

The Gratitude and Happiness of a Mother with a Child in Special Need

Retty Ulfasari¹, Nita Trimulyaningsih²

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Indonesia, Yogyakarta

Corresponding E-mail: nitatri@uii.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between gratitude and happiness in mothers of special needs children. The research hypothesis in this study was a positive relationship between gratitude and happiness in mothers of special needs children. The participants in this study were 65 mothers of special needs children aged 18 - 60 years. This study used two scales, namely the happiness scale translated by Ramadhonna (2017), referring to The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) developed by Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999). The gratitude scale, adapted from Surya (2016), refers to the aspect of the gratitude scale proposed by Al-Jauziyah (1998). The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to analyze the data in this study. The results of the data analysis showed that $r = 0,520$ with the significance $p = 0,000$ ($p < 0,05$). The determination analysis (r^2) showed that gratitude contributes 27% to the happiness of mothers of special needs children. Thus, it can be concluded that the hypothesis proposed in this study was accepted. The researcher also conducted additional analyses based on the demographic data, and then the discussions on the findings will be discussed further. Gratitude is highly recommended in interventions to increase happiness or well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Much research has been done on the concept of happiness from various perspectives. Happiness generally refers to positive feelings, such as joy or serenity and positive states associated with flow or absorption. Carr's (2004) view is that happiness is one of the favorable psychological conditions characterized by a high level of satisfaction with life, so it has more positive influence than negative influence (Carr, 2004). Seligman (2005) also states that happiness involves three types of positive emotions: emotions directed at the past, future, and present. Another viewpoint, Khavari (2000), mentions that happiness relates to material, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual balance. This balance will allow the individual to cope with existing problems, even when faced with severe problems.

Unlike Khavari (2000), Lyubomirsky (2001) defines happiness as an experience of joy, satisfaction, and positive well-being combined with a feeling that life is good, meaningful and beneficial. In addition, Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999) also explain that happiness is a subjective and global judgment of an individual judging himself as a happy individual or not. Happiness is mainly under the control of the individual through the selected activities and how to interpret and respond to situations in life so that happiness can be felt not only from pleasant things but also from unpleasant events (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon & Schkade, 2005).

One of the things that generally brings happiness is the birth of a child. The child brings hope as the family's successor and becomes a fruit that can make both parents happy. Nevertheless, it is an inevitable and very vulnerable for a mother as a primary caregiver to feel stressed in the upbringing

of her child (Findler, Jacoby & Gabis, 2016). Some factors that can jeopardize the happiness of mothers (Suganda & Ninin, 2021) are past maternal experiences, socioeconomic status, support from close people, self-acceptance, and the difference between expectations and reality in maternal care.

Suganda and Ninin (2021) also stated that a healthy, happy, and adaptive child can add happiness to a mother. In reality, there are different conditions from what is expected of parents, one of which is a child born in conditions of special needs. In 2022, the Central Bureau of Statistics published the results of the COVID-19 Census in Indonesia. From the data, it can be seen that the number of covid-19 patients in the age between 5 and 9 years in Indonesia was 22,013,768 people, while the age group between 10 and 14 years was 22,088,673 (BPS, 2022).

According to Heward, Alber-Morgan, and Konrad (2019), special needs children have learning difficulties and higher performance, so modifications in curricula and instruction are required to help individuals meet their potential. Furthermore, it is explained that the term special needs children refers to those with problems of learning and behavior, children with physical disabilities or sensory/sensory impairment, and children with superior mental abilities or unique talents.

According to the results of interviews conducted by researchers with one of the heads of SLB X in Yogyakarta, there were still parents who cannot accept the condition of their child. The head of the SLB stated that there was a mother who often mocked her child because she did not understand what the child said, given that the child had a disability of speech and hearing. Furthermore, the mother even treated her son like she treated a dead object (pushed and dragged) in the early months of school. In addition, some parents who worked outside the city also entrusted their children in their parents' residences in Yogyakarta and only visited them once a year.

