSONALITY WITH HEALTHY BEHAVIOR IN AUTISTIC CHILDREN WITH CARERING MEDIATION IN THE TIME OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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**Abstract.** Healthy behavior implementation is a main priority during this Covid-19 pandemic, especially for children with autistic disorder. Children with autistic disorder have a high risk of transmission if there is no help associated with health problems accompaniment. The purpose of this study is to determine whether there is an effect of personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness) on health behavior for children with autism, mediated by parenting in the COVID-19 pandemic. The study participants included 31 mothers who have children with ASD aged 6-12 years with the Mild - Moderately category who live in the Central Java region and are cared for by their mothers. The research method used is a quantitative method using path analysis as a data analysis technique. The research measurement tools used a scale of health behavior, parenting scale, and Big Five Inventory (BFI) scale. The Results of the study found that there was an effect of personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness) on health behavior in children with autism, mediated by parenting in the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Keywords:** health behavior, autism, parenting, maternal personality.

**Abstrak.** Penerapan perilaku sehat di masa pandemi Covid-19 menjadi prioritas utama, khususnya bagi anak dengan gangguan autis. Anak dengan gangguan autis memiliki risiko penularan yang tinggi apabila tidak ada pendampingan terkait masalah kesehatan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui apakah ada pengaruh trait kepribadian (*extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness*) dengan perilaku sehat pada anak autis, yang dimediasi oleh pengasuhan di tengah pandemi Covid-19. Partisipan penelitian meliputi 31 ibu yang memiliki anak dengan ASD yang berusia 6 -12 tahun dengan kategori *Mild – Moderatly* yang tinggal di wilayah Jawa Tengah dan diasuh oleh ibu. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah metode kuantitatif dengan menggunakan analisis jalur sebagai teknik analisis data. Alat ukur penelitian menggunakan skala perilaku sehat, skala pengasuhan dan skala *Big Five Inventory* (BFI). Hasil penelitian menemukan bahwa ada pengaruh trait kepribadian ibu (*extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness* dan *openness*) terhadap perilaku sehat pada anak autis, dengan dimediasi oleh pengasuhan di tengah pandemi Covid-19.

**Keywords:** perilaku sehat, autism, pengasuhan, kepribadian ibu

## **INTRODUCTION**

Healthy behavior is an act of individual that is related with the effort to prevent or avoid illness and the cause of healthy issues (prevention), and a behavior in maintaining and improving health (promotive) (Notoatmodjo, 2014). This article will focus on healthy behavior to autistic children to prevent them getting infected to COVID-19 such as maintaining hands cleanliness, eating balanced nutritious food, doing physical activities, maintaining clothes cleanliness, and other positive behavior towards health.

Hundreds of thousands of people are infected and died because of COVID-19. According to World Health Organization (WHO), by 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2021, there were 818,386 confirmed positive case and 23,947 deaths (COVID-19, 2021). Whereas cases in children age 6-18 years old were 125,084 confirmed positive COVID-19 cases. By the increasing number of positive cases of COVID-19 on daily basis, it causes the feeling of worries of everyone including parents with children with special needs especial parents with autistic children. Autism is a pervasive developmental disorder that is characterized by an inability to interact socially, deviations in communications and restricted or stereotyped patterns of behavior or interests. (Sadock & Sadock, 2010; Desiningrum, 2016; *American Psychiatric Association*, 2013).

Children with autism have a high risk of getting infected if there is no guidance in health issues (Kring, Greenberg, Seltzer, 2010; Baweja, Brown, Edwards & Murray, 2021). This is also supported by previous study which found that children with autistic disorder experienced an increase in health problems (Filipek, 2005; Volkmar & Wiesner, 2004).

According to Widagdo & Wijaya research (2020), children with autistic disorder have issues with healthy behavior such as lazy to shower, do not eat vegetables and exercise, lack of sleep, and do not use soap when washing hands. While, in the condition of COVID-19 require children to be able to apply healthy behavior in order to prevent getting infected by COVID-19. Therefore, it is very important to cultivate the application of healthy behavior in the midst of a COVID-19 pandemic to children with autism that will bring a positive impact for them and their family.

