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Living Gratitude: The Intersection of Emotions, Religiosity, and Prosociality of Growing Up with a Disabled Sibling

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ABSTRACT

Individuals who grew up with a sibling with a disability experience a life that is not only full of challenges but also enriched with meaning. Those who find meaning in the challenges of caring for a sibling with a disability often find it easier to feel gratitude for the experiences embedded in this process. This study aimed to explore how gratitude develops through positive emotions, religiosity, and prosocial behavior. A qualitative methodology with a phenomenological approach was used. Data were collected through observation and in-depth interviews with five individuals who have siblings with various types of disabilities, including Deafness, Autism, and Down Syndrome. The data were analyzed through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results showed that all participants expressed deep gratitude for having a sibling with a disability. Moreover, living with a sibling with a disability contributed positively to the participants' emotional resilience, improved their relationships with their siblings, and fostered a more optimistic outlook on life. The implications of this study extend to family counseling and educational interventions, offering insights for fostering gratitude and emotional resilience in families of individuals with disabilities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

People with disabilities experience a wide range of challenges and obstacles in their daily lives. The visible problems are only the main barriers, such as physical, intellectual, mental, and sensory barriers. When looked at more deeply, these barriers then have an impact on the psychological, academic, and social aspects of life. Youth with disabilities often experience discrimination, exclusion, and neglect. Psychologically, people with disabilities are more vulnerable to having low self-esteem, poor social skills, and quality of life. However, every child with a disability has different abilities and potential, despite their obstacles. Therefore, to foster the development of their abilities and opportunities, it is essential to understand and address their specific needs. Several parties can help people with disabilities meet their needs, one of which is the family. The results of previous research show that families have an important and crucial role in helping people with disabilities meet their needs and develop their potential (Lestari, 2018; Naufal & Rahmandani, 2020).

The support from family members will certainly help the development of people with disabilities. Previous research found that a strong relationship between people with disabilities and family members also had a positive impact on family members. Providing support to people with disabilities can have an impact on personal development in the form of understanding life from a new perspective (Beighton & Wills, 2019). In the previous studies (Farrell, 2004), participants reported more frequent communication with siblings with developmental disabilities, and most importantly, more positive feelings about the relationship compared to their relationship with siblings without disabilities. Siblings who provide support demonstrate their ability to accept and be grateful for the presence of their disabled siblings. Gratitude refers to the tendency of individuals to experience positive emotions and feel satisfied with their lives, the existence of prosocial traits, and remembering God's favors (McCullough et al., 2002). In their research (Nura & Sari, 2018), grateful parents feel satisfaction in their lives and feel calmer and more comfortable living life when they have children with special needs. In line with the other studies' findings (Emmons & Hill, 2001), researchers conducted experimental research on gratitude in several groups. Experimental groups that focused on gratitude were more likely to show social behavior, helping and supporting others.

This study aimed to explore how gratitude develops through positive emotions, religiosity, and prosocial behavior. A qualitative methodology with a phenomenological approach was used. Data were collected through observation and in-depth interviews with five individuals who have siblings with various types of disabilities, including Deafness, Autism, and Down Syndrome. The data were analyzed through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results showed that all participants expressed deep gratitude for having a sibling with a disability. Moreover, living with a sibling with a disability contributed positively to the participants' emotional resilience, improved their relationships with their siblings, and fostered a more optimistic outlook on life. The implications of this study extend to family counseling and educational interventions, offering insights for fostering gratitude and emotional resilience in families of individuals with disabilities.

2. METHODS

The method used in this research is qualitative research and uses a phenomenological model. According to the literature, phenomenological research does not assume that researchers know the meaning of something for research subjects. The researcher tries to enter into the conceptual world of the research subject in such a way that the researcher

understands how understanding is developed by the subject around events in his daily life. Data collection was carried out using structured and in-depth observations and interviews. Data analysis in this study uses the Miles and Huberman model, which starts from the data reduction stage, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, 5 respondents have disabled siblings and have various types of disability. **Table 1** provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of respondents who participated in this study. This information helps to contextualize their unique perspectives on gratitude within the family dynamic, as influenced by their experiences with a sibling with disabilities.

Table 1. The profile of Respondents.

No	Age	Gender	Sibling's Disability	Sibling's Age
R1.	22	Female	Autism	30
R2.	21	Female	Down Syndrome	10
R3.	21	Female	Down Syndrome	8
R4.	25	Male	Deaf	8
R5.	35	Female	Deaf	27

This study used NVivo 12 software to analyze the data, focusing on identifying gratitude themes among individuals with siblings with disabilities. The analysis involved three main stages: coding, word frequency analysis, and the creation of concept maps (**Table 2**).

First, coding was conducted to categorize and organize the themes that appeared in the data, with special attention to expressions of gratitude. Second, a word frequency analysis was conducted, which allowed us to count the words that appeared most frequently in the coded themes.