Based on the above information, it can be seen that negative responses such as anger, disappointment, sadness, not accepting, rejection, shame, loss, and even giving up on living life can appear in mothers with special needs children. It is also explained in the qualitative research carried out by Papadopoulos (2021) that mothers raising children with autism syndrome have high levels of emotional, family, social, and financial burden. This experience is marked by a feeling of frustration and anxiety about the future of the child, a fear of stigmatization that reduces the mother's confidence in intercession.

METHODS

Research Design

This research is a quantitative study that emphasizes on the analysis of numerical data (number), performed by statistical methods and is inferential (hypothesis study) (Sudaryana & Agusady, 2022). The dependent variable in this study is happiness, while the independent variable is gratitude.

Participants

Population is a generalization of objects/subjects with a certain quantity and characteristics that the researcher determines to be studied and then concludes. At the same time, samples are part of a population's number and characteristics (Sudaryana et al., 2022). The population of this study was mothers with special needs children. In contrast, the study sample was 65 mothers with special needs children, Islamic religion, and were in the early adult age range between 18 to 40 years (53.8%) and mid adult between 40 to 60 years (46.2%).

From a child's age, most special needs mothers have children with childhood age (2-11 years) of 73.8%, and the rest are teenagers (12-18 tahun). From marriage status, 93.8% were married, while the rest were widows. The sample of this survey was 72.3% employed, and the rest were housewives, with the educational level being predominantly High School/SME (49.2%), followed by Bachelor (20%), SME (12.3%), Elementary School (9.2%) and Diploma (7.7%) and the remainder was Master Degree Holder.

The data were also categorized using percentage norms to learn more about the happiness and gratitude levels in mothers with special needs children. The table below showed that the highest percentage results of the satisfaction variable were in the high category of 32.3%. Meanwhile, the most excellent percentage on the happiness variable is 24.6%, which means it is in the higher category.

Tabel 1. Categorization

Categorization	Gratitude			Happiness		
	Range Score	f	%	Range Score	f	%
Lowest	$X < 38.2$	13	20.0%	$X < 18$	11	16.9%
Low	$38.2 \leq X < 42$	11	17.0%	$18 \leq X < 20$	13	20.0%
Average	$42 \leq X < 44$	11	16.9%	$20 \leq X < 22$	12	18.5%
High	$44 \leq X \leq 47$	21	32.3%	$22 \leq X \leq 23.8$	16	24.6%
Highest	$X > 47$	9	13.8%	$X > 23.8$	13	20.0%

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Instrument

The data in this study were collected by using two scales: the happiness scale and the gratitude scale. Happiness Scale used in the study has been translated and adapted by Ramadhonna (2017) from the Lyubomirsky & Lepper (1999) measurement instrument, the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS), which measures happiness globally and subjectively.

The happiness scale consisted of four items: three favorable and one unfavourable item. This scale provides seven alternative answers to be chosen by the subject: highly disagree, disagreed, less disagrees, agreed, neutral, less agree, agree, and fully agree. A favorable item scores from 7 to 1, whereas an unfavorable item scores from 1 to 7. In the trial process, four authentic items were found with an item discrimination index ranging between 0.333 – 0.683 and obtained an Alpha (α) reliability coefficient of 0.763.

The gratitude scale is modified based on the scale compiled by Surya (2016), which describes the aspects of gratefulness presented by Al-Jauziyah (1998). This gratefulness scale provides four answers to be chosen by the subject, namely highly appropriate (SS), suitable (S), non-suitable (TS), and highly inappropriate (STS). Favorable item scores from 4 to 1. Alpha Cronbach reliability coefficient (α) with 12 items is 0.873 with an item discrimination force in the range 0.433 – 0.638.

Data analysis

The data analysis method used to test the hypothesis in this study, which is to find out the relationship between gratitude and happiness, uses the statistical technique of product-moment correlation. Before testing the hypothesis, the researchers test the assumption first. In a normality test using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov technique, the normality score of the variable happiness $p = 0.200$ ($p > 0.05$) and the magnitude variable $p = 0.076$ ($p > 0.05$), which showed that both data are evenly distributed.