Parents are the first environment that plays the most important role in the parenting style, so they have a great influence in the formation of behavior. Parenting is directing, contribution or supporting and guiding children with the aim that children will take responsibility for all things that must be done (Lestari, 2008; Suparmi, dkk., 2018; Virasiri, Yunibhand & Chaiyawat, 2011; Bern, 2010). Parenting is characterized by various aspect, including aspect of control, providing opportunities, directives, responsiveness, and communication aspect (Aldridge, 2010; Gilmore, Cuskelly, Jobling & Hayes, 2009; Gormley, Flemming & Campbell, 2011; Suparmi, Ekowarni, Adiyanti & Helmi, 2018).

Several previous study, found that parenting style has impacts towards shaping healthy behavior to children (David, Roman & Leach, 2017; Philips, Sioen, Sleddens, Michel & Henauw, 2014). In this study, parenting is focused on parenting that is done by mothers. As stated by Llyod and Hastings (in Valentia, Sani & Anggreany, 2017), mothers play more role as the primary caregiver for children and spend more times with their children. Optimal caregiving from other to children will bring an optimal healthy behavior to children with autistic disorder into reality (David, Roman & Leach, 2017).

Parents' personalities will be one of the factors that will influence caregiving (Lestari, 2012). Parents' personalities will be one factors in caregiving because personalities will be one of the aspects of social functional from parents that will impacting in child's growth (Prinzle, Reijntjes, Stams & Belksy, 2009; Lestari, 2012). Personalities in this study will be focused on mother's personalities that will be seen based of Big Five Inventory (BFI) that will identify five personalities dimensions according to McCrae and Costa (Pervin & Cervone, 2013) which cover *extraversion*, *agreeableness*, *conscientiousness*, *neuroticism*, dan *openness to experience* (Pervin & Cervone, 2013).

Previous research explained that the extraversion personality in mothers is described as sociable, active, optimistic, fun, cheerful, and affectionate. Therefore it is very important that a mother has an extraversion attitude *in* providing care for her child (Bornstein, Hahn & Hayne, 2011; Charke, 2006; Prinzle, Reijntjes, Stams & Belksy, 2009). This is related to the parenting aspect, namely the responsive aspect. In this responsive aspect, it refers to parents who give attention and affection to their children (Aldridge, 2010; Gilmore, Cuskelly, Jobling & Hayes, 2009; Gormley, Flemming & Campbell, 2011).

The next dimension is agreeableness. A mother who has an agreeableness personality in providing parenting will find it easier to develop positive relationships with children through affection and be more responsive (Bornstein, Hahn & Hayne, 2011; Pervin & Cervone, 2013). Meanwhile, mothers with disagreeableness tend to be egocentric and lack trust in others and are competitive (Bornstein, Hahn & Hayne, 2011; Pervin & Cervone, 2013).

In parenting, a mother who has a conscientiousness personality will be more thorough, well-organized, and goal-oriented as well as more consistent and structured with parenting tasks and pay attention to child development (Bornstein, Hahn & Hayne, 2011; Charke, 2006; Prinzie, Reijntjes, Stams & Belksy, 2009).

The next dimension is neuroticism which is characterized by negative emotions such as worry, fear, shame, guilt, anxiety and insecurity. Associated with parenting, neuroticism personality is more described with individuals who have negative attributions to children which allow abusive parenting (Prinzie, Reijntjes, Stams & Belksy, 2009; Bornstein, Hahn & Hayne, 2011).

The last dimension is openness to experience, reflects the extent to which a person enjoys new experiences, has broad interests, and is imaginative. Associated with parenting, individuals who have the characteristics of openness to experience tend to be more able to enjoy and engage more with children and provide more stimulation (Prinzie, Reijntjes, Stams & Belksy, 2009; Pervin & Cervone, 2013).

