

The Effect of Gratitude on Parental Stress among Mothers' of Early Children

Ika Febrian Kristiana, Darosy Endah Hyoschamina, Niken Fatimah
Faculty of Pshycology, Diponegoro University, Central Java, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The stress of parenting as a distress experience in carrying out the demands of parenting role becomes greater experienced by the mother as the primary caregiver as a culture in Indonesia. Be grateful to be a strength-based intervention aimed at strengthening positive emotions and protecting individuals from psychological problems. This experimental study aims to test the effectiveness of gratitude in reducing maternal stress. The experimental design between subjects was selected by dividing the 70 mothers who had early childhood into two groups: the experimental and control group. The data analysis using 2 independent samples test with R statistic showed ($p=.023$; Cohen's $d=.183$), and Wilcoxon 2 related samples test ($p=.0087$) showed that gratitude training was effective to decrease maternal stress. Being grateful for a moral response based on personal reinforcement through thoughts, emotions, and positive and pleasant attitudes that then lead to the ability to give goodness to others. The findings of this study become interesting when examined also from the social context such as the existence of social support where the attitude of gratitude is related to it.

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Corresponding Author:

Ika Febrian Kristiana,
Faculty of Pshycology,
Diponegoro University,
Prof. Soedarto, S. H. road, Tembalang, Semarang City 50275, Central Java, Indonesia.
Email: ika.f.kristiana@live.undip.ac

1. INTRODUCTION

A nurturing task that involves emotions, energy, thoughts and feelings and no time limit requires a strong commitment as the child grows and the wider range of children's environments. The relationship with a more complex environment is certainly not as simple as relating to the family. Children's expectations and desires are not always acceptable to the environment. There are rules and norms that the child should recognize. The clash between fulfilling personal expectations and social norms has the potential to bring problems especially to children who do not have the ability to cope and manage these conflicts. The child's ability to overcome the clash between personal expectations and social norms has been shown to be related to parenting [1-2]. Furthermore, the experience of children's interaction with parents in the family will determine how children's development in both cognitive, emotional, and social aspects, including patterns of child behavior toward others in society [3].

However, not a few parents who lack the readiness to face the changing characteristics, needs, and demands in child development including preparing children to meet social expectations. Unprepared for the demands of parenthood and giving birth to this depressed feeling which is then called the stress of nurturing. Nursing stress is a series of processes that bring undesirable psychological conditions and physiological reactions that arise in an attempt to adapt to the demands of parenting roles and parent-child interactions [4], [5-6]. Parenting stress component, based on the parent child relationship (PCR) paradigm consisting of: (1) parent domains (P, parenting stress aspects arising from parents), (2) (C, aspects of parenting stress arise

from the child's behavior), and (3) the parent-child relationship domain (R, aspects of parenting stress arising from parent-child relationships, such as the proximity of parents to children)[4]. Early childhood characteristics that tend to be rebellious, unruly, often cause chaos to potentially be a source of parenting stress for parents[5], [7].

Parenting stress negatively affects children and their parents, for example, children who do not have the ability to cope and manage emotions have been shown to be associated with ineffective parental care[1], [2]. Stressed parents tend to have problems with acceptance in children and often experience conflicts [8]. For parents, especially mothers, the inability to manage stressed parenting can lead to the wrong mother or maltreatment in care as it is easy to perform a negative and violent behavior on the child.

In an effort to anticipate the adverse effects of child development due to the negative behavior of parents in the care of several countries has developed a program of social intervention through positive parenting, one of them in Spain. Positive parenting has been understood as a set of parental actions and behaviors in helping children achieve healthy psychological development. To be able to perform this positive parenting, parents must have the competence of being able to strengthen the protective factors, minimize risks, and give a positive influence in the psychological development of children in the family context. However, the fulfillment of competencies for parents to be able to do positive parenting is not easy as the results of the evaluation of positive parenting programs in Spain and America [9]. If the previous parenting approach puts more emphasis on how to shape the external behaviors of the competent parent in parenting is rated as not easy to do then the need for a strong strengthening intervention program from within the parents first so that with a strong person they are able to perform the task of parenting which is effective anyway. One of the efforts to form a strong and positive person as a parent is by strengthening the experience of gratitude. The gratified individual is associated with someone who easily grabs and understands the positive of everything and gives it to others [10-11]. Being grateful can prevent negative emotions and protects from the emergence of psychiatric disorders, positively related to optimism and hope, negatively related to depression and anxiety, leads to supportive social relationships, and can increase success in one's life [10]. Emotions of gratitude are experienced when one affirms that something good has happened to them, and they recognize that others are largely responsible for the good [12]. It has also been affirmed in studies that gratitude is a positive feeling, whereby experience of gratitude as a pleasant emotion and will usually be followed by other positive emotions [12-13]. Grateful to be effective as a moral response, meaning that as a human being needs to accept anything with thinking that everything experienced has a good for him then with the subsequently perceived habits will lead to good actions against others such as by saying positive words (eg. thanking) or repay the kindness of the person. This experimental research aims to test the effectiveness of gratitude training d by training mothers to strengthen a conscious experience of gratitude to reduce the stress of parenting on the subject. In the context of parenting, parents who have a high level of gratitude or can feel a lot of experience of gratitude then they are expected to be able to give a lot of good in serving the growth and development of children

