

## Parents of children with special needs: Gratitude and life satisfaction

Rani Aulia<sup>1</sup>

Tiara Sahira<sup>2</sup>

Syakira Riandhiani<sup>3</sup>

H. Fuad Nashori<sup>4\*</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>*Department of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Islam Indonesia, Yogyakarta, Indonesia*

\*Corresponding author: [fuadnashori@uii.ac.id](mailto:fuadnashori@uii.ac.id)

**Abstract:** Every parent unquestionably desires to have a child born physically and spiritually healthy. However, there are times when a child is born with physical or psychological limitations that occur during the early stages of development. This condition is commonly referred to as children with special needs. This study aims to examine the relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction among parents with special needs children. This study employed a quantitative correlational approach as its methodology. The study's participants are parents of children with special needs. The gratitude and life satisfaction scales were used as instruments in this study. The findings indicate a significant positive relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction among parents of special needs children. of religious faith and clinical hypnotherapy is presented as a holistic model that supports long-

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Every parent aspires to have a physically and mentally normal child. In reality, not all wishes can be granted. Occasionally, parents cannot refuse the fact that the child entrusted to their care turns out to be unique, special, and different from other kids. When parents discover their child has special needs, they have a variety of responses. Smith et al. (2017) found that parents of special needs children frequently experience severe emotional difficulties.

Children with special needs (*ABK/Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus*) are members of society who exhibit genuine differences in their physical, emotional, cognitive, and social characteristics. They encounter difficulties obtaining their needs and capabilities to the fullest extent possible. For instance, children who have physical, mental, emotional, speech, visual, or hearing impairments are considered to have special needs. Children with high intelligence and talent are also classified as special needs (*ABK*) since they require professional supervision (Mirnawati, 2019). Johnson et al. (2016) argue that in order to reach their full potential, children with special needs require appropriate intervention. Furthermore, Lee and Thompson (2018) emphasize the importance of both educators and parents in providing adequate support for children's development.

Parents frequently have negative emotional reactions when they notice their child is different from other children. This response is understandable, given that they must accept the fact that their child has special needs. Parents of children with special needs frequently endure higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression than parents of children without special needs (Brown et al., 2017; cited in Lay and Weiss, 2017). Parents who receive professional and social support can also better handle these negative emotions (Brown et al., 2017). Additionally, Smith and Grzywacz's findings (Prabowo, 2018) indicate that parents of children with special needs and parents of children with normal development have distinct degrees of mental health and well-being. It was found that parents of special needs children were more likely to have higher depression and lower mental health. The findings of this study were also supported by (Shenaar-Golan, 2016). The research shows that life satisfaction (as part of subjective well-being) among parents of children with developmental disabilities is lower than the average of the general population. These two studies' findings suggest that life satisfaction in parents of children with special needs has higher challenges.

Acceptance of special needs children's conditions creates life satisfaction for parents. Perrone et.al., identify life satisfaction as the capacity to meaningfully enjoy life experiences (as cited in Fauzi, 2013). Life satisfaction can be achieved through an adequate income, good health, and an active lifestyle in terms of family and friendship. Life satisfaction, which is characterized by the fulfilment of needs and desires during life with positive meaning, can lead individuals to a good life (Sulastina & Rohmatun, 2018).

Life satisfaction is also a cognitive assessment process in a person that depends on comparing their condition with the appropriate standards (Diener, as cited in Smith et al., 2019). An individual's life satisfaction assessment can be based on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs: physiological, safety, social/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. If these five needs can be met properly, the individual will get life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1985). According to Hurlock (as cited in Laraswati & Jannah, 2014), fulfilling these needs also plays an important role in an individual's personality development and overall well-being. Life satisfaction is often described as a form of overall individual assessment of whether or not the life he has experienced is satisfactory. Based on the explanation above, life satisfaction can be interpreted as a cognitive assessment of the life that the individual has lived as a whole.

Fakhrunnisak and Patria (2022) found that parents' higher formal education levels were longitudinally associated with better mental health outcomes in their adolescent children. One of the influential factors is gratitude (Sansone & Sansone, 2010).