Several previous studies have proven that extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience have an influence in parenting (Bornstein, Hahn & Hayne, 2011; Amalia & Kumalasari, 2019; Prinzie, Dekovic, Reijntjes, Stams, & Belsky, 2009). As the results of studies by Haan, Dekovic dan Prinzie (2009) who found that extraversion and agreeableness were very important for parenting because parents who have high extraversion tend to be energetic, affectionate, talk-active and optimistic in caring to their children. And individuals who have an agreeableness attitude can maintain positive social relationship in interacting with children. Previous research has also found that parents who are high in openness to experience have a broad range of options for guiding their children in the desired direction. Individuals who have high neuroticism tend to be

easily nervous, tense, anxious and less emotionally stable. This is very disturbing in parenting because parents with high neuroticism tend to be insensitive to the needs of their children (Amalia & Kumalasari, 2019; Prinzie, Dekovic, Reijntjes, Stams, & Belsky, 2009).

Based on the explanation above, it can be seen that parenting becomes a mediator for the mother's personality in influencing the healthy behavior of children with autistic disorders in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mother's personality, especially for the traits of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience has a direct influence on parenting. Mother's personality such as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience indirectly affect the healthy behavior of autistic children, mediated by parenting in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study aims to prove whether there is an effect of mother's personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience) on the healthy behavior of autistic children, mediated by parenting in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Based on the explanation described above, the hypothesis proposed in this study is that there is an effect of mother's personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience) on healthy behavior in children with autistic disorders, mediated by parenting in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. As well as, there is no influence of the mother's neuroticism personality trait on healthy behavior in children with autistic disorders, which is mediated by parenting in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a quantitative approach with a correlational research strategy (Margono, 2005). The research variables include healthy behavior in autistic children as the dependent variable, parenting as a moderator, and the mother's personality as the independent variable.

The research participants are mothers who have children with autistic disorders, with the characteristics of having been diagnosed with autism in the Mildly – Moderately autistic category, aged 6-12 years, living with children in one house and not having a

caregiver and living in the Central Java region. Participants in this study is 31 participants.

The data collection process begins with giving informed consent to parents so that they are understood by parents. After the parents give permission, then the data collection process for parents and children is carried out through Google Form.

The measuring instrument consists of the Healthy Behavior Scale in autistic children, which consists of forms of healthy behavior including washing hands with soap, eating balanced nutritious foods, doing physical activity every day and maintaining clean clothes and other positive behaviors for health. Another measuring tool used is the Parenting Scale which consists of several aspects including aspects of control, providing opportunities, directives, responsiveness and communication aspects. The third measuring instrument is using the Mother's Personality Scale based on the Big Five Inventory scale compiled by Wild, Grove, Martin, Eremenco, Verje-Lorenz, and Erikson which was adapted by language and culture by Ramdhani (2012) which consists of aspects of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness.

Based on the results of the reliability validity test, the three measuring instruments were proven to be reliable and valid. From the 11 items on the healthy behavior scale, the validity value is 0,407-0,714 and the reliability is 0,874. On the parenting scale with 19 items, the validity value is 0,318-0,776 and the reliability is 0,907. Meanwhile the validity of the Big Five Inventory (BFI) scale that has been adapted in language and cultural on the extraversion dimension is 0,93; agreeableness is 0,99; conscientiousness is 0,98; openness is 0,99; and neuroticism is 0,98. The reliability value on the extraversion dimension is 0,73; agreeableness 0,76; conscientiousness is 0,79; openness is 0,79; and neuroticism is 0,75.

The data is then analyzed using path analysis techniques (path coefficient) which is processed thorough a computer program Statistical Packages for Social Science 26. Hypothesis testing in this study is using the Sobel Test.

