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The Role of Gratitude and Family Support on Psychological Well-Being of Mothers with Autistic Children

Kahfi Hizbullah*, Rina Mulyati

Universitas Islam Indonesia, Indonesia

*Corresponding email: kahfyhiezbullah@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Having a child with an autistic spectrum disorder is a challenge for parents, especially mothers, which can hinder the fulfillment of optimal psychological functions so that the mother's psychological well-being is disturbed. Internal situations such as gratitude and the presence of external support from the family can be factors that can encourage increased psychological well-being in mothers. This study observed the effects of gratitude and family support on mothers' psychological well-being with children with an autism spectrum disorder. The instruments in this study used the gratitude scale, the family support scale and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scales-short version distributed online. The subject in this study was 98 people, and the data collected were analyzed using the Doubled Linear Regression test using JASP software. The results showed the significance value of p<0.05; thus, gratitude and family support had a role or effect on mothers' psychological well-being with children with an autism spectrum disorder. Meanwhile, the effective contribution for gratitude was 17.39%, and family support was 21.53%. For future research, gratitude and emotion-based therapies such as emotion regulation training can be used as an intervention in experimental research to improve psychological well-being.

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INTRODUCTION

In a family, having a child is every parent's hope. Parents will hope to have children with normal and healthy conditions, but few parents have to face the reality of having children with special needs such as autism spectrum disorders. This unexpected condition will certainly influence parents' psychological state, especially mothers.

In 2017, at least 35 million people had autism worldwide, and every year there is an increase of 1.5% (WHO, 2017). Whereas in America in 2018, at least 1 in 59 children had autism, and in 2020, at least 1 in 54 children had autism (TACA, 2020). In Indonesia alone, there is no definite data, but the latest data in 2015 about 1 in 250 children experienced autism spectrum disorders, and the number was 132,000 children and predicted to continue to increase every year (Yessy, 2016).

Parents of children with disabilities, especially those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), are known to experience elevated levels of chronic stress that can negatively impact their physical and emotional health across the child's life course (Kuhn & Carter, 2010). Meanwhile, according to Faradina (2016), mothers who have not been able to accept having an autistic child often experience conflicts within themselves such as prolonged sadness, feeling that they are carrying their heavy burden, and feeling heavy in life which results in feelings of dissatisfaction with achieving the stage of self-acceptance to the conditions they live inexperience.

For mothers, accompanying children with autism spectrum disorders is certainly not easy because mothers will face many challenges and daily stressful conditions related to the behavior and process of parenting (Estes et al., 2013). Mothers of children with autism take on diagnosis, advocacy, and daily care responsibilities. There is evidence that this issue affects their well-being. They have great difficulties accepting their children's diagnosis due to lack of knowledge, social stigma, and establishing healthy communication with their children to maintain their socio-emotional and physical development healthily. Also, they tend to report lower quality of life, more depression, and greater pessimism about their children future than other mothers of children with other developmental disabilities (Zaki & Moawad, 2016).

Research on parents of autistic children found that the most common psychological effects were frustration and doubt with parenting abilities (Losh et al., 2008), worry about the future (Giallo et al., 2013), relationship problems with partners and other people close (Hartley et al., 2010) heavier parenting pressures and burdens (Karst & van Hecke, 2012), stress, compulsive thoughts, avoidance, uncertainty, fear, and regret (Whalen et al., 2011). Moreover, a mother as the primary caregiver of the child tends to develop guilty feelings, tenseness, and worries toward her childcare skills (Jose et al., 2017).

Rising a child with autism can be a stressful experience for a parent, especially when left unmanaged and make their life hard (Cachia, 2016). According to Desiningrum (2018), when a person has high levels of stress and other mental problems, this is a sign or part of the individual's low psychological well-being. In addition, behavioral problems of ASD children such as defiant behavior and lack of prosocial behavior also impact the psychological well-being of parents decreasing (Hartley et al., 2016; Timmons & Ekas, 2018; Totsika et al., 2015). When the mother's psychological well-being decreases, it will also affect the condition of other mothers, such as the quality of the relationship with her husband and problems in raising children (Estes et al., 2013).