Concept maps also allowed for a clearer understanding of how participants interpret their experiences and the role of gratitude in their siblings' relationships (**Figure 1**). This figure explains the concept map of gratitude experienced by individuals with disabled siblings.

Table 2. Coding result.

Codes	Files	References
Acceptance	5	21
Positive Emotions	5	20
Prosociality	4	13
Gratitude Intensity	5	13
Religiosity	5	11
Compassion	5	10
Grief	3	8
Family Role	3	5
Self-Sacrifice	3	4

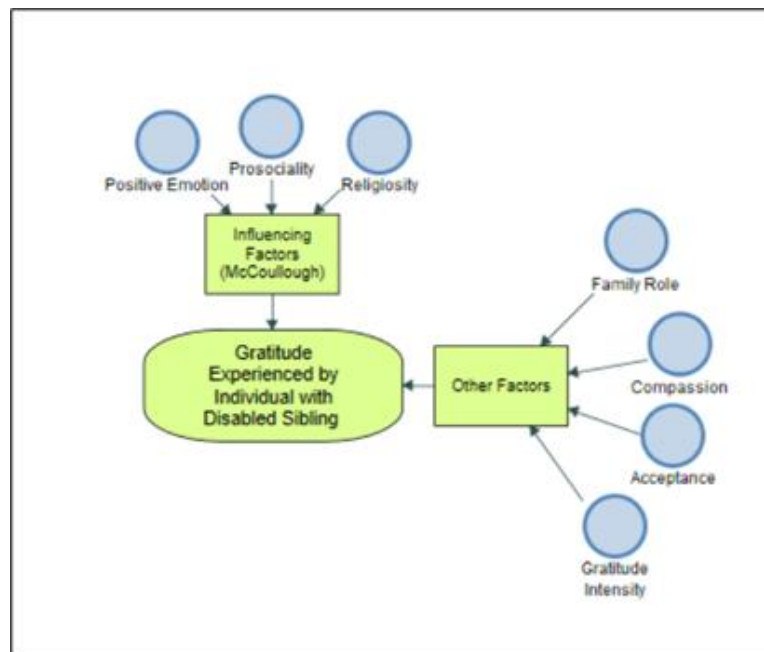


Figure 1. Concept Map of Gratitude experienced by an Individual with disabled siblings.

3.1. Gratitude Overview

The interviews showed that respondents often encountered difficulties and sadness in several situations, such as having to always give in because parents focused on the development of siblings with disabilities, feeling sad about the obstacles experienced by their siblings with disabilities, and prioritizing the needs of their siblings with disabilities over themselves. However, despite these situations, all respondents reported being able to accept and be grateful for their siblings' existence. Observations also showed that respondents often provided love, support, and care for their siblings.

Based on the results of the interviews, it is inevitable that respondents expressed some sadness and difficulties in accompanying their disabled siblings.

"...having to give in in some circumstances" R2

"...sometimes I wonder what if my brother was born normal," R1

".. at first it was very difficult to understand him, but now it's easier" R4

However, this sadness was not always present in the respondents' daily lives and did not adversely affect the relationship. A sibling relationship was not damaged by Down syndrome in one child (Cuskelly & Gunn, 2003).

On the other hand, this study revealed how respondents were able to be grateful for the simple things that happened in the development of their siblings with disabilities.

"... hearing him make sounds and seeing him smile," R5

"... being able to be independent in any activities, such as bathing, eating, wearing clothes" R3

"... grateful that he is healthy, smart, and starting to change little by little," R5

The gratitude revealed by the respondents will then be analyzed based on the factors that influence gratitude, namely positive emotions, religiosity, and prosocial (McCullough et al., 2002).

3.2. Positive Emotions Affecting Gratitude

Having a sibling with special needs is often associated with significant emotional and physical challenges. However, behind the burdens and pressures that come with the role

come a range of positive emotions that enrich the experience. Interviews and observations with respondents showed that positive emotions, such as patience, resilience, and compassion, often emerge in the process of caring for a sibling with special needs.

Other research results show that providing care and assistance to individuals with disabilities often develops better adaptability to stress, increasing their emotional resilience (Utami *et al.*, 2019). This patience and spaciousness become a form of coping strategy that can help caregivers maintain their mental health amid the demands of complex roles (Saputra *et al.*, 2018). This phenomenon is also related to the concept of positive caregiving, where caregivers learn to find strength and meaning in the caregiving process (Rahmawati *et al.*, 2020).

In addition, the role of compassion and happiness in dealing with small things was also identified in the interviews as key elements of the positive experiences felt by caregivers. Even in seemingly difficult situations, respondents demonstrated the ability to remain calm and direct in a firm yet loving manner. This supports findings in the literature that affection and positive attention towards the person being cared for can increase emotional bonding and happiness in the caregiver (Sari & Mahardika, 2019).