**RESEARCH RESULT**

The total number of participants in this study which is the basis of the data analysis is 31 mothers that has children with autistic disorder, age 6-12 years old. The average age of parents in this research is 36-40 years, while the average age of children is around 6-10 years. Descriptive data can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Descriptive data of research participants**

Parent demographic		Freque	%
		ency	
Age	31-35 years old	5	1,6
	36-40 years old	10	32,2
	41-45 years old	8	25,8
	46-50 years old	7	22,5
	51years old more	1	3,2
Educatio n	High School	11	35,4
	Diploma 3	4	12,9
	Bachelor Degree	14	45,1
	Master Degree	1	3,2
	PHD	1	3,2
Status	Married	31	100
Expenses	2,5 mio – 5 mio	13	41,9
	5 mio – 10 mio	14	45,1
	> 10 mio	4	12,9
Occupati on	Civil Employee	1	3,2
	Private Sector	3	9,6
	Employee	2	6,4
	Teacher	2	6,4
	Business Owner	2	6,4
	Domestic Industry	23	74,1
Child demographic		Freque	%
		ency	
Age	6-10 years old	17	54,8
	11- 12 years old	14	45,1
Sex	Male	28	90,3
	Female	3	9,6

Based on data analysis using the path analysis technique, the result of path correlation coefficient as stated on Table 2 and Image 1.

**Table 2**  
**Result Path Coefficient and Significance Level**

		Correlations					
		P	EP	AP	CP	NP	OP
Pearson Correlation	P	1.000	.379	.142	-.589	-.211	-.104
	KE	.379	1.000	.004	-.259	-.140	.181
	KA	.142	.004	1.000	.002	.174	.252
	KC	.589	-.259	.002	1.000	.103	-.399
	KN	-.211	-.140	.174	.103	1.000	.209
	KO	.104	.181	.252	-.399	.209	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	P	.	.018	.223	.000	.127	.288
	KE	.018	.	.492	.080	.227	.165
	KA	.223	.492	.	.497	.175	.086
	KC	.000	.080	.497	.	.291	.013
	KN	.127	.227	.175	.291	.	.130
	KO	.288	.165	.086	.013	.130	.
N	P	31	31	31	31	31	31
	KE	31	31	31	31	31	31
	KA	31	31	31	31	31	31
	KC	31	31	31	31	31	31
	KN	31	31	31	31	31	31
	KO	31	31	31	31	31	31

		Correlations						
		HB	EP	AP	CP	NP	OP	P
Pearson Correlation	PS	1.000	.256	.422	-.031	-.079	-.110	.449
	KE	.256	1.000	-.237	-.204	.170	-.063	-.244
	KA	.422	.237	1.000	-.098	-.062	.072	.170
	KC	.031	-.204	-.098	1.000	-.095	.154	-.254
	KN	-.079	.170	-.062	-.095	1.000	-.016	-.150
	KO	.110	.063	.072	.154	-.016	1.000	.175
Sig. (1-tailed)	P	.449	-.244	.170	-.254	-.150	.175	1.000
	PS	.	.082	.009	.435	.337	.278	.006
	KE	.042	.	.100	.136	.180	.369	.093
	KA	.009	.100	.	.300	.369	.351	.181
	KC	.435	.136	.300	.	.306	.205	.084
	KN	.337	.180	.369	.306	.	.466	.210
N	KO	.278	.369	.351	.205	.466	.	.173
	P	.006	.093	.181	.084	.210	.173	.
	PS	31	31	31	31	31	31	31
	KE	31	31	31	31	31	31	31
	KA	31	31	31	31	31	31	31
	KN	31	31	31	31	31	31	31



KO	31	31	31	31	31	31	31
P	31	31	31	31	31	31	31

Notes: HB (Health Behavior), P (Parenting), EP (Extraversion Personality), AP (Agreeableness Personality), CP (Conscientiousness Personality), NP (Neuroticism Personality), OP (Openness Personality).