Taking care of and caring for a child with ASD certainly requires extra attention, especially from the mother. Mothers are required to better adapt to the needs and conditions of children, often unstable emotions often cause children to have tantrums. In addition, with the child's condition, the mother may often experience fatigue due to difficulties in parenting and a lack of support from other parties. With this condition, mothers are more prone to feeling disappointed, sad, and ashamed to have an autistic child than fathers because mothers feel the most responsible for what is experienced by their children (Lestari & Mariyati, 2016). According to Cox et al. (2015), mothers with autistic children tend to have low psychological well-being. The psychological well-being of mothers with children with autism, indicated by the quality of life and good mental health, affects the mothers' ability to adapt to the children's conditions, thus optimizing childcare (Hsiao, 2016). Therefore, having psychological well-being is important for mothers because if mothers can appreciate themselves, they can provide better childcare and education for the children (Neff & Faso, 2015).

Ryff (1989) states that psychological well-being is the optimal achievement of psychological potential in an individual who can accept himself, have good interpersonal relationships, have a purpose in life, be independent, master the environment, and have self-development. Meanwhile, according to Faramarzi (2017), psychological well-being is vital because it relates to self-defense mechanisms and appropriate stress management to deal with a condition experienced by individuals.

Haworth & Lewis (2005) stated that one of the factors that can affect psychological well-being is gratitude. Gratitude is associated with psychological functions and mental health indicators, such as positivity, efficiency, satisfaction, happiness, and contentment. Gratitude is also associated with high levels of positive emotion, as it encourages the individual to make optimal use of self-resources to employ them in various areas of life (Al-Sasafa et al., 2021) because gratitude is the foundation of mental well-being and health (Sood & Gupta, 2012). Wood et al. (2009) revealed that gratitude has a great relationship with the components of psychological well-being, such as environmental mastery, positive relationships, life goals, and self-acceptance.

According to Lyubomirsky & Layous (2013), gratitude can improve the quality of self and individual positive change, encourage individuals to improve life goals and develop positive behavior to become better individuals. Gratitude is an important factor in improving mental health and, thus, psychological wellbeing (Ziadat, 2019).

Several previous studies have shown that gratitude has a positive and significant relationship to psychological well-being (Chintya, 2016; Devy & Sugiasih, 2017; Greene & McGovern, 2017; Lee & Lee, 2015; Washizu & Naito, 2015). In addition, research on the same subject showed that gratitude influenced psychological well-being in parents with children with special needs (Nurarini, 2016). Then, gratitude influences the psychological well-being of mothers with mentally disabled children (Ratnayanti & Wahyuningrum, 2016).

According to Al-Jauziyah (2006), gratitude is the level of self-acceptance of all the goodness that has been given by God and is manifested in the form of words, deeds, and belief in the heart. Meanwhile, according to Rusdi (2016), gratitude is responsive and expressive because gratitude is a pleasure with God's favor, then expressing it with kindness.

According to Rusdi (2016), gratitude has two aspects, internal gratitude (alshukr al-dakhiliah), which is part of the initial process of gratitude where individuals can fully understand a favor of Allah and external gratitude (alshukr al-kharijiyah), which is expressing and responding both verbally and by deed for Allah's blessings.

In addition to gratitude, other factors can affect psychological well-being. Ryff & Keyes (1995) stated that social support could affect a person's psychological well-being. Apart from requiring internal protective factors such as gratitude, mothers certainly cannot stand alone without external support from their family (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). According to Wiliyanarti & Mundakir (2021), parents who have high psychological well-being are known to have high support from their respective families.

