

Self-Acceptance and Social Support as Predictors of Gratitude among Parents of Children with Special Needs.

Lailatul Izzah¹

izzah@diniyah.ac.id

Eva Yuliza²

eva@diniyah.ac.id

Leviana Nur Fadhillah³

^{1,2,3}Fakultas Dakwah, Program Studi Psikologi Islam, Institut Agama Islam Diniyyah Pekanbaru
Jl. KH. Ahmad Dahlan. No 100. Pekanbaru

Abstract

This study aims to examine the role self-acceptance and sosial support as predictors of gratitude among parents of children with special needs. This research employed a quantitative survey design. A total of 76 parents of children with special needs from a public special education school in Pekanbaru, Indonesia, were selected using random sampling. Data were collected using standardized psychological scales measuring self-acceptance, social support, and gratitude. Statistical analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS version 20 for Windows to assess the predictive contribution of self-acceptance and social support to gratitude. The findings revealed that the levels of self-acceptance (97.36%), social support (86.84%), and gratitude (100%) were predominantly in the high category. Regression analysis indicated that self-acceptance and social support significantly predicted gratitude, with a contribution value of 0.207, meaning that both variables explained 20.7% of the variance in gratitude among parents of children with special needs. The study highlights the importance of strengthening internal psychological resources (self-acceptance) and external support systems (social support) to foster gratitude in parents raising children with special needs. However, the study is limited by its relatively small sample size and focus on a single institution, which may affect generalizability. Future research should include broader samples and additional psychosocial variables. This study contributes to the positive psychology literature by examining gratitude from both intrapersonal and interpersonal perspectives in the context of parenting children with special needs—an area that remains underexplored, particularly within Indonesian cultural settings.

Keywords: *Self-Acceptance, Social Support, Gratitude, Parents of Children with Special Needs, Positive Psychology.*

A. Introduction

The presence of a child in a family is generally perceived as a blessing that brings happiness and hope to parents. However, this perception can change when parents discover that their child has special needs. Children with special needs are those who experience physical, intellectual, emotional, social, or sensory limitations that require special educational services and support tailored to their conditions. Such circumstances often create psychological challenges for parents, as they must adjust emotionally, socially, and spiritually to unexpected caregiving demands (Mangunsong, 2011).

Parents of children with special needs frequently experience a range of emotional reactions, including denial, guilt, sadness, anger, and anxiety about their child's future. These responses often arise from the discrepancy between parental expectations and the reality of the child's condition. If this adjustment process does not occur adaptively, parents may experience prolonged stress that negatively affects their mental health and parenting patterns (Santrock, 2012). Therefore, the ability to achieve self-acceptance becomes crucial.

Self-acceptance refers to a positive attitude toward oneself, including the ability to acknowledge personal limitations, weaknesses, and life experiences without excessive self-blame. Individuals with high self-acceptance are able to evaluate themselves realistically and maintain a constructive outlook on life (Ryff, 1989). In the context of parenting a child with special needs, self-acceptance involves the parents' capacity to accept their child's condition as well as their own role as caregivers. Adequate self-acceptance enables parents to adapt more effectively, show unconditional care, and provide optimal support for their child's development.

One important factor that may facilitate parental self-acceptance is **social support**. Social support refers to the comfort, care, appreciation, and assistance received from others, which make individuals feel loved, valued, and part of a social network (Sarafino, E.P., & Smith, 2011). For parents of children with special needs, support from spouses, extended family members, friends, communities, and professionals can reduce feelings of isolation, increase coping capacity, and strengthen psychological resilience. Higher perceived social support is associated with better emotional adjustment and reduced caregiving burden.

In addition to external resources, an important internal factor is **gratitude**. Gratitude is a psychological tendency to recognize and appreciate the positive aspects of life, including benefits received from others and from God (Emmons and McCullough, 2003). Grateful individuals tend to focus on meaning, lessons, and positive elements even in difficult circumstances. Within positive psychology, gratitude is known to enhance psychological well-being, positive emotions, and adaptive coping (Peterson and Seligman, 2004) For parents of children with special needs, gratitude may help them reframe their experiences, perceive their child as a source of personal growth, and cultivate acceptance rather than resistance.