Gratitude is defined in various literature as an emotion, moral value, attitude, personality trait, and coping style. Gratitude is considered the most noble value in an individual and is the source of other good values. It is a positive emotional expression that expresses happiness and gratitude for all the goodness received. People are grateful because they have received much kindness, appreciation, and good gifts from God, fellow human beings, and their surroundings. This awareness encourages them to give back, appreciate, and give thanks to all they accept through feelings, words, and actions (Prabowo, 2018).

Studies from various countries show that grateful parents will experience life satisfaction. For example, Chan et al. (2017) study in Hong Kong found that parents of children with special needs reported less happiness and life satisfaction than parents of children with special needs. A study conducted in Australia by Emerson and Llewellyn (2023) also found that parents of children with disabilities had lower subjective well-being, which was associated with higher levels of stress and depression.

Conceptually, gratitude can be divided into two levels: state *and* trait. Gratitude as a state refers to subjective feelings that include awe, gratitude, and appreciation for everything received. Meanwhile, gratitude as a trait refers to a person's tendency to feel grateful. However, not everyone consistently feels grateful, but individuals with this trait tend to feel grateful more often in certain situations (Prabowo, 2018). McCullough et al. (2002) explain the characteristics of gratitude in four dimensions. First, the intensity of gratitude refers to how huge the gratitude felt when positive things happen. Second, the frequency of gratitude describes how often a person expresses gratitude, even daily. Third, the range or breadth of gratitude includes a person's ability to feel grateful in various aspects of life, such as work, health, and family. Fourth, density gratitude refers to how often a person feels gratitude towards more people. Al-Jauziyah (2023) also expressed aspects of gratitude. Al-Jauziyah discusses gratitude in four main ways. First, gratitude with the heart, which includes awareness and recognition of the rewards received. Second, verbal thanksgiving, which includes praise and gratitude. Third, gratitude through good deeds. Fourth, gratitude through avoiding bad behaviour, which shows the blessings received.

Additionally, a study by Rash et al. (2011) found that people who completed a gratitude intervention significantly increased their life satisfaction compared to a control group. This intervention included daily practices designed to increase gratitude, such as writing gratitude notes or listing three good things that happened each day. The results of this study support the hypothesis that gratitude is positively related to life satisfaction and can be increased through simple, targeted practices.

There are several fundamental differences between this study and previous studies on the relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction. While previous studies, such as Emmons and McCullough (2003), Wood et al. (2010), and Rash et al. (2011), have examined the general relationship between gratitude and psychological well-being, this study specifically focuses on parents of children with special needs. Previous studies have typically involved participants from the general population or certain subgroups that do not specifically include parents of children with special needs. In contrast, this study aims to understand how gratitude influences life satisfaction in a more complex and unique context, namely among parents who face additional challenges in parenting children with special needs.

In addition, this study also focuses on measuring gratitude not only as a state but also as a trait. Although several previous studies have discussed both aspects, this study focuses on how both levels of gratitude affect the life satisfaction of parents with special needs children. This approach allows for a more in-depth analysis of the impact of gratitude in a very specific context.

This study aimed to determine the relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction in parents with children with special needs. The hypothesis proposed in this study is that there is a significant positive relationship between gratitude (condition and nature) and life satisfaction of parents of children with special needs. This means that the higher the parents' gratitude, the higher their life satisfaction.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This is a correlational-quantitative research. According to Sugiyono (Sulaeman, 2023), quantitative research is a quantitative research approach based on philosophy positivism, relying on the scientific method to unravel phenomena in general, objective and measurable. Its characteristic is the collection of numeric data, which is then analyzed using statistics.

This use collection method data questionnaire using *Google Forms* and distributed through *social media Instagram* and *WhatsApp*. The independent variable is gratitude, and the dependent variable is life satisfaction. Researchers use the *Psychological Measure of Islamic* (PMIG) scale to measure the dimensions of gratitude. Meanwhile, researchers use the *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWLS) to measure life satisfaction. Both use the Likert scale with 4 Choices for Gratitude and 7 choices for Life Satisfaction.