The linearity test determines whether the two variables have a linear or non-significant correlation. Based on the test results, it was indicated that both variables had an F value of 30.245 with a significance value of 0,000 ($p < 0.05$). It showed that the variables of happiness and gratitude have a linear correlation. Based on the normality test, it was indicated that both variables have normal data distribution, and in the linearity test, the correlation of the two variables was said to be linear. Therefore, Pearson's correlation technique was used to test the hypothesis in this study.

RESULTS

This study aimed to determine the relationship between gratitude and happiness in mothers with special needs children. The subjects in this study are mostly housewives and residents of Yogyakarta. Based on the results of the hypothesis test performed using Pearson's correlation test, a correlating coefficient (r) = 0.520 with $p = 0,000$ ($p < 0.05$).

Table 2. Hypothesis Testing

	(r)	(R ²)	(p)
Gratitude* Happiness	0.520	0.270	0.000

These results indicated that there was a very significant positive relationship between gratitude and happiness in mothers with special needs children. This relationship suggested that the higher the level of gratitude, the greater the happiness of a mother who has a child with special needs as shown by effect size of $r = 0.520$. Cohen (1992) stated that the visible effect size of a score more excellent than 0.5 showed a significant effect of gratitude on happiness in mothers with special needs children. The determination coefficient (r^2) indicated the magnitude of the effective contribution of the gratitude variable to the happiness variable.

Gratitude is one of the factors that contribute significantly to the happiness of mothers with special needs children. In this study, the level of gratitude can be a predictor of the degree of happiness for mothers who have children with special needs. This statement is supported by studies by [Watkins et al \(2003\)](#) that gratitude is positively correlated with happiness. A grateful person tends to feel happy, which can also boost a positive mood. In line with this, a qualitative study conducted by [Nura and Sari \(2018\)](#) showed that the gratitude of mothers who have children with special needs makes mothers more patient and creative, feel positive emotions of joy and pride, learn more about their children's condition, and live more comfortably.

Furthermore, in this study, it was found that the majority of the levels of happiness in mothers with children with particular needs were in high categories. This can be seen from the description of the research, which showed that as many as 13 participants (20%) were from the lowest category, 11 participants (17%) were from the lower category, 11 participants (16.9%) were out of the average category, 21 participants (32.3%) was out in the high category and 9 participants (13.8%) were in highest. The data explained that the average subject in this study could already accept the presence of a child with special needs in his/her life.

A mother with a child with special needs who can receive the blessing will instil a sense of acceptance as it is and believed that what has been given is the portion that Allah SWT has determined. Based on research carried out by the [Prime and Goddess \(2015\)](#) reported that happiness is related to the belief of the subjects in God. The subjects in the study arise from an attitude of self-righteousness towards God's decision, which is to judge that the condition of a child is God's condition that should be accepted.

Gratitude is related to happiness. Gratitude makes the individual feel fulfilled in every need in life and in their passion and enthusiasm for life ([Laili et al., 2022](#)). Actions of gratitude will be able to be a positive resource to prevent the emergence of negative thoughts when stressors appear in life ([Suminta et al., 2022](#)).

This is also in line with the results of an experimental study conducted by [Khoiriyah \(2016\)](#) on grateful training for improved subjective well-being in mothers who have children with Down syndrome. Subjects in such intervention groups were much more likely to accept their living conditions, especially children with Down syndrome, consider them a gift and avoid comparing themselves to the conditions of others who are more fortunate. With this happiness, the mother will be able to pay attention to the needs of the child in parenting so that success of parenting can be achieved ([Wadham et al., 2022](#)).

Overall, researchers realize this study has limitations, such as the number of research subjects. In this study, the data from 65 subjects with special needs children were obtained unevenly, so there

were only a few findings compared with each type of special needs children. In addition, more complete demographic data, such as the amount of income, should be included in this study. Most research subjects did not list the amount of income earned, although further analysis can be done about the quantity of income (money), given that money is also one of the factors that can affect one's happiness.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, gratitude can make a significant contribution to the happiness of mothers with special needs children. The results showed that the higher the mother's gratitude for the special needs children, the greater the joy the mother will feel. This study implies that gratitude is highly recommended as a modality in interventions to enhance happiness or well-being. Practically, gratitude is a concept that has been understood and internalized by religious societies to enhance happiness in everyday life.

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