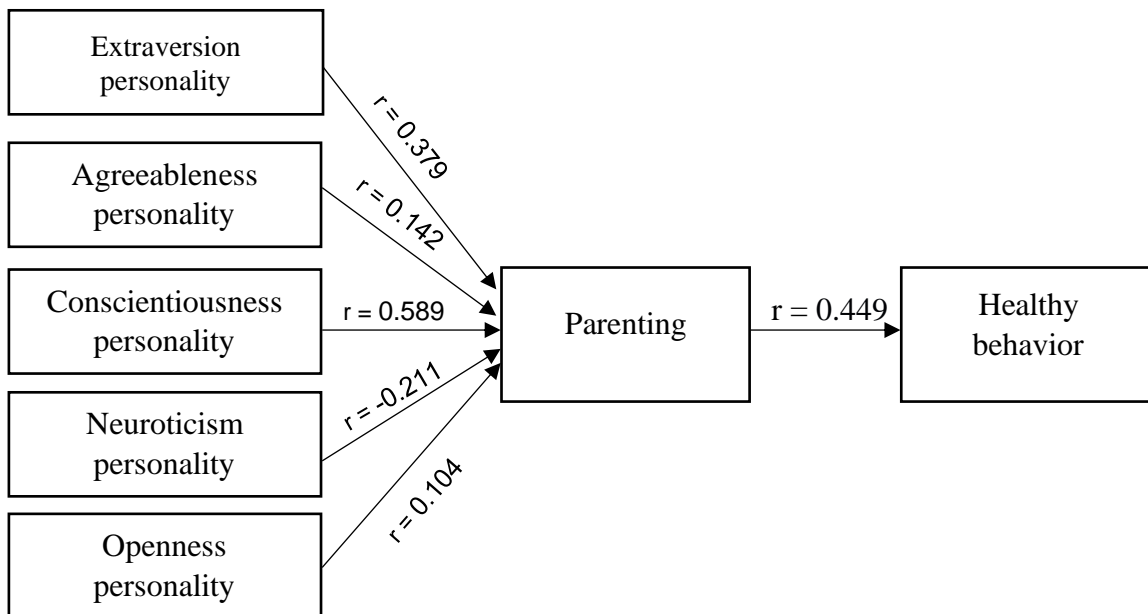


Image 1. Connection between Mother’s Personality Traits, Parenting and Healthy Behavior

The results shows that there is a significant correlation at the 5% level between the mother's extraversion personality and parenting ( $r = 0.379$ ). Between the personality variables agreeableness mother and parenting show no significant correlation ( $r = 0.142$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). On the personality variable conscientiousness mother and parenting result in a correlation value ( $r = 0.589$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The neuroticism and parenting personality variables show no significant correlation ( $r = 0.211$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). The openness and parenting personality variables show no significant correlation ( $r = 0.104$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Meanwhile, the extraversion personality variable of the mother and the healthy behavior of the autistic child show no significant correlation ( $r = 0.256$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). On the personality variable agreeableness of mothers and healthy behavior of autistic children show a significant correlation at the level of 1% ( $r = 0.422$ ). The conscientiousness personality variable and the healthy behavior of autistic children show no significant correlation ( $r = 0.031$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). In the neuroticism personality variable of mothers with healthy behavior of autistic

children, there is no significant correlation ( $r=-0.079$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). Between mother's openness personality and healthy behavior of autistic children show no significant correlation ( $r=-0.110$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). The results show that there was a significant correlation at the 1% level between parenting and healthy behavior of autistic children ( $r= 0.449$ ).

In this study, hypothesis testing is then carried out using the Sobel Test by calculating each of the Big Five personality dimensions, which are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. Sobel Test results obtain values of 1.972, 1.963, 3.514, -0.328, 2.811 and  $p = 0.048$  ( $p<0.05$ ), 0.049 ( $p<0.05$ ), 0.000 ( $p<0.01$ ), 0.742 ( $p>0.05$ ), and 0.004 ( $p<0.01$ ). These results indicate that parenting acts as a mediating variable as the influence of the personality of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and mother's openness on healthy behavior in children with autistic disorders. However, parenting does not act as a mediating variable in influencing the mother's neuroticism personality towards healthy behavior in children with autistic disorders.

