



The Effectiveness of Gratitude Training on Reducing Parenting Stress in Parents Who Have Children with Special Needs

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ABSTRACT

As the number of children with special needs in Indonesia increases, the number of cases of maltreatment of children with special needs by parents also increases. Caring for children with disabilities who have inhibitions and limitations and require special treatment brings its own difficulties for parents and can cause great stress. This study aims to determine whether gratitude training is effective in reducing parenting stress in parents of children with special needs. The research subjects were 20 parents who have children with special needs in the Sidoarjo and Surabaya areas. The type of research used is experimental method research, with experimental design One Group Pretest Posttest Design. The parenting stress scale in this study, measured using the Indonesian version of the Parental Stress Scale (PSS) which has proven its validity and reliability and has been tested on 449 parents in Indonesia. The results of the hypothesis test study in this study, using Wilcoxon statistical test = -3.834 and significance = 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), and the average level of parenting stress during the pretest (mean = 46.20) was higher than the average parenting stress during the posttest (mean = 28.25) meaning that gratitude training was effective in reducing parenting stress in parents who have Children with Special Needs, It was proven that the average level of parenting stress during the posttest decreased compared to the average parenting stress during the pretest.

Keywords: Gratitude Training; Parenting Stress; Parents of Children with Special Need

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INTRODUCTION

Married couples often dream of having a perfect child, but some parents have children with imperfect conditions, including physical, intellectual, mental, and sensory deficiencies. These children require special treatment, and parents must be prepared to accept and care for these children. Special services are essential for raising these children, bringing happiness and hope to the family.

Children with special needs are children who have limits or outstanding talents, both physically, mentally-intellectually, socially, and emotionally, that have a substantial impact on their growth or development process as compared to other children their age, according to Winarsih, dkk (2013). According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, the number of Special Needs Children in Indonesia is growing year after year. The number of Children with Special Needs in Indonesia has risen significantly, with 1.6 million persons in 2017 rising to 22.5 million by 2020.

Numerous problems and instances of parental maltreatment of children with special needs have developed in Indonesia along with the rise in the number of special needs children. The case of a child with special needs who was chained and abandoned by their parents in Bekasi in July 2022, the biological mother who killed her child with special needs in Jember in January 2022 because the child often feces in public, the case of a father and mother who killed their autistic son in South Sumatra due to open defecation, as well as the murder case of a girl with mental retardation by her mother and was placed in a septic tank and a plate that was inadvertently broken in Jember ten years ago, and just recently made public in February 2022, indicated that parents of children with special needs endure more difficulties, stigma, and stress than parents of typical children. In general, parents who care for children with special needs face many challenges, including uncertainty about whether their child will be able to develop as they should, uncertainty about the child's future, feelings of insecurity and embarrassment, and even some families who view it as a family disgrace or a curse for a sin. A kid with a handicap can cause a large rise in stress, according to earlier studies. Due of the child's cognitive disability and likely future need on the parent, this heightened stress is a result of both of these factors. Koegel, dkk (Boyd,2002). In line with research of Robbins , dkk(Boyd,2002) who found that parents of both dads and mothers who have children with impairments, in this example Autism, are much more stressed than parents who have typical children and are at a higher risk of depression. Another study found that stress factors were not only associated to child behavior difficulties, but also to concerns about the permanence of the kid's restricted condition, as well as poor acceptance of child conduct by society and frequently by family members. other families, as well as the degree of social assistance that parents get Sharpley,dkk (Boyd,2002).

Researchers conducted interviews with various parents who have children with exceptional needs, and the results reveal that parents endure parental stress. There are times when parents are exhausted, agitated, and too concerned about their child's condition, to the point where they are unable to cope or regulate their emotions.

Parenting stress causes parents to be quickly offended, to abandon their children, to show little compassion, and to become harsher, critical, and inflexible in their interactions with their children, according to Berry and Jones (1995). Furthermore, research shows that when parents are stressed, they exhibit more rejection, limit their children's activities, are reactive, and are less warm towards their children Bogels dkk (2010). The various reactions from parents who are aware of their children's imperfect birth condition, as well as the phenomenon of poor parenting quality for children with disabilities or special needs, have prompted researchers to conduct research on parenting stress, using gratitude as a variable that contributes to reducing parenting stress. The purpose of this study is to determine and assess if gratitude training is useful in lowering parental stress in parents who have special needs children. The proposed hypothesis is that gratitude training is beneficial in lowering parental stress in parents who have special needs children.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to determine the effect that is caused, specifically a reduction in parenting stress experienced by parents as participants, this study employs an experimental research method, namely by offering sessions in gratitude training to parents of children with special needs..

