

# 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

## ABSTRAK

Seiring dengan peningkatan jumlah Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus di Indonesia, jumlah kasus penganiayaan Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus oleh orang tua juga meningkat. Mengasuh anak disabilitas dengan segala hambatan dan keterbatasan serta membutuhkan penanganan khusus memunculkan kesulitan tersendiri bagi orang tua dan dapat menimbulkan stres yang besar. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui apakah pelatihan kebersyukuran efektif dalam menurunkan stres pengasuhan pada orang tua yang memiliki Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus. Subjek penelitian adalah 20 orang tua yang memiliki Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus di wilayah Sidoarjo dan Surabaya. Jenis penelitian yang digunakan adalah penelitian metode eksperimen, dengan desain eksperimen *One Group Pretest Posttest Design*. Skala stres pengasuhan dalam penelitian ini, diukur menggunakan *Parental Stress Scale* (PSS) versi bahasa Indonesia yang telah terbukti validitas dan reliabilitasnya dan telah diujikan kepada 449 orang tua di Indonesia. Hasil penelitian uji hipotesis pada penelitian ini, menggunakan uji statistik *Wilcoxon* = -3,834 dan signifikansi = 0,000 ( $p < 0.05$ ), dan rata-rata tingkat stres pengasuhan orang tua saat pretest (rerata = 46,20) lebih tinggi daripada rata-rata stres pengasuhan orang tua saat posttest (rerata = 28,25) artinya pelatihan kebersyukuran efektif menurunkan stres pengasuhan pada orang tua yang memiliki Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus, terbukti rata – rata tingkat stres pengasuhan orang tua saat posttest mengalami penurunan dibandingkan dengan rata – rata stres pengasuhan saat pretest.

**Kata kunci** : Pelatihan Kebersyukuran, Stres Pengasuhan, Orang tua Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus.

## BACKGROUND

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.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Stress related to parenting is a factor in the unpleasant psychological circumstances that develop as parents attempt to adjust to the obligations of parenthood. Parenting stress, as defined by Abidin (1995), is a process of strain, anxiety, and tension that transcends boundaries and is particularly tied to the role of parents and the interactions between parents and their children

during the childcare process. As a result of parental fights with kids, Abidin also notes how stress results in dysfunctional parental care. According to Berry and Jones (1995), parenting stress is a negative sensation experienced by parents such as feeling frightened when they see challenges in parenting and focusing on the repercussions that occur in parents such as loss of control and freedom due to responsibilities. Spending money, energy, and time on raising children. Negative feelings such as the worries faced by parents when difficulties occur as a stressor, the indicator considers the child as a burden and considers the child as a source of stress, as well as aspects of lack of control with the indicator feeling heavy on responsibility as a parent and children as a source of lack of control in parents' lives. According to the definition above, parenting stress is excessive anxiety and tension experienced by parents during the parenting process as a result of a mismatch between perceived demands and the parents' abilities, which occurs as a result of the parental role in parenting and the process of interaction with children malfunctioning. Abidin (1995) proposed three aspects of parenting stress: the experience of parental stress (the parental distress), namely stress that arises from the parents, such as easily experiencing depressive symptoms, attachment to children, rigidity in carrying out the role of parents, feeling uneasy competent, socially isolated, less harmonious relationships with partners, and poor health. The second part is difficult kid conduct, namely stress caused by child behavior such as lack of parental acceptance, low child adaptation, bad moods, likes to demand or be problematic, having thoughts, and a lack of understanding. has the capacity to assist in the strengthening of parents and the third is the dysfunctional

interaction of parents and children (The parent-child dysfunctional interaction), namely conflicts that arise in the interactions of parents and children . According to Deater and Deckard (2004), there are three categories on characteristics of parental stress, as mentioned by Abidin (1995). First, the parental domain covers the emotions and depression levels of the parents. The second domain is derived from the child's behavior, health, and problems. Third, the relationship and intimacy between parents and children is included in the realm of interaction between parents and children. The P-C-R (Parent-Child-Relationship) hypothesis is used to explain these characteristics of parental stress.

In contrast to the two previous hypotheses, Berry and Jones (1995) believe that the features listed by Abidin (1995) are too restrictive and are more generally utilized to quantify parental stress in parents of children with specific problems such as hyperactivity and developmental impairments. As a result, Berry and Jones devised a more comprehensive definition of parenting stress, which resulted in two themes, good parenting and negative parenting, which were then summarized into four elements, First, there are parental stressors, which are negative components in parenting that entail numerous demands from many sources such as time, energy, and money, which can generate stress such as viewing children as a burden, spending most of the expense and time caring for children. Second loss of control (Loss of control), especially loss of control and independence as a result of parenting obligations, such as feeling burdened by parental responsibilities and viewing children as a cause of lack of control in life. The third is parental satisfaction, which refers to emotionally healthy