With support from the family, mothers will more easily deal with children's behavior with autism spectrum disorders. This condition makes mothers need support from the family, emotionally, mentally, and physically (Myers et al., 2007). In addition, mothers will accept the conditions, be motivated and become more optimistic. On the other hand, it is tricky to accept the situation independently when the mother does not support the family. This self-acceptance is an indicator of a person's psychological well-being. (Twistiandayani & Handika, 2015).

Previous research has shown that family support contributes to the psychological well-being of mothers. Desiningrum et al. (2019) found that family support contributes to individual psychological well-being because the individual feels the family loves and accepts him as he is and can understand

the shortcomings and strengths of his potential. Such social support might become a significant factor in developing mothers' psychological well-being (Gorlin et al., 2016). Another study from Budiarti & Hanoum (2019) also showed that family support was positively related to the psychological well-being of mothers with children with special needs.

According to Sarafino and Smith (2011), family support has several aspects, namely 1) emotional support, which involves empathy, compassion, and care for the individual. 2) instrumental support, which includes direct assistance. 3) informational support, such as giving advice, direction, or suggestions on how individuals do things well and providing the required information. 4) appreciation support is expressions of respect or appreciation, positive assessment, gifts, and praise for what individuals do.

Parenting children with autism spectrum disorders is not easy. The complexity of the disorders experienced by autistic children often makes mothers experience difficulties, interfering with their psychological well-being. Therefore, internal factors such as gratitude are needed as well as external factors such as family support to assist mothers in maintaining their psychological well-being because with a spiritual approach such as gratitude, mothers will be better able to understand the conditions and the support from the closest people such as family will strengthen the mother in face difficulties, so these two factors will be equally important for the psychological well-being of the mother, making the researchers intend to find out how the role of gratitude and family support for psychological well-being in mothers with children with autism spectrum disorders.

METHODS

This research hypothesizes that gratitude and family support correlate with psychological well-being in mothers who have children with autism. This study is a quantitative study with a correlational approach, and the data analysis technique used was regression analysis using JASP software.

Chart 1. Hypothesis

Gratitude

H1

Psychological
Well-Being

Familyy
Support

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The number of participants in this study was 98 mothers aged 27-55 years who had children with autism spectrum disorders. The specific criteria for the subject in this study are Muslim.

INSTRUMENTS

The data collection technique in this study was carried out online using a Google Form which contains three scales, or gratitude which refers to the scale compiled by Rusdi (2016) where there are 2 aspects, al shukr al dakhiliyah (internal) and al shukr al kharijiyah (external), the questionnaire had 10 items with a 6-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, mildly disagree, mildly agree, agree, and strongly agree.

The second instrument utilized family support scale referred to the scale of Sarafino and Smith (2011), which Akmalia (2020) later adapted where there are 4 aspects, such as emotional support, instrumental support, information support, and appreciation support, with a 6-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, mildly disagree, mildly agree, agree, and strongly agree). This instrument contained 18 items but had 17 items with good item consistency.

The psychological well-being scale used a short-version psychological well-being scale from Ryff & Keyes (1995) and adapted by Azalia et al. (2018). This scale has six aspects: self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, environmental mastery, autonomy, self-development, and having a purpose in life, with a 6-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, mildly disagree, mildly agree, agree, and strongly agree) this instrument contained 18 items but has 15 items have good item consistency.

The reliability of all three questionnaires was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, which measured internal consistency, showing closely related items as a group. The reliability of gratitude was 0.905, the reliability of family support was 0.987, and the reliability of psychological well-being was 0.848.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis technique used was multiple linear regression which aims to predict the condition of the dependent variable (criteria) if two or more independent variables as predictor factors are manipulated (Sugiyono, 2019). Multiple linear regression was performed to increase prediction probability involving multiple predictors (Elmes et al., 2014). The data was then be analyzed using the JASP program with multiple linear regression test techniques to prove the research hypothesis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The description of the data from this research will provide an overview of the demographic data of the research subjects and their categorization.