### Participants

The subjects in this study were selected using a purposive sampling technique, where the sample was determined based on subjects who met certain characteristics. Participating subjects are parents of Indonesian citizens who have children with special needs. The criteria for subjects in this study are Muslim, parents who have children with special needs, and aged 20-50 years. The subjects are selected using the purposive sampling technique, which is determined based on the requirements and are willing to be a research sample by agreeing to the statement of willingness to be a subject of this research. The number of subjects involved is 100 people.

### Research Instruments

This study uses two scales: the Scale of Gratitude and the Life Satisfaction Scale. The first scale is the gratitude scale compiled by Kurniawan et al. (2012). *Psychological Measure of Islamic Gratitude* (PMIG) includes the *Gratitude Questionnaire* (GQ-6) as a criterion variable that equally reveals the gratitude variable, which was conducted in two studies. This scale consists of 25 items, and the gratitude scale (N=25 items) has a *Cronbach Alpha value* of 0.914. The acquisition of more than 0.7 signifies consistency in measuring function or reliability (see Simm & Wright, 2005). This scale is based on the following aspects: being grateful with the heart, being grateful to Allah, giving thanks to humans, and being grateful with action.

The second scale is the life satisfaction scale compiled by Diener et al. 1985). *The Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWLS) is a scale used to measure general life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is a cognitive aspect of *subjective well-being* (SWB). Scale This was developed by Diener et al. (1985). This scale consists of 5 items in the form of statements which describe an individual assessment of his/her life. Each item consists of seven scale ratings. Scale reliability is measured using the *Alpha method Cronbach*. Results test reliability Alpha from 1,003 participants showed an Alpha coefficient of 0.828 with item-total correlation ranging from 0.553 – 0.686.

## Analysis Techniques

The analysis techniques used in the study are an analysis of descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis aims to describe data distribution, such as the mean, median, and standard deviation, of gratitude and life satisfaction variables in parents with special needs children (Creswell, 2014). Inferential analysis, which includes *Pearson correlation* and linear regression, was used to test the relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction in parents with children with special needs.

*The software* used for data analysis is the jamovi application version 2.5.3. jamovi provides various analysis tools needed to support the validity and reliability of research results, ensuring that data is processed with appropriate and accurate methods. Jamovi is known for its comprehensive capabilities in statistical analysis and ease of use, which facilitates the data analysis process more efficiently.

## RESULTS

### Data Description and Assumption Test Results

*The skewness* score for the life satisfaction variable was -1.67, and for the gratitude variable, it was as high as -1.65. This shows that the *skewness value* is  $> 0.005$ , so the data is normal, and the shadow of the lines follows the direction of line motion. It can be concluded that the data obtained is also linear.

**Table 1**

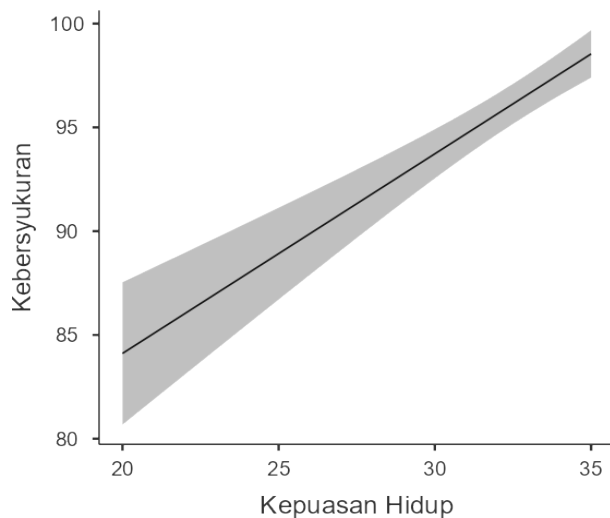
*Description*

	Satisfaction Life	Gratitude
Mean	32.6	96.3
Standard deviation	3.72	6.05
Minimum	20	74
Maximum	35	100
Skewness	- 1.67	- 1.65
Std. skewness error	0.239	0.239
Kurtosis	2.10	1.87
Std. kurtosis error	0.474	0.474
Shapiro Wilk W	0.697	0.682
Shapiro Wilk p	< .001	< .001

The results of the assumption test confirm that the linearity test is fulfilled because the relationship pattern between the gratitude and satisfaction variables shows a relatively constant straight line, which shows a linear connection between both variables.