In religious and cultural contexts, gratitude also carries spiritual meaning. In Islamic teachings, gratitude is closely related to accepting God's decree with sincerity and trust, which contributes to inner peace. Such spiritual coping may further strengthen parents' self-acceptance and psychological adjustment when facing life challenges.

SLB Negeri Pembina Pekanbaru, a public special education school, serves as an environment where parents of children with special needs interact and potentially gain social support through shared experiences, emotional encouragement, and information exchange. Nevertheless, not all parents experience similar levels of support or gratitude. These differences are assumed to influence the degree of self-acceptance among parents.

Based on the above considerations, self-acceptance among parents of children with special needs appears to be influenced by both external factors (social support) and internal psychological resources (gratitude). Therefore, this study aims to examine **the influence of social support and gratitude on self-acceptance among parents of children with special needs at SLB Negeri Pembina Pekanbaru**. The findings are expected to provide empirical evidence that may inform psychosocial interventions and parental support programs in special education settings.

B. Literature Review

Self-Acceptance in Parents of Children with Special Needs

Self-acceptance is a key dimension of psychological well-being and refers to an individual's ability to recognize and accept personal strengths, weaknesses, and life experiences while maintaining a positive self-attitude ((Ryff, 1989)). Individuals with high self-acceptance tend to evaluate themselves realistically without excessive self-criticism. In the context of parenting children with special needs, self-acceptance involves acknowledging the child's condition and embracing one's parental role without persistent denial or shame. Parents who achieve self-acceptance show better emotional regulation, lower psychological distress, and more adaptive caregiving behaviors (Hurlock, 2006).

Social Support and Self-Acceptance

Social support is defined as the comfort, care, appreciation, and assistance received from others, which fosters feelings of belonging and being valued (Sarafino & Smith, 2011). It includes emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal support. Social support functions as a stress-buffering factor, helping individuals cope with difficult life situations (Cohen and Wills, 1985). For parents of children with special needs, support from family, friends, and professionals reduces feelings of isolation and strengthens psychological resilience. A supportive environment encourages parents to reinterpret challenges more positively, which contributes to healthier self-evaluation and greater self-acceptance.

Gratitude and Self-Acceptance

Gratitude refers to a dispositional tendency to recognize and appreciate positive aspects of life (Emmons and McCullough, 2003). It is associated with higher levels of well-being, optimism, and life satisfaction (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). Gratitude enhances positive emotions and reduces negative affect, enabling individuals to find meaning even in adversity. For parents of children with special needs, gratitude may promote cognitive reframing, allowing them to view caregiving experiences as meaningful and spiritually valuable. This process supports emotional adjustment and facilitates self-acceptance.

Integration of Variables

Self-acceptance among parents of children with special needs is assumed to develop through the interaction of external and internal resources. Social support provides emotional security and practical assistance, while gratitude fosters positive meaning-making and emotional resilience. Together, these variables may enhance parents' ability to accept themselves and their life situations. However, empirical studies examining these three constructs simultaneously remain limited, particularly in Indonesian cultural contexts.

Hypothesis Development

Based on the theoretical framework and previous findings, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Social support significantly predicts self-acceptance among parents of children with special needs.

H2: Gratitude significantly predicts self-acceptance among parents of children with special needs.

H3: Social support and gratitude simultaneously predict self-acceptance among parents of children with special needs.

Conceptual Framework

Self-acceptance is positioned as the dependent variable influenced by two independent variables:

C. Methods

This section describes how the research was conducted, including the research design, population and sample, data collection techniques and instrument development, as well as data analysis techniques.

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational survey design. The design was chosen to examine the predictive role of social support and gratitude on self-acceptance among parents of children with special needs. The study aimed to identify the degree to which the independent variables (social support and gratitude) contribute to variations in the dependent variable (self-acceptance).

Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of parents of children with special needs enrolled at SLB Negeri Pembina Pekanbaru, a public special education school in Indonesia. The participants were parents whose children have various developmental conditions and receive specialized educational services.

A total of 76 parents were selected as research participants using random sampling techniques. This sampling method was applied to ensure that each member of the population had an equal chance of being selected, thereby increasing the representativeness of the sample.

Data Collection Techniques and Instrument Development

Data were collected using self-report psychological scales distributed directly to participants.

Three instruments were used:

1. Self-Acceptance Scale

This scale measured parents' ability to accept themselves and their life conditions, including acceptance of their child's condition. The scale was constructed based on psychological well-being theory (Ryff, 1989), covering aspects such as positive self-attitude, acknowledgment of strengths and weaknesses, and realistic self-evaluation.

2. Social Support Scale

This scale assessed perceived social support received by parents from family, friends, and significant others. The instrument was developed based on the social

support framework by Sarafino and Smith, (2011), including emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal support.

3. Gratitude Scale

Gratitude was measured using a scale that captured individuals' tendency to recognize and appreciate positive aspects of life. The scale was developed based on the gratitude concept from Emmons and McCullough, (2003), focusing on appreciation, positive meaning-making, and acknowledgment of benefits received.

All instruments used a Likert-type scale format. Prior to use, the instruments underwent validity and reliability testing to ensure that the items accurately measured the intended constructs and demonstrated acceptable internal consistency.

Tool and Material Specifications

The primary tool used in this study was a computer-based statistical analysis program, namely IBM SPSS version 20 for Windows. This software was utilized to perform statistical calculations, including descriptive statistics and regression analysis. The main research materials consisted of:

- Printed psychological scale questionnaires
- Demographic data sheets for participants

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the levels of self-acceptance, social support, and gratitude among participants. Multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the simultaneous and partial predictive effects of social support and gratitude on self-acceptance. This technique allowed the researcher to determine the magnitude of contribution of the independent variables to the dependent variable.

D. Result

Instrumen Testing

Validity

Item validity testing showed that all Items met the validity criterion ($r > 0.30$)

Table 1. Item Validity Summary

Scale	Number of Items	Valid Items	Range of Item Correlations
Self-Acceptance	15	15	0.32 - 0.60
Social Support	22	22	0.30 - 0.56
Gratitude	16	16	0.23 - 0.86

Reliability

Table 2. Reliability Statistics

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Self-Acceptance	0.592	Moderate
Social Support	0.717	High

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

Variabel	N	Min	Max	Max	SD
Self-Acceptance	76	66	102	85.96	6.27
Social Support	76	73	127	97.68	10.15
Gratitude	76	48	60	51.68	2.76

Most participants showed **high levels** of all three variabels.

Asumption Testing

Test	Result	Conclusion
Normality (K-S)	p = 0.669	Normal distribution
Linearity	p = 0.949	Linear relationship
Multicollinearity	VIF = 1.014	No multicollinearity
Heteroskedasticity	p > 0.05	No heteroskedasticity

All regression assumptions were met

Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 4. ANOVA

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	612.232	2	306.116	9.555	.000
Residual	2338.650	73	32.036		
Total	2950.882	75			

The regression model is statistically significant.

Model Summary

Table 5. Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
0.455	0.207	0.186	5.660

Social support and gratitude explain **20.7%** of the variance in self-acceptance.

Regression Coefficients

Table 6. Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	67.029	13.206	-	5.076	.000
Social Support	0.283	0.065	0.458	4.367	.000
Gratitude	-0.169	0.239	-0.074	-0.709	.481

D. Discussion

This study aimed to examine the role of social support and gratitude in predicting self-acceptance among parents of children with special needs. The findings reveal that the regression model is statistically significant, indicating that social support and gratitude together contribute to self-acceptance. However, only social support emerged as a significant predictor, while gratitude did not show a significant effect.