Research Design

This study applies a research design of *One Group Pretest – Posttest Design* to one set of parents with Special Needs children was chosen as an experimental group utilizing the Purposive Sampling approach and will get treatment or gratitude training therapy. The following is the research design plan:

Experiment Group :

Pretest	Treatmen	Post test
T1	Pelatihan Kebersyukuran	T2

Research participants

Participants in this study were parents with special needs children living in Surabaya and Sidoarjo. Researchers were recruited by distributing the G-form, which was screened based on the characteristics of the research subjects, which were as follows: male or female aged 25 and up, having children with special needs, living in the Sidoarjo and Surabaya areas, having never participated in gratitude training, and experiencing difficulties, discomfort, or stress while caring for Children with Special Needs. G-forms are then sent via social media, in this case WhatsApp, to institutions involved in family empowerment for children with special needs in Surabaya and Sidoarjo, as well as many child development clinics in Surabaya and Sidoarjo, as well as groups of parents and teachers from ABK in inclusive schools in Surabaya and Sidoarjo as well as several psychologists who work with children with special needs.

Instrument

The Parental Stress Scale (PSS) by Berry and Jones, (1995), which consists of 18 items, was adapted into the Indonesian version in accordance with the procedure suggested by the International Test Commission in The Guidelines for Translating and Adapting Test and which have been tested for validity and reliability by Kumalasari, et al. (2021). This study used this tool to measure parenting stress. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used in the first stage, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used in the second. These two stages were applied to 449 respondents, who were split into two sample groups at random and with reasonably balanced proportions: 249 for EFA testing and 200 for CFA testing. The results obtained by 3 items namely SP3, SP 4 and SP 9 were eliminated so that the parenting stress measurement tool used in this study consisted of 15 items,

Research Procedure

In this study, gratitude training was carried out by one psychologist, two trainers with experience in gratitude training, and two facilitators. Pre-training, training 1, and training 2 were the three stages of this program. The trainers introduced themselves at the pre-training stage and mentioned that this training was part of the research's goal to establish participants' trust and comfort during the training process. Before receiving therapy, participants completed informed permission forms and were given a pretest to determine the stress level of parenting. At the training stage 1, in the Grateful Recounting session, participants were asked to ponder on and experience all the joys, to be glad for "simple pleasures" as well as to live or be grateful for the enormous pleasures throughout the first stage of training. Participants are given worksheets and are asked to write out what makes them thankful to have a Special Needs Child. Following that, the participants were given gratitude-themed materials.

In the second session, participants entered the Grateful Reflection session (Reflection and contemplation of gratitude), which is to look within to see if the actions taken are true or not by doing simple reflections on someone's kindness in situations that make us grateful and produce an increase in positive affect. Participants offered brief thoughts on their kindness and got materials for enhancing thankfulness. The participants were tasked with creating a photo or video of parents and their special needs children giving a thank you or a hug as part of phase two of the training, which was conducted a week after the initial session and in between the one-week vacation. Participants begin training stage 2 by going through the Grateful Expression session, which involves being thankful or appreciative of God's or other people's generosity before acting in ways that can make other people happy by exhibiting both a significant increase in emotional well-being and a significant decrease in emotional well-being. major impact on depressed symptoms. The fourth session, titled "Grateful Reappraisal" (reassessment of gratitude), involved reevaluating negative events and attempting to release or eliminate negative thoughts. Participants were asked to look back at the

photos and videos that had been taken, and the trainer led a sharing session in which they shared what obstacles they had encountered. Participants get reading material on affirmations and hypnosis. In pairs, participants practice hypnosis, affirmations, and breathing.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis approach employed was a comparison test statistical data analysis model to identify the mean differences between observations across time using SPSS version 25.0 software. The normality assumption test on the pretest score yielded the following results:

Table of Parenting Stress Normality Test Results

Class		Saphiro - Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.
Parenting Stress	Pre - Test	0,791	20	0,001

Obtained a significance value for the pre-test of 0,001 ($p < 0,05$). The significance value of the gratitude training pre-test score is less than 0.05, implying that the data is not regularly distributed. Because the parenting stress data derived from pretest scores were not normally distributed, a non-parametric statistical test, specifically the Wilcoxon statistical test, was used to determine whether the suggested hypothesis was accepted or not.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

According to the results of measuring the parenting stress scale during the pre-test and post-test, the lowest score for the stress level of the parents during the pretest was 27 and the highest score was 53, while the lowest score for the stress level of the parents during the posttest was 23 and the highest score was 31. According to the findings of the stress level of participant care prior to receiving appreciation training, 75% of participants were in the moderate stress group, 10% were in the low stress area, and 5% were in the very low stress category.

After receiving the gratitude training, it was discovered that there was a decrease in parenting stress scores, with 70% of the participants falling into the very low stress category and the remaining 30% falling into the low stress category, indicating that almost all participants experienced a decrease in their parenting stress level after receiving the gratitude training. It is also supported by lower mean pretest and posttest stress levels.