Table 1. Research Subject Data

Carling Characteristic	s Category	N	%	Psychological Well-Being			
Subject Characteristic				M	SD	Eta-squared	
Mother's age	20-40 years	64	65	4.349	0.675	0.041	
	41-65 years	34	35	4.627	0.595	0.041	
Job Status	Housewife	66	67	4.363	0.740	0.008	
	Worker	33	33	4.490	0.613		
Number of Children	1	23	23	4.409	0.794	0.005	
Autistic Child Age	2	42	43	4.414	0.614		
	3	28	29	4.507	0.597		
	4	5	5	4.533	0.860		
	3-6 years	12	12	4.161	0.402		
	7-12 years	54	54	4.384	0.677	0.082	
	13-20 years	28	28	4.585	0.645		
	>20 years	5	5	5.040	0.668		
Long time parenting autistic children	<7 years	55	56	4.280	0.640	0.189	
	8-14 years	31	32	4.456	0.549		
	>15 years	12	12	5.178	0.521		

The majority of the subjects in this study were 20-40 years old (65%) with an age range from 27 years to 55 years old, did not work or as housewives (67%), and worked on average as entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs, and teachers, had autistic children aged 7-12 years (54%). Most parents had 2 children, and the majority had accompanied children for 7 years (56%) since they were first diagnosed with autism.

Assumption Test Results

Before testing the hypothesis, the researcher first tested the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity as a condition for the multiple regression test. The normality test results showed that the data was normally distributed because the curve formed a pattern in the middle so that the research sample data could represent the population. For the linearity test, the results showed a linear relationship between the variables of gratitude and family support with psychological well-being (p<0.05).

In the multicollinearity test, the variables of gratitude and family support did not show symptoms of multicollinearity because the tolerance value was >0.10 and the VIF value was <10. There was no correlation between the independent variables studied. Meanwhile, for the heteroscedasticity test, based on the scatterplot graph, the points spread above and below the 0 axes indicated no

symptoms of heteroscedasticity. Other variables did not influence the residual or dependent variable.

Multiple Regression Test Results

Table 2. Multiple Regression Test Results

Model	Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardize	р	Partial r
H ₁ (Intercept)	0.056	0.557		<.001	
Gratitude	0.475	0.106	0.422	<.001	0.417
Family Support	0.439	0.086	0.370	<.001	0.464

Note: r square 0.405

The table above shows that gratitude and family support together can predict or affect psychological well-being in mothers with ASD children because the p-value is <0.05 and has an r-square value of 0.405.

The researchers also conducted a partial analysis to see the effective contribution of gratitude and family support from the squared partial correlation value. Gratitude has a contribution of 0.174, while family support is 0.215. Based on research findings, family support has a greater effective contribution than gratitude. So, from these results, researchers are interested in seeing which aspects of family support have the greatest influence on psychological well-being in mothers with ASD children. Based on the partial correlation value of each aspect, the effective contribution to the emotional aspect is 0.076, the instrumental aspect is 0.028, the appreciation aspect is 0.002, and the informational aspect is 0.016. So, it can be concluded that the emotional aspect has the greatest influence on psychological well-being.

Additional analysis in a different test was also carried out to know whether there were differences in psychological well-being based on maternal age, mother's occupation, number of children, age of autistic children, and the length of time mothers accompanied autistic children. The results showed differences in psychological well-being based on the age of the autistic child and the length of time the mother accompanied the autistic child (p<0.05), while based on the mother's age, number of children, and mother's occupation, there was no difference (p>0.05). Based on Table 1, the Mean value, mothers with adult children with autism have higher psychological well-being than other children's ages. In addition, based on the length of time mothers accompany children with

autism, the longer mothers accompany children, the higher the psychological welfare of mothers.

Based on the study results, gratitude and family support had a significant role in influencing mothers' psychological well-being with children with autism spectrum disorders, meaning that the research hypothesis was accepted. When mothers with autism have a high level of gratitude and get good family support, the mother's psychological well-being will also be high. These results strengthen previous research, showing that family gratitude and social support had a significant influence on psychological well-being (Asmarani & Sugiasih, 2019; Nurarini, 2016; Ratnayanti & Wahyuningrum, 2016).

