



Gratitude of Parents of Children with Special Needs during Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 Pandemic period brought many changes and challenges for all society levels, including parents who have children with special needs. The challenges faced certainly can cause stress and pressure in themselves. However, gratitude will foster positive emotions that build optimism, even when we are facing stressful situations. This study aims to get an overview of parents' gratitude who have children with special needs during the Covid-19 pandemic. The method used in this research is descriptive quantitative, involving 66 parents of children with special needs who are students of inclusion schools in Surabaya. Respondents in this study were selected purposively. The measuring instrument used is the gratitude scale compiled by Listiyandini et al. (2015). This study showed that 40% of respondents have a moderate level of gratitude and 20% have a high level of gratitude.

Keywords: children with special needs; gratitude; parents; pandemic.

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INTRODUCTION

The period of the Covid-19 pandemic that began in early 2020 impacted all aspects of life. People need to make adjustments related to the changes that occur in their daily activities. Since March 2020, the Government of Indonesia has established a social distancing policy. These policies have an impact on many aspects of life, including education. Schools implement learning activities at home, where learning activities are carried out online with parental assistance. This condition certainly requires a complicated adjustment process, both from the teacher, parent, and student side. Parents of children with special needs also experience increased pressure considering that the service facilities usually provided to their children, such as therapy and medical examinations, are closed. Therefore, during the Covid-19 pandemic, parents with special needs have a dual role apart from being parents and therapists, educators, and companions.

Parents of children with special needs who have not previously been used to accompanying their children to study at home will undoubtedly experience difficulties in assisting in children's learning activities. Understanding children with special needs related to changes in their activities from studying at school to learning at home is certainly not comfortable. The next challenge is to overcome the child's boredom while at home. They can only understand that they can only play inside the house and, when outside the house, must wear a mask, which requires a separate effort, not to mention when children become tantrums. The difficulties faced will certainly increase if both parents also have to work to meet the family's economic needs.

The difficulties faced by parents who have children with special needs during the Covid-19 pandemic can cause stress. If parents are unable to manage their stress, of course this condition has the potential to cause long-term psychological pressure to the level of depression (Kristanto, 2016). Negative emotions will undoubtedly trigger the emergence of negative attitudes in responding to children's needs while studying at home and these negative attitudes will also affect the results of the learning assistance activities carried out. On the other hand, many research results state that individuals' various problems can be overcome by appreciating the positive things that are felt in life, or in other words with gratitude (Putra, Anggreiny, & Sarry, 2019). In the midst of helplessness, humans always have the opportunity to see life more positively (Listiyandini, Nathania, Syahniar, Sonia, & Nadya, 2015; Jans-Beken & Wong, 2019).

Gratitude is a response that arises for something obtained, whether it is in the form of objects, happy events, the ability to overcome difficulties faced, or the limitations they have (Hambali, Meiza, & Fahmi, 2015). According to Sansone and Sansone (2010), another definition of gratitude is the appreciation of what is valuable and meaningful to oneself; it is a general state of thankfulness and / or appreciation. Gratitude is an emotion, which is the essence of feeling happy for the benefits received (Emmons & McCullough, 2004). Grateful individuals will have positive coping in overcoming difficulties faced in their lives, seek social support from the environment, interpret experiences from different points of view, and have plans to overcome problems (Emmons, McCullough, & Tsang, 2003).

Gratitude is a positive coping mechanism for parents who have children with special needs and has been proven to prevent stress and depression (Kristanto, 2016). Parents of children with special needs who can positively assess the situation faced during the Covid-19 pandemic with gratitude for being able to accept their child's condition tend to act positively and realistically in caring for and educating their children, preparing all the facilities needed in the process of their child's education (Hambali, Meiza, & Fahmi, 2015). Gratitude has emotional and interpersonal benefits. By seeing and feeling suffering as something positive, a person will be able to increase his new coping skills, consciously or not (Listiyandini, et al 2015).

Gratefulness is a variable that has been widely researched in both the West and the East. However, most of the existing measuring instruments come from Western countries that have different cultures so that they may also differ in the meaning of gratitude that people from Eastern countries have, especially Indonesia. Listiyandini, et al (2015) conducted a study that aims to develop an Indonesian version of the measuring instrument of gratitude. Based on the research results

METHOD

Research Design

This research uses descriptive quantitative method. which aims to get a picture of the joy of parents who have children with special needs during the Covid-19 pandemic. Respondents of this study were 66 parents of children with special needs in Surabaya who were selected purposively. The criteria of the respondents are parents who have children with special needs and their children attend inclusive schools in Surabaya. The selection of respondents was carried out in collaboration with the Surabaya city education office and inclusive schools in Surabaya. Respondents were asked for their willingness before the data collection process through an online form that was distributed. The data collection process was carried out through a webinar where respondents were asked to fill in a gratitude scale first, then given psychoeducation on stress-free parenting. Thus it can be ascertained that the respondents of this study are true parents who have children with special needs according to the intended criteria.