As seen in the table below:

Table of Average Parenting Stress Scores Before Treatment (Pretest) and After Treatment (Posttest)

Parenting Stress Score	N	Mean
Before Treatment (Pretest)	20	46,20
After Treatment (Posttest)	20	28,25

A lower average parental stress score was recorded during the post test than it was during the pre test. This demonstrates that gratitude training can help parents of special needs children feel less stressed about raising them. The Wilcoxon test yielded the following findings when the hypothesis was tested:

Table of Parenting Stress Wilcoxon Test Results

Grateful	Mean	Z	Sig.
Pre-test	46,20	-3,834	0,000

The table above shows the values of $Z = -3,834$ and $\text{Sig.} = 0,000$ ($p < 0,05$) This indicates that the parental stress ratings of parents of special needs children vary depending on whether they received gratitude training before receiving it or not. Parenting stress dropped from an average of 46.20 on the pretest to 28.25 on the posttest. This demonstrates how gratitude training might help parents of special needs kids feel less stressed about raising them.

The results of non-parametric statistical tests with the Wilcoxon test are known values of $\text{Sig.} = 0,000 < 0,05$, means that there is a difference in the stress levels of caring for parents with special needs before and after gratitude training, proving the hypothesis that gratitude training is effective in reducing parenting stress for parents with special needs.

The information provided in this training on gratitude and the findings from this study highlight the significance of being grateful and its effects, both of which can lessen the stress associated with providing care for participants. When participants are taught to express their gratitude to God and count the blessings they have received throughout their lives—including the blessings of having children, which are not necessarily bestowed upon every person—they are also taught to recognize negative thoughts and replace them with positive ones. Additionally, the participants were asked to consider the benefits their children with impairments had brought them. Little kindnesses done by the children of participants who have limitations that so far have not been seen because the participants are more focused on the weaknesses, not the

strengths of the children. Participants were asked to reflect on and appreciate all the "simple pleasures" they have received and be grateful for them.

Sessions for expression and reassessment are a crucial component of the training. Participants realized that the power of thinking can alter one's sentiments and behavior. When they saw videos and images of their own happy faces and read articles about mindful appreciation, which controls the subconscious mind to give us all we desire. Along with the release session, which involves the practice of letting go of all the pressures and burdens parents experience, participants are assisted in programming their own minds, analyzing and rationalizing any information that comes to mind, and developing positive thoughts and emotions. Hypnosis treatments, breathing techniques, and affirmations can support the healing process by removing loads and obstacles and eliminate negative thoughts that affect participants' stress levels.

During the training process, the researcher also conducted interviews with the participants. Based on the findings of the interviews and sharing sessions, it was discovered that parents of children with disabilities are most afraid that the participants (parents) will pass away later on or become incapacitated. The participants consider what will happen to and how their children would be affected. Others hold themselves responsible for what occurred; but, with gratitude training, these negative attitudes may be transformed into good ones, serving as inspiration for parents to be even greater partners for their kids and to live even better lives. The results of the questionnaire given by the researcher at the end of each training session show that after being given material and practice, participants feel confident that everything that God gives them is a blessing for which they should be grateful. Participants also begin to be able to accept their circumstances and no longer blame themselves for what they do. What is going on in the lives of the participants? Participants were able to get to know their children and control their emotions so that they did not become angry or rebellious when faced with parenting challenges, as well as to appreciate their children and themselves more.

Following the session, the participants felt a greater sense of gratitude for every small favor their special needs children gave them. Participants feel more inspired and optimistic about supporting and educating their children with special needs. Participants further revealed that by taking part in this gratitude training, they were able to recognize the positive aspects of their children with special needs and began to nurture these aspects, such as enrolling them in modeling classes, making plans to give them more education so they could carry on the family business, and managing a family business. The participants held the opinion that parenting styles did not matter when children came to disability.

Participants received questionnaires from the researchers as well. When asked to list their reasons for being grateful on a scale of 1 to 10, most participants' responses before receiving the training were in the range of numbers 5 to 6. However, after receiving the training in gratitude, participants confidently listed their reasons for being grateful in the range of numbers 8 to 9, and some even answered 10. This demonstrates

that the gratitude training offers fresh viewpoints, encourages positive thinking, and eliminates negative thinking, resulting in a strong sense of thankfulness that can help individuals feel less stressed and that their lives are more meaningful.

Participants felt that more parents of children with special needs should benefit from training like this by continuing to provide it. Another benefit of this appreciation training is that it is thought to be able to remove challenges that participants have faced in their parental roles.

In light of the foregoing reasoning, it may be inferred that this study—specifically, gratitude training—has demonstrated efficacy in lowering parental stress for parents of special needs children. This is consistent with study by Mega, et al. (2018) that found a link between social support, gratitude training, and decreased parental stress for parents of children with impairments.

CONCLUSION

The parenting stress scale in this study, measured using the Indonesian version of the Parental Stress Scale (PSS) which has proven its validity and reliability and has been tested on 449 parents in Indonesia. The results of the hypothesis test study in this study, using Wilcoxon statistical test = -3.834 and significance = 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), and the average level of parenting stress during the pretest (mean = 46.20) was higher than the average parenting stress during the posttest (mean = 28.25) meaning that gratitude training was effective in reducing parenting stress in parents who have Children with Special Needs, It was proven that the average level of parenting stress during the posttest decreased compared to the average parenting stress during the pretest.

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