**Figure 1**

*Satisfaction*



### Hypothesis Test Results

Based on the results of the hypothesis test, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction. The relationship can be significant because the obtained  $p = <0.001$  shows a  $p$ -value  $<0.05$  on the life satisfaction variable. The regression coefficient value for life satisfaction is 0.591, which shows an influence of gratitude on life satisfaction with an estimate of 59.1%. In addition, the R-squared mark was 0.349 in the one-variable measurement model. In this case, gratitude explains the variation in life satisfaction by 34.9%. This shows that gratitude is one of the factors that can influence life satisfaction. Thus, the R-square shows that only a small portion of the variation in the gratitude variable can be explained by the life satisfaction variable. In other words, many other factors need to be considered to understand life satisfaction as a whole.



**Table 2**

*Model Coefficients - Gratitude*

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Stand. Estimate
Intercept	64,870	4.315	15.04	< .001	
Satisfaction Life	0.962	0.131	7.32	< .001	0.591

**Table 3**

*Model Fit Measures*

Model	R	RI
1	0.591	0.349

Based on the regression results, it can be concluded that there is a positive relationship between the gratitude variable and the life satisfaction variable. The positive relationship between the two variables shows that the more gratitude increases, the more life satisfaction will increase in parents with children with special needs.

**Table 4**

*Correlation Matrix*

		Gratitude	Life Satisfaction
Gratitude	Spearman's rho	—	
	Df	—	
	p-value	—	
Life Satisfaction	Spearman's rho	0.699 ***	—
	Df	100	—
	p-value	< .001	—

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## Results of Regression Analysis

Based on the results of the regression analysis, there is a significant positive relationship between the gratitude variable and the life satisfaction variable. The positive relationship between the two variables shows that the more grateful parents are, the more life satisfaction they have with their children with special needs.

Further regression analysis showed that aspects of gratitude, such as intensity of gratitude, frequency of gratitude, level of gratitude, and frequency of gratitude all contributed significantly to life satisfaction. The following are the regression analysis results linking gratitude and life satisfaction. First, intensity of gratitude. The analysis results showed a regression coefficient of intensity of gratitude of 0.45 ( $p < 0.01$ ), which means that the intensity of gratitude increased significantly, thereby increasing life satisfaction. Parents with a high intensity of gratitude tend to be more satisfied with life. Second, frequency of gratitude. The regression coefficient of frequency of gratitude is 0.38 ( $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that parents who often feel grateful in their daily lives feel satisfied with their lives. This highlights a way to express gratitude regularly. Third, gratitude span. The gratitude span that includes the ability to feel gratitude in various areas of life has a regression coefficient of 0.42 ( $p < 0.01$ ). This shows that parents who appreciate various positive aspects of their lives tend to feel satisfied. Fourth, frequency of gratitude. The frequency of gratitude, which indicates how often a person feels grateful to more people, has a regression coefficient of 0.40 ( $p < 0.01$ ). Older adults who frequently feel grateful to more people tend to report greater life satisfaction.

Based on the above explanation, the regression analysis results show that all aspects of gratitude significantly affect life satisfaction. In other words, gratitude affects general life satisfaction. Still, specific aspects of gratitude (intensity, frequency, range, and frequency) are important in determining the life satisfaction of parents of children with special needs.

This study provides empirical evidence to support the importance of gratitude in increasing life satisfaction, especially for parents of children with special needs. Therefore, interventions to increase gratitude may be an effective strategy to improve this population's psychological well-being and life satisfaction.

## DISCUSSION

### Gratitude and Life Satisfaction

The study showed a positive relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction in parents with children with special needs. This means that the higher the gratitude in parents with children with special needs, the higher the life satisfaction, and vice versa.

