



Mother's Gratitude and Psychological Well-Being in Raising Children with Autism in Indonesia: A Meta-Analysis

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Abstract

Education is a fundamental right for all children, both within schools and in the family environment. The psychological well-being of mothers plays a crucial role in raising children with autism. Various factors contribute to the formation of maternal psychological well-being, one of which is gratitude. This study aims to examine the correlation effect size between gratitude and mothers' psychological well-being in raising children with autism. A meta-analysis was conducted on seven research articles and two research reports identified through Google Scholar, Portal Garuda, and Indonesia ONESEARCH within the last eight years (2018-2025). The total number of participants was 523 mothers of children with autism. Data were analyzed using correlation effect size (correlation coefficient r and sample size N). The effect size value obtained from the random effects model was $r = 0.878$, $p < 0.001$. The findings indicate that gratitude and psychological well-being have a strong effect size and are positively correlated. The higher level of gratitude, the higher psychological well-being of mothers in educating children with autism. Mothers with greater psychological well-being are better able to optimally educate and nurture their children with autism, enabling the children to grow and develop across various aspects in accordance with expectations and conditions.

Introduction

Children are considered a precious gift whose presence is always eagerly anticipated. They bring a unique sense of joy and fulfillment to their parents' lives. At the same time, parents assume new responsibilities, particularly in terms of providing education and upbringing. Every parent desires their children to grow and develop according to developmental milestones; however, in reality, not all children progress as expected. Some children experience developmental disorders, including autism. In 2020, the Central Bureau of Statistics (Badan Pusat Statistik) reported a total population of 270.2 million in Indonesia,

with an estimated prevalence of approximately 3.2 million children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). ASD is classified as a complex neurological and developmental disorder that leads to difficulties in speech, non-verbal communication, social interaction, and behaviors ranging from mild to severe (Aborayana *et al.*, 2025; Asmare *et al.*, 2023; Meliati & Ekayani, 2018). These challenges place parents, particularly mothers, at a heightened risk of psychological difficulties. Parents hold substantial roles and responsibilities in nurturing and supporting children with autism. Mothers, in particular, are often required to remain resilient and capable of providing

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consistent care and education for their children, even in circumstances where they may feel powerless (Mathew *et al.*, 2019; Mittal & Sinha, 2025; Sa'diyah, 2016).

The presence of a child with autism in a family has a significant impact, particularly on mothers. Mothers must adapt to new routines, not only by providing education and caregiving but also by struggling to maintain their own well-being (Akhtayeva *et al.*, 2025; Alemnh, 2025; Boni *et al.*, 2025; Shabbir *et al.*, 2025). Bravo-Benitez *et al.* (2019) explain that mothers often experience profound and continuous grief as a consequence of raising a child with ASD, which affects all aspects of their lives. As the primary caregivers, mothers frequently encounter parenting stress responses when raising a child with ASD.

These parenting stress responses may manifest in various forms: physiological responses (fatigue, increased susceptibility to illness, and elevated heart rate), cognitive responses (memory disturbances, impaired thinking, problem-solving difficulties, and learning disruptions), emotional responses (feelings of shame, disappointment, sadness, irritability, and apathy), and behavioral responses (frequent scolding, hitting, pinching, or crying) (Alemnh, 2025; Astuti & Suminar, 2022; Dijkstra-de Neijs *et al.*, 2024). Such responses directly influence the mothers' mental state when providing education and caregiving. The psychological health of mothers, in turn, affects the well-being and development of their children. Some parents of children diagnosed with ASD experience a decline in psychological well-being due to labeling and negative stigma (Al-Mossawy *et al.*, 2019; Costa *et al.*, 2017; Rezq *et al.*, 2025).

On the other hand, Ilias *et al.* (2017) report that mothers of children with ASD in Malaysia can attain psychological well-being. These mothers perceived autism as a journey to be overcome to achieve well-being. The transition from a lack of understanding of autism to greater awareness enabled them to develop strategies for child support and to engage in ASD communities. Mothers of children with ASD also strive to cope with stigmatization from both family and society (Al-Mossawy *et al.*, 2019; Boadi & Kwakye,

2020; Gao & Drani, 2025). Their study found that mothers achieved well-being by adopting forgiving behaviors toward the stigma they faced, resisting pity, and maintaining a belief that the challenges could be overcome.

These inconsistent findings have led the authors to further explore factors influencing the psychological well-being of mothers. Recent research has increasingly emphasized the positive dimensions of parenting children with ASD, highlighting both the challenges faced and the psychological strengths that emerge. Ryff, as cited in Ardani & Istiqomah (2020), explains that psychological well-being is an individual's perception of the self, shaped by life experiences and personal expectations, and serves as an indicator of psychological health. An individual is considered to possess well-being when life is filled with purposeful, meaningful, and beneficial activities that contribute not only to personal welfare but also to the welfare of others. Individuals play an active and positive role in fostering well-being for themselves and others (Ardani & Istiqomah, 2020; Mathew *et al.*, 2019). This theoretical framework follows the eudemonic tradition, in which individual well-being involves the actualization of personal potential, thereby enabling individuals to contribute actively to themselves and others.

Psychological well-being comprises six dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. This state of well-being can also be achieved through gratitude, as gratitude has been shown to enhance the psychological well-being of mothers raising children with special needs (Hizbullah & Mulyati, 2022; Laili *et al.*, 2022; Jones, as cited in Wahyudi *et al.*, 2021). Gratitude is inherently subjective, as its extent depends on an individual's perception and interpretation of life circumstances, whether favorable or adverse. Gratitude fosters self-improvement and positive personal change (Lyubomirsky *et al.*, as cited in Syahidah *et al.*, 2018; Utami *et al.*, 2025). According to McCullough (as cited in Irawan *et al.*, 2022), there are four aspects of gratitude: intensity, frequency, span, and density. Gratitude may be experienced in both positive and adverse conditions, and these four

aspects (intensity, frequency span, and density) serve as indicators of the degree to which individuals experience gratitude.

Previous research indicates that gratitude fosters emotional regulation through moral behaviours within individuals; thus, the higher the level of gratitude among mothers raising children with autism, the greater their psychological well-being (Irawan *et al.*, 2022; Reich *et al.*, 2025). Gratitude enables mothers to accept their present lives, embrace the presence of their children, cultivate patience, and perceive these circumstances as positive aspects of life (Wahyudi *et al.*, 2021; Gao & Drani, 2025; Shokouhi-Tabar *et al.*, 2025). Mothers of children with autism who adopt positive acceptance tend to demonstrate gratitude consistently and exhibit prosocial behavior in various aspects of life (Sa'diyah, 2016; Utami