Gratitude contributes to influencing the psychological well-being of mothers with ASD children. According to Harimukthi and Dewi (2014), a religious approach that then raises gratitude will make individuals enjoy life more so that mothers will assume that the presence of autistic children is not just a trial but also a challenge. As a gift from God and believes that caring for autistic children is a field of charity worship that mothers will receive in the future (Daulay, 2016). Meanwhile, according to Lestari & Pratisti (2019), with gratitude, mothers will not complain and will not feel hopeless in caring for autistic children and are more optimistic regarding their child's development. Gratitude felt by mothers with GSA children is by appreciating the development of the child's condition by saying *Alhamdulillah* and realizing the goodness received (Syahidah, 2019).

Family support also contributes to influencing the psychological well-being of mothers. These results corroborate previous research from Desiningrum (2010) and Budiarti & Hanoum (2019) because support from the family is an important foundation for parents in accompanying children who have limitations such as autism (Syahidah, 2019; Williams & Lynn 2010). Meanwhile, according to Rahmawati et al. (2013), with support from the closest environment such as family, mothers will survive in challenging situations when accompanying autistic children, mothers will not feel alone, are more able to accept themselves, and are more optimistic in achieving life goals, and mothers will feel happier and happier in life (Hardjo & Novita, 2015). Emotional support plays the most role because, in stressful situations, the mother certainly needs emotional support such as giving a sense of empathy, understanding the mother's condition, being willing to listen to the mother's complaints, and providing emotional reinforcement, as stated by Setyoadi et al. (2017) that with the emotional support provided by the family to the mother when in a problem, the mother will not feel alone and will survive better in the situation.

The finding in this study is that the longer the mother accompanies an autistic child, the more it will affect their psychological well-being because when mothers have children with autism at first, mothers will try to accept the existing

conditions and, of course, will face many difficult situations, but the longer the mother will be better able to adjust to these conditions, as stated by Twoy et al. (2007) that in the first years of caring for autistic children, mothers will face various stressors, even mothers tend to have a rejection of children due to lack of knowledge related to autism problems (Luong et al., 2009). However, according to Dewi & Yullyana (2018), the longer mothers accompany or care for autistic children, the adaptation process occurs so that the mother's ability to care for autistic children is higher and mothers can be better able to accept which is part of psychological well-being.

A mother's psychological well-being is also significantly different based on the age of the autistic child. The more the child grows up, the higher the mother's psychological well-being because the child's condition tends to improve with age and if the autistic child has undergone a therapy process or gone to school, as found by Canfield et al. (2016). The condition of autistic children tends to improve when they grow up by receiving intensive therapy. According to Maulana (2014), autistic children tend to have bad habits or conditions at an early age, but the child's condition will tend to improve with age. Meanwhile, according to Daulay (2016) that at every age, autistic children will have their challenges, including when autistic children enter their teens, mothers will experience other problems, especially in terms of puberty that children begin to experience, but mothers are used to dealing with this so that mothers are more able to maintain their psychological well-being.

In general, mothers with autistic children in this study had a fairly good level of psychological well-being because the mother has a fairly good sense of gratitude, and the support from the family is also quite good. Gratitude and family support are important internal and external factors for mothers with ASD children because they will manage and maintain their psychological well-being.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results, the research hypothesis was accepted, where there was a correlation of gratitude and family support on psychological well-being in mothers with children with autism spectrum disorders. When mothers who have children with autism have high gratitude, the psychological well-being of mothers will also be high. In addition, the support from the family, especially emotional support, will make the psychological well-being of the mother better.

The results are expected to be a reference for mothers who have children with autism and other related parties that gratitude and the support from the family will greatly help mothers maintain good psychological well-being. For future research, gratitude and emotion-based therapies such as emotion regulation training can be used as an intervention or therapy in the form of experimental research to improve psychological well-being.

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