1.1. Parenting Stress

Parenting stress is a process that carries unwelcome psychological conditions and physiological reactions that arise in an attempt to adapt to the demands of parental roles [4], [14] that affect the behavior and well-being of the parent, as well as the child's self-adjustment [15]. Parenting stress as a stressful or stressful situation that occurs during the execution of parenting tasks [5]. The boss defines that nurture stress is the stress or tension that occurs in the family that gives rise to interference in the family [14]. In fact, parenting is not an easy task to do, so it can be said that parenting is a stressful process. The three components of parenting stress according to Deater-Deckard consist of, (1) parent sphere (P, parenting stress aspects arising from parent side), (2) child domain (C, aspect of parenting stress arising from child's behavior) and (3) the domain of parent-child relations (R, aspects of parenting stress originating from parent-child relations).

1.2. Gratitude

In general, gratitude is conceptualized as both a disposition and an emotional state. As a disposition, gratitude is seen as the eternal characteristic of a person who is sustained in every situation and from time to time [16]. Thus, grateful individuals will more easily demonstrate experience and express gratitude in response to benefits or rewards given by others. As an emotional state, the occurrence of gratitude is usually associated with perceptions of the benefit or goodness of others [17]. Emotions of gratitude are experienced when one affirms "that something good has happened to them, and they recognize that others are largely responsible for the good [12]. It has also been affirmed in studies that gratitude is a positive feeling, where the experience of gratitude as a pleasant emotion and will usually be followed by other positive emotions

[12-13] .Thus, a person who is high on the affective nature of gratitude will be easier and often experience gratitude.

Being grateful becomes effective as a moral response, meaning that we need to accept anything as more than something that makes us feel good or reminds us how well we have it then take actions that serve others for example by saying positive words (eg thanking) or repay the kindness of that person. To achieve the essence of gratitude, we need to take the act of gratitude itself and find understanding through that experience.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This experimental study used a design between subjects, of which 70 participants, ie mothers who had an early childhood and attended school in Aisiyah 51 early childhood education, Semarang City. The controls in this experimental study in the form of the randomized assignment were done by placing subjects into experimental and control groups based on predefined subject criteria (minimum age 25 years, marital status and having at least 1 early childhood) and based on baseline measurement data on parenting stress mother. The demographic characteristics of research subjects are presented in the Table 1.

Table 1. The demographic characteristics of the subject

Data	Number of group	
	E	C
Marital status:		
married	35	35
divorce	0	0
Age:		
25-40 years	12	10
41-50 years	23	25
Number of children:		
1-2	27	31
>2	8	4
Children' age:		
1-3 years	11	8
4-6 years	24	27
Education background :		
Senior high school	9	11
bachelor degrees	26	24

Note: E (experimental group); C (control group)

Measurements using maternal stress maternal stress scale (35 items, $\alpha = .92$, range of correlation item total = .318 to .711). The parenting stress scale is based on 3 components of parenting stress from Deater-Deckard: parent domain (P, parenting stress aspects arising from parent side), (2) child domain (C, aspect of parenting stress arising from child's behavior) and (3) the parent-child relationship (R, aspects of parenting stress originating from parent-child relations). Here are examples of items on the parenting stress scale shown in Table 2. Baseline Maternal Stress shown in Table 3.