parenting practices like love, joy, and pleasure as well as feelings of self-enrichment and self-development. The fourth is parental rewards, which refers to a state in which parents feel content with their parenting, such as enjoying the time they spend with their kids, feeling close to them, or having a positive outlook on the future. Berry and Jones (1995) components of parental stress, which comprise four aspects of Parental Stressors, Loss of Control, Parental Satisfaction, and Parental Rewards, were found as markers of evaluating parental stress for parents who have children with special needs in this study. Parenting stress is caused by two types of causes: internal factors and external factors, sometimes known as individual factors and environmental factors. External influences include family functioning, emotional expressiveness, children's education, social support, and parental job time. According to Gunarsa (2009), there are various elements that influence parental stress. The first is general life stress; parents who have more than one duty, such as employees, are more likely to be stressed since they are saddled with additional duties. Parental stress will add to the weight of parental stress. Second, the child's condition; when parents are confronted with children that exhibit aberrant conduct or have developmental issues, they must deal with increased stress. Third, social support, such as that provided by spouses, relatives, neighbors, and friends, can help to lessen the likelihood of parents feeling parental stress. The most important assistance for parenting stress comes from a spouse. If one spouse feels alone in carrying out parenting obligations, he will feel overwhelmed by the tension. Meanwhile, if he believes he has parental support, the tension he feels will be reduced. Fourth, economic status, poverty, and high life stresses can all

contribute to stress. Parenting stress is not regarded too much of a burden provided food, clothing, and housing facilities match the needs of children in the developmental process. Fifth, parents who are psychologically immature and behave as parents at a young age might raise levels of parental stress. Parents have little expertise and experience in educating their children while they are young, which increases the amount of parenting stress.

Parenting stress may be produced by a variety of factors, including individual stress, such as illness, or a scenario in which a person must choose between two really significant options. Another factor is family stress, such as having additional children, divorce, financial difficulties, a sick family, and financial and health concerns. Another kind of stress is environmental stress, which includes relationships and social interactions with others. Mothers' parenting stress will influence their obligations as parents in terms of nurturing and caring for their children. Parenting stress will interfere with parents' regular job. Parents who are bored of dealing with a family's numerous and never-ending requirements will lose interest in parenting. This creates emotional changes in the mother, causing her to use angry words, threaten the kid, and possibly harm the child. Ahern (2004) discovered a link between parenting stress and the risk of child maltreatment in a variety of severe cases. This study discovered a strong association between parental stress and the likelihood of parents abusing their children. Life changes, parental traits, kid characteristics, changes in work position, and so on all put pressure on parents. According to Gunarsa's (2006) research, parental stress might make it easier for

parents to be prompted by rage when confronted with difficult situations.

This study uses an intervention in the form of gratitude training to reduce parenting stress for parents who have children with special needs. Gratitude is a feeling of response to a gift, as a form of appreciation that is felt after someone gets altruistic (receives kindness from others), according to research by McCullough, Emmons, et al. (2004). This research also states that gratitude is a feeling of response to a gift, as a form of appreciation that is felt after someone gets altruistic (receives kindness from others). According to Watkins (2014), there are four ways to instill a sense of gratitude in a person. The first is *Grateful Recounting* (counting gratitude), which includes contemplating and experiencing all pleasures, being grateful for "simple pleasures," and experiencing or being grateful for great favors. Second, *Grateful Reflection* (reflection and contemplation of gratitude) involves looking within to determine whether the acts made were proper or not by completing basic reflections on someone's goodwill in situations that make us glad and cause an increase in pleasant affect. Third, *Grateful Expression* namely being appreciative or grateful for God's or other people's kindness, then acting in ways that can make other people happy by demonstrating a considerable improvement in emotional well-being and a significant reduction in depressive symptoms. Fourth, *Grateful Reappraisal* (reassessment of appreciation), that is, reassessing unfavorable occurrences and attempting to release or eradicate negative thoughts. Watkins' appreciative steps were used to develop the gratitude training module in this study.

Previous research has shown that having a high feeling of appreciation causes someone to perceive an

unpleasant event as beneficial. Wood, Maltby, Gillett, and others (2008). According to Bahrapour and Yazdkhasti (2014), increasing gratitude as a positive trait in a person can lead to a decrease in variables such as anxiety, stress, depression, and life satisfaction, while Lau and Cheng's (2011) research on people entering old age found that gratitude reduced anxiety about facing death. Another research by Kendler et al. (2003) found that thankfulness helps to alleviate anxiety disorders and sadness. Previous research revealed, as stated by McCullough et al, (2002), that increasing thankfulness as a positive characteristic in a person can lead to a decrease in factors such as anxiety, stress, and depression. and boost life pleasure. thankfulness contributes to the development and maintenance of a sense of spirituality by instilling sentiments of thankfulness for previous experiences and religion. If a person's past and current experiences may develop thankfulness, gratitude will empower someone looking forward. Research conducted by Tofangchi (2013) entitled *Effectiveness of gratitude training on happiness in mother of child with mental retardation*, resulted in the conclusion that gratitude training can boost happiness in moms with mentally retarded children. According to Mukhlis and Koentjoro (2015), gratitude training allows participants to review situations that generate anxiety in themselves and hunt for fresh alternative thoughts in order to be more optimum. One participant stated that awareness of self-responses, both physical and mental processes, helps to realize that participants have a choice to respond to an event and to look back at the source of anxiety through a new, better perspective. The purpose of this study is to see if gratitude training may help parents reduce their parental stress.

## METHOD

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	Treatment	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

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 (Postest)

Parenting Stress Score	N	Mean
Before Treatment (Pretest)	20	46,20
After Treatment (Postest)	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.

## DISCUSSION

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.

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