Thus, the hypothesis in this study can be accepted that there is a relationship between mother's personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experiences) on healthy behavior in children with autistic disorders, mediated by parenting in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, there is no significant relationship between the mother's neuroticism personality trait and healthy behavior in autistic children, mediated by parenting in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results show that the mother's personality, especially the extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and mother's openness to experiences personality traits have an indirect relationship to healthy behavior in children with autistic disorders, which was mediated by parenting. Meanwhile, for the maternal neuroticism personality trait in this study, it is found that there is no significant relationship between maternal neuroticism

personality and healthy behavior in children with autistic disorder, which was mediated by parenting.

Based on the results of this study, it is known that healthy behavior in children with autistic disorders can lead to health problems in the midst of a pandemic, especially in the application of healthy behavior to prevent infection of COVID-19 (Baweja, Brown, Edwards & Murray, 2021).

Parenting is a way for parents to provide direction, guide, communicate, discipline and support children with the aim of meeting children's needs and protecting children (Lestari, 2018; Boyd & Bee, 2009). The effect of parenting on children's healthy behavior has been proven in several studies (including David, Roman & Leach, 2017; Philips, Sloen, Sleddens, Michel & Henauw, 2014). Based on the results of previous studies, it was found that the development of healthy behavior in children cannot be separated from the application of parenting. This is because parents who always pay attention and get used to the application of healthy behavior in children, then children will be encouraged to apply healthy behavior properly. Parents play an important role in the maintenance and development of behaviors related to children's healthy behavior. The important role played by parents in maintaining children's healthy behavior can increase positive healthy behavior (David, Roman & Leach, 2017; Philips, Sloen, Sleddens, Michel & Henauw, 2014).

Due to the influence of parenting on healthy behavior in children with autism, it is necessary to strive for optimal care to be able to stimulate children's healthy behavior. Optimizing parenting can be influenced by the personality of the parents (Lestari, 2012). The parental personality in this study was more focused on the mother's personality that is measured using the Big Five Inventory (BFI). The mother's personality has an important role in providing child care. The mother's personality influences the way in which a mother feels, thinks and acts in providing care (Prinzle, Dekovic, Reijntjes, Stams, & Belsky, 2009).

The results show that there is a relationship between the mother's extraversion personality trait and parenting in line with the results of Amalia & Kumalasari's study (2019) which found that in parenting, extraversion personality is related to interpersonal interactions, activity level, sociability and has a positive influence which is reflected in parental behavior during interactions with children, so parents tend to have good

interactions with children. In addition, this study also found a relationship between mother's conscientiousness personality and parenting which is in line with research from Chi & Hinshaw (2002) where a high level of mother's conscientiousness personality shows the most consistent relationship with parenting because it is associated with positive parenting behavior.

Several previous quantitative studies have also explained that parents who show higher levels of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness and lower levels of neuroticism in parenting are easier to initiate and build positive interactions with their children, parents are more sensitive with the child's needs, and parents provide a more consistent and structured parenting environment (Smith, Spinrad, Eisenberg, Payne, Gaertner & Maxon, 2007).

This is also supported by previous research which explains that personality traits have a close relationship with parenting. Parents who are high in personality extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experiences and low in personality neuroticism in providing care to children, will give affection, love, attention and pay attention to the needs of children well and sincerely. Parents tend to be able to understand their children and can spend time together to do activities together (Pervin & Cervone, 2013; Amalia & Kumalasari, 2019; DeHaan, Dekovic & Prinzie, 2009).

This study has several limitations, namely the number of participants which is only 31 participants, of course it is still not enough to describe the real situation. Furthermore, the limitations of research by filling out online questionnaires are sometimes hampered by the internet connection.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of research and discussion, it can be concluded that parenting can be proven to be a mediator for the mother's personality trait variables (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness). Mother's personality traits have been shown to have an indirect impact on the healthy behavior of autistic children, which is mediated by parenting in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, the mother's neuroticism personality does not have a significant relationship with the healthy behavior

of autistic children, which is mediated by parenting in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Further researchers are advised to pay attention and anticipate so that there are no weaknesses as in this study, namely in terms of using more participants and in terms of theoretical constructs, where there are theoretical imbalances with limited theories that support the influence of parenting on children's healthy behavior.

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