The measuring instrument used in this study is the gratitude scale formulated by Listiyandini et al (2015). Listiyandini compiles a scale of gratitude that suits the people of Indonesia. The definition of gratitude used by Listiyandini in compiling the measuring instrument is a feeling of gratitude, happiness,



and appreciation for things that are obtained during life, whether from God, humans or other creatures, and the universe, which then encourages the individual to do this. the same as he got. Aspects of gratitude include: 1) a sense of appreciation towards other people or God and life, 2) positive feelings towards one's life, and 3) a tendency to act as an expression of the positive feelings and appreciation they have. These three aspects are divided into two indicators, namely transpersonal and personal. In addition, researchers also gave respondents an open question about what they could be grateful for while accompanying their children with special needs during this pandemic.

This scale was tested by researchers before use. The test results show that the item discrimination index moves between 0.338 - 0.679 with a reliability coefficient of 0.921. An example of a question rhythm on a scale related to the aspect of Appreciation for God is: my health comes from God. The responses requested from the respondents were in the form of a rating scale that moved from number 1 (strongly disagree) to number 5 (strongly agree).

The data collection procedure in this study begins by asking for the respondents' consent as research subjects through an online form. If the respondent agrees, they will be invited to a webinar which becomes a medium for data collection. The data collection process was carried out through a webinar where respondents were asked to fill in a gratitude scale first and then give psychoeducation on stress-free parenting. Thus it can be ascertained that the respondents of this study are true parents who have children with special needs according to the intended criteria.

The collected data were analyzed descriptively using descriptive statistical techniques. The picture of gratitude that the respondents had was categorized into 5 categories, namely very high, high, medium, low, and very low based on the mean empiric obtained. The data from the open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively.

RESULT

The data analysis of this research begins with mapping the descriptive data of the respondents. The results of the analysis show that the respondents of this study are mostly mothers and work as housewives. Of the 66 parents who were respondents, most of their children were specific with the slow learner type. This data can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Descriptive Data of Responden

Category	Total	Percentage
Parents Role		
Father	18	27%
Mother	48	73%
Parents Job		
Public Sector	20	30%
Housewife	27	41%
Private Sector	4	6%
Teacher/Lecturer	6	11%
Enterpreuner	9	12%
Special Need Type of Children		
Slow Learner	33	48%
ADD / ADHD	2	3%
Communication Disorders	6	11%
Autism Spectrum Disorder	4	6%
Intellectual Disabilities	21	32%

The analysis of the gratitude scale score given shows that 48% of the respondents have a moderate level of gratitude, and 20% of the respondents have a relatively high level of gratitude. Respondents who have a low level of gratitude, 17% and 5% of respondents, are classified as having a very low level of gratitude.

The open question response given to the respondent has 5 groups of answer themes. Parents of children with special needs who became respondents felt that what they could be grateful for during the Covid-19 pandemic were: 1) feeling happy because they could accompany children to learn, 2) having lots of time to be with children at home, 3) getting to know more what are the strengths, weaknesses and needs of the child, 4) more control over the things the child does, and 5) being grateful for being given health while at home with the child and family.

DISCUSSION

This study indicates that most parents of children with special needs who are respondents in this study have a fairly large level of gratitude. It can be concluded that parents of children who have children with special needs can still have a positive appreciation for God and other people during this pandemic. Respondents also have positive feelings about their life and tend to act positively to express their positive feelings and appreciation.

Based on the results of the responses to the open questions given, the respondents said that what they could be grateful for in this pandemic was being able to assist children in learning, having more time with children, getting to know the strengths and weaknesses of children, being more able to control what was done by them. Children, and stay healthy while at home with children and family. This response shows that even though accompanying children while studying at home is not easy, the respondents still have a positive appreciation for the activities they have to do. This condition is in accordance with Jans-Beken & Wong (2019) opinion, which states that even in unpleasant conditions (suffering, misfortune, difficulty), something good will come such as new opportunities or new experiences so that someone who experiences it can feel grateful.

The good things that respondents felt during this pandemic were getting to know the strengths and weaknesses of children and controlling what their children did everyday. Positive appreciation of the events experienced can make respondents have positive feelings, as expressed by respondents that they feel happy because they have more time with their children. Hambali, Meiza, & Fahmi (2015) in their research also stated that parents of children with special needs who are able to be grateful for what they experience can feel positive emotions and strengths and have hope in their lives. Respondents' gratitude leads them to act positively as an expression of their positive feelings and appreciation.

One factor that plays a role in gratitude is self-acceptance of the situation experienced (Hambali et al., 2015). Respondents show that most of them have reasonably high gratitude, it can be concluded that they have self-acceptance in the current conditions, namely accompanying their children with special needs during the pandemic. Even when data collection was carried out through webinars, several respondents went online from their place of work and brought their children to participate. Gratitude that someone owns will benefit that person both in terms of emotion and interpersonal (Listiyandini et al., 2015). When respondents can see the positives of the difficulties they are facing, they will be able to improve their new coping skills, both consciously and unconsciously. McCullough, M., Emmons, R., & Tsang (2002) explain that a grateful person will have high control over his environment and have positive coping with seeking social support from others and interpreting experiences from a different perspective, and have a plan for solving problems. However, this study did not explore



further the behavioral manifestations of thanksgiving that the respondents had. Therefore, further research on gratitude for parents who have children with special needs can further observe the manifestations of gratitude in their daily behavior.

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