Table 2. Examples Item of Parenting Stress Scale

Dimension	Example of aitem
P (parent)	I'm not sure I can give my full attention to every child's growth process
C (child's behavior)	My child tends to show tantrum behavior
R(parent-child relation)	I and the kids often argue to defend each other's desires

Table 3. Baseline Maternal Stress

Group	M	SD
Experiment	53.08	4.13
Control	53.19	4.47

Note: M(Mean); SD(standard of deviation)

Gratitude training as an intervention in this experimental study was administered only in the experimental group as much as 2 treatments, with stages in 1 treatment including:

a. Session 1: Gratitude reappraisal

In this session, subjects were asked to identify the negative responses based on their past experience. Then, they were trained to change their negative perspectives by searching the silver lining of every event to produce the sense of gratitude.

b. Session 2: Gratitude recounting

In this session, subjects were trained to express their happiness according to their own subjectivity by sharing things that they were fully grateful of.

c. Session 3: Gratitude reflection

This session asked the subjects to open their eyes to all the good things that had happened to them after coping with the obstacles preventing them to feel grateful. The training provided a state of self-reflection by observing other misfortune people around them.

d. Session 4: Expression of Gratitude

In this session, the subjects were asked to practice expressing their gratitude by all means necessary. This was considered effective enough to improve their emotional welfare.

Data were analyzed using t test with statistic program R. Independent t-test was conducted to test the effect of thanks giving training in the experimental group that was given training compared to control group that was not given training. Paired t-test was conducted to test the effect of gratitude training on the experimental group by comparing maternal stress levels before and after the training.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Result

Figure 1 shows the independent test t-test, it can be seen the significance value ($p = .023 < .05$) which means that there is a difference of the level of spring stress between the experimental group and the control group, where the mean score of experimental group stress score ($M=50$) less than the mean stress score of care in the control group ($M=53$). Thus the mothers who attended the thanks giving training proved to have lower levels of parenting stress than mothers who did not receive thanks giving training.

Independent t-test result is then compared with paired t-test that is by analyzing mother's maternal stress score in experimental group before and after getting thanks giving training. The results of paired t-test can be seen in the following Figure 2.

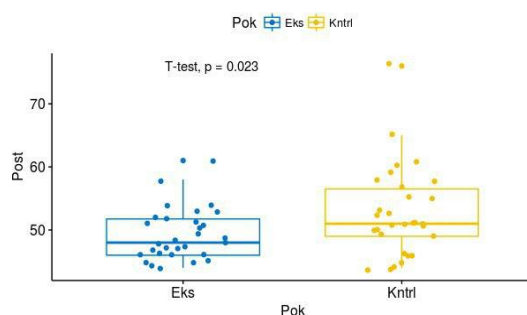


Figure 1. Independent t-test with R Statistic

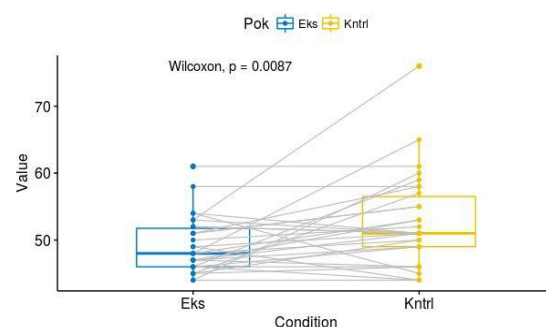


Figure 2. Wilcoxon Paired t-test with R-Statistic

The significance value of paired t-test with Wilcoxon ($p = .0087 < .05$), which means there is a difference in maternal stress between the before and after gratitude training. The mean maternal stress score prior to training ($M=50$) decreases to ($M=47$), whereas gratitude training has an effect of ($d=.183$) in reducing maternal stress, and can be seen in the following Figure. 3.

Grateful training is strength based intervention training that is by strengthening positive experiences in the self that is often not realized. Be grateful for the life experiences of individuals, but often this experience is not realized so that its benefits are less perceived. Individuals who are filled with gratitude will easily find positive things from every life event experienced, have positive emotions, and lead to positive prosocial behavior [10], [18], [19].

Being grateful is proven to decrease maternal stress in which a grateful disposition allows mothers to think and behave flexibly and coping with the perceived pressure on the role of parenting, showing adversity in the face of any adverse events including dealing with difficult child behavior or interpersonal barriers in care [20], [21]. When reviewing gratitude on the theory that being grateful as a positive emotion is a broader adaptation mechanism than just thinking then responding but also involves higher cognitive abilities that can lead one to perform more effective coping methods and can further improve each coping skills time [22]. Previous research has also found that improving gratitude leads to positive aspects of life including active coping behaviors [13], [21]. Gratitude has also been studied longitudinally to reduce stress

levels and individual depression [21], [23], [24]. The increased experience of gratitude is realized by the mother, then the mother will be able to modify his cognition by finding positive things from every event experienced so that will lead the mother to do active coping and effective in solving various problems in parenting.