Several previous studies on gratitude and life satisfaction support the study's results. Research conducted by Prabowo (2018), which had 53 participants who were parents with special needs children domiciled in Malang using the data collection method, namely the cluster sampling method, shows that there is a relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction. This means that the higher a person's gratitude, the higher the life satisfaction of parents with special needs children, and vice versa.

This study's results support the research by Emmons and McCullough (2003). They found that people who regularly kept a gratitude journal were more satisfied with their lives than those who did not practice gratitude. Study participants also reported decreased stress levels and increased emotional well-being, suggesting that gratitude increases life satisfaction and improves mental health.

This study supports Wood et al. (2010) findings. They showed that gratitude is positively related to various indicators of psychological well-being, including optimism, vitality, and better social relationships. The study also revealed that gratitude helps people develop a more positive attitude towards life, increasing their satisfaction. This study highlights the importance of cultivating gratitude as a strategy to improve overall well-being.

The argument to be put forward is that the results of this study support the theory that gratitude is positively related to life satisfaction. This study is consistent with the results of other studies in various fields. Emmons and McCullough (2003) revealed that people who regularly write what is. Gratitude journals mean greater satisfaction with life. In this study, students and adults participated in a gratitude training program.



The results of this study also support Wood et al. (2010) findings. Their study found that gratitude positively affects a population's psychological well-being and life satisfaction. This study involved various age groups ranging from adolescents to adults, indicating that the positive effects of gratitude are universal.

The research results of Rahman et al. (2022) show that gratitude can increase subjective well-being in adolescents whose parents are divorced. This study suggests that gratitude can be an effective coping mechanism that increases life satisfaction and well-being in difficult emotional conditions.

This is also explained by the dynamics that gratitude positively correlates with positive affect, which may inhibit personal growth and positive change (Armenta et al., 2017).

This study is also supported by research by McCullough et al. (2002), who found a positive relationship between gratitude and psychological well-being, including life satisfaction, subjective realism, vitality, optimism, and hope. In addition, gratitude was found to be negatively correlated with depression and anxiety, indicating that grateful people tend to experience fewer negative emotions. The results of this study also support the research results of (Cahyandari et al., 2015) that gratitude can improve an individual's quality of life. Gratitude itself is an expression of individual religiosity. By being grateful, individuals always believe that there is an Almighty God who always provides strength to face various challenges in life.

For parents of children with special needs, gratitude can help them see the positive impact on their child's development. This will gradually increase the positive self-image of the child and parent so that the positive feelings will likely be related to increased life satisfaction. Salvador-Ferrer's (2016) research shows that gratitude as a psychological strategy helps people enjoy everyday experiences and cope with challenges better.

This study also supports previous research findings that show that gratitude is positively related to life satisfaction. Nura and Sari's (2018) study revealed that parents who practice gratitude experience greater life satisfaction and feel calmer and more comfortable daily despite having children with special needs. Gratitude helps them interpret life events positively and see the wisdom behind every challenge.

In addition, Ikhwanisifa et al. (2024) showed that gratitude has a stronger predictive power than family support in determining life satisfaction. When parents are grateful, they spend more time meeting their children's mental, physical, and basic needs, improving overall family well-being.

## **Research Limitations**

A shortcoming of the study was the use of an online questionnaire (Google Form), which could potentially result in a non-representative sample of the population of parents with children special needs children, especially if they did not have access or the ability to participate in this research survey.

## **CONCLUSION**

The results showed a positive and significant relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction. The higher the level of gratitude, the higher the life satisfaction in parents with children with special needs. Conversely, the lower the gratitude, the lower the life satisfaction in parents with children with special needs. This study's results are supported by theory and previous research highlighting gratitude's importance in improving psychological well-being and individual quality of life.

## SUGGESTIONS

Some suggestions can be given from the results of this research, namely that a more comprehensive data collection method is needed so that the obtained data is optimal. Then, practically, gratitude can be made into coping with the right part of parents with special needs children. This study is expected to better understand how gratitude can affect the life satisfaction of parents who care for children with special needs. Practical implications include suggestions for intervention programs or psychological approaches that can increase gratitude to parents, hoping to improve their quality of life. Also, suggestions to conduct research on more varied participant characteristics and add types of disorders in children with special needs.

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