In addition, R3 revealed that she felt “happy with little things, even just seeing him smile,” which shows how caregivers can find happiness in simple achievements. Another study also revealed that caregivers often feel happiness and a sense of life in caring for their siblings, especially in positive daily interactions (Wardani & Fauziah, 2021). Feelings of happiness and satisfaction in caring for individuals with special needs often arise from simple experiences, which indirectly improve the psychological well-being of the caregiver (Sumarni & Permatasari, 2021).

3.3. Prosociality Affect Gratitude

The prosocial behavior shown by caregivers in interactions with siblings with special needs is evident from the respondents' statements in the interviews. Prosocial behavior refers to actions that a person takes to provide benefits to others, which are often based on empathy, compassion, and the intention to support the welfare of other individuals. In this case, actions such as “often getting together and spending time together” and “inviting to play, travel, and vacation,” as stated by R1 and R2, reflect active efforts to build positive relationships and improve the quality of life of siblings with special needs. This is by the concept of prosociality, where caregivers seek to create a pleasant and safe social environment for the individuals they care for. Research has also shown that such prosocial behavior contributes to the development of stronger emotional bonds between caregivers and individuals with special needs and improves the psychological well-being of both parties (Santoso *et al.*, 2020).

In addition, more specific actions, such as “interacting, caring, looking after, and communicating with” (R1), and “providing affection, security, and best behavior” (R3), also reflect another form of prosocial behavior that emphasizes care and emotional support. This emphasizes the importance of quality social interaction and open communication in the caregiving process, which helps individuals with special needs feel accepted and valued (Darling, 2017). Furthermore, R4's statement that they “better understand the world of disability using their perspective” illustrates a deep empathy and an attempt to truly understand their sibling's needs and experiences. This perspective is important because prosocial behavior involves not only physical actions, but also understanding and adjusting to the emotional and social needs of the individual being cared for (Hastings *et al.*, 2014). This understanding also enhances the caregiver's ability to provide more effective and

personalized support, which has a positive impact on the psychological well-being of individuals with special needs.

The results of this study also showed a meaningful role in the respondents' sibling relationships. In their daily lives, respondents showed a sincere and patient attitude in accompanying the development of their disabled siblings, especially R1 and R3. This shows that having a family member with a disability is not a big problem for some families. In line with other research, sibling relationships that include disability are rich and meaningful in family life.

3.4. Religiosity Affects Gratitude

Caring for a sibling with special needs is not easy, and not everyone can go through it with acceptance, resulting in different adaptations and stressors. Religiosity offers a powerful coping mechanism in the face of daily challenges. The link between spirituality and gratitude is key in building resilience for a caregiver. Someone who takes care of their disabled sibling can change their perspective on what they face as a challenge, seeing it not as a burden, but rather a valuable part of the life journey that enriches their experience. Spirituality helps them to overcome challenges faced both in the past and the present (Penman, 2021).

The results of interviews and observations with respondents show that spirituality exists in the respondents. As expressed by the respondents "I am grateful because there are many things that can be learned from whatever is done when I am happy, as well as sad and angry." R1 "Thankfully, I was born with complete senses and understand the world of deafness, thus becoming a mature person earlier." R2.

Religiosity values present in respondents are characterized by the activity of a sense of peace and control over difficult situations, as well as opportunities for personal reflection, such as expressing gratitude for their greater acceptance, then being able to turn into positive challenges and perspectives.

When an individual has been able to change the perspective of life into a challenge that is based on religiosity, and is characterized by reflecting on themselves by being grateful, the quality of family closeness becomes closer. Realizing that all blessings essentially come from God, everyone who does good is seen as an intermediary of God's will and deserves gratitude for his or her role in making the good happen, which can also be called remembering God's blessings.

According to the study, utilizing religiosity and practices, someone can find a source of calm and meaning in the face of stress and adversity, thereby improving their emotional and psychological well-being. This approach not only helps in managing feelings of anxiety or distress, but also increases the overall sense of purpose and satisfaction with life, hence, religion has been shown to have a significant positive impact on a caregiver's mental health and quality of life. Religious coping strategies positively impact mental health and quality of life (Casaleiro et al., 2024).

4. CONCLUSION

The gratitude that exists in individuals who have siblings with disabilities in this study is the result of several aspects, including positive emotions, religiosity, and prosociality. The existence of positive emotions in the respondents changed their point of view to be more positive, accepting their disabled siblings with compassion. In addition, respondents can maintain a more optimistic perspective, appreciate small moments, and enrich their relationship with their disabled sibling. Love and sacrifice can bring meaning and happiness,

despite the challenging situation of caring for a disabled sibling, showing that respondents grow from the experience.

5 AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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