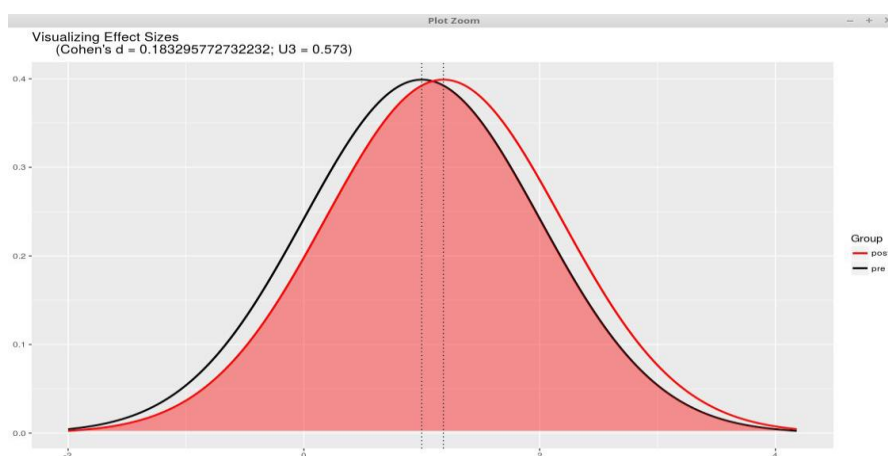


Figure 3. Effect Size (Cohen's d value)

3.2. Discussions

The findings in this experimental study show that gratitude can decrease maternal stress in early childhood through control of demographic variables by randomized assignment. The effect of thanks giving training in this study, which is shown by the value of Cohen's d ($d = .183$), is very small because there are several variables that have the possibility of influencing the gratitude variable and have been controlled properly. This condition can be explained by some findings from previous research which found that gratitude can reduce stress and depression by being moderated by social support and individual personality [24-25]. Gratitude disposition also relates to the development of individual attachments where individuals who have secure attachments will be able to grow gratitude well [26]. The variables of nurture stress are also influenced by social environment factors including low salaries, social conditions of living environment, interpersonal conflict, and daily complexity that need to be considered in subsequent experimental studies.

4. CONCLUSION

Gratitude training interventions have been statistically effective in reducing maternal stress in early childhood. Mothers who increase their gratitude will become private more easily take positive things in anything that experienced and spread it to others so as to reduce the emergence of negative emotions. The more positive emotions that mothers have will help them to do effective coping so that their parenting stress will decrease. Interpretation of the results of the study is appropriate to the context as the study was conducted. Generalization will be stronger if the future research can expand the subject of research. This experimental study showed that gratitude effectively decreased maternal stress. However, the dynamics of gratitude causality and maternal stress are interesting to describe through other research designs such as qualitative in subsequent research.

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BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS

Lecturer in Psychology Section of Development of Faculty of Psychology Diponegoro University. Completed Bachelor and Master of Psychology Profession from Airlangga University Surabaya. In addition to teaching actively, the author also counseled in handling the problems of the development of special needs children in some schools that receive special needs children (SLB and Inclusion School) in Semarang, trainers for teachers with special needs children in Special Education Development Agency (BP- Diksus) of Central Java Province, as secretary to LPPM-UNDIP Health Research Center (with mental health research topic), and member of Family Empowerment Center (Division of family and disability) Undip Faculty of Psychology. Actively conducting researches and publications of scientific papers, as well as doing community service in the area of Developmental and Educational Psychology. To make contact can contact via email to ika.f.kristiana@live.undip.ac.id



Lecturer at the Department of General & Experimental Faculty of Psychology Diponegoro University. In addition to teaching actively, the author also became a family counselor and resource person in the television program "Rumahku Syurgaku" on national television. To make contact can contact via email to bundarosyendah@gmail.com



Lecturer at the Department of General & Experimental Faculty of Psychology Diponegoro University. Sports psychology and physical development of children become the topic of his expertise. In addition to teaching actively, the author also co-athletes and develop training modules to improve student competence through games and sports. To make contact can contact via email to niken.fatimah@gmail.com.