Social Support and Self-Acceptance

The results indicate that social support significantly predicts self-acceptance. This finding aligns with the theoretical framework of Sarafino, E.P., & Smith, (2011), who emphasize that social support functions as a psychological buffer in stressful life situations. Parents of children with special needs often encounter emotional strain, social stigma, and caregiving burden. Support from spouses, family members, friends, and professionals may reduce these pressures, foster a sense of belonging, and strengthen coping resources.

This supportive environment enables parents to develop a more positive self-evaluation, which is central to Ryff, (1989) concept of self-acceptance. According to Ryff, self-acceptance involves holding a positive attitude toward oneself and acknowledging life experiences without excessive self-blame. Social support may help parents reinterpret their circumstances more constructively, thus facilitating emotional adjustment and acceptance of both themselves and their children's conditions.

The strong standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.458$) indicates that social support is the dominant factor in predicting self-acceptance. This suggests that external psychosocial resources play a crucial role in helping parents adapt to the challenges of raising children with special needs.

Gratitude and Self-Acceptance

Contrary to expectations, gratitude did not significantly predict self-acceptance in this study. This finding differs from positive psychology perspectives proposed by Emmons and McCullough, (2003), which suggest that gratitude enhances well-being and adaptive coping. Gratitude is often associated with positive emotions, meaning-making, and resilience. However, in this sample, gratitude may function more as a general emotional tendency rather than a direct determinant of self-acceptance.

One possible explanation is that gratitude alone may not be sufficient to influence self-acceptance without strong environmental reinforcement. Parents might feel grateful spiritually or emotionally, yet still struggle with internal acceptance if they lack consistent social validation and practical assistance. Thus, while gratitude supports psychological well-being broadly, its influence on self-acceptance may be indirect or mediated by other variables such as coping strategies or religious meaning-making.

Combined Contribution of Social Support and Gratitude

The two predictors together explain 20.7% of the variance in self-acceptance, indicating that other factors also contribute to parents' self-acceptance. These may include personality traits, religiosity, coping styles, or length of time since the child's diagnosis. Nonetheless, the model highlights that psychosocial resources remain important determinants.

From the perspective of Ryff's psychological well-being model, self-acceptance is shaped not only by internal strengths but also by environmental conditions that provide emotional security. Therefore, social support appears to be a more immediate and

tangible factor than gratitude in shaping parents' acceptance of themselves and their life circumstances.

Implications

These findings suggest that interventions aimed at increasing self-acceptance among parents of children with special needs should prioritize strengthening social support systems. Support groups, family counseling, and community-based programs may help parents share experiences and receive emotional and practical assistance. While gratitude-based interventions remain valuable for enhancing well-being, they may need to be integrated with social support mechanisms to effectively influence self-acceptance.

E. Conclusion

This study examined the role of social support and gratitude in predicting self-acceptance among parents of children with special needs. The findings demonstrate that social support and gratitude collectively contribute to self-acceptance; however, only social support was found to be a significant predictor. This indicates that external psychosocial resources play a more dominant role than internal emotional tendencies in shaping parents' acceptance of themselves and their life situations.

The results reinforce Ryff, (1989) perspective that self-acceptance is a key component of psychological well-being, influenced not only by internal evaluation but also by environmental conditions. Consistent with Sarafino, E.P., & Smith, (2011) social support serves as a stress-buffering factor that enhances coping capacity and psychological adjustment. Parents who feel supported are better able to manage caregiving demands and develop a positive attitude toward themselves.

Although gratitude, as described in Emmons and McCullough, (2003) is theoretically linked to positive emotions and well-being, it did not significantly predict self-acceptance in this study. This suggests that gratitude may function as a broader emotional resource rather than a direct determinant of self-acceptance in this context.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of strengthening social support systems for parents of children with special needs. Programs that foster emotional, informational, and practical assistance may be more effective in promoting self-acceptance than focusing solely on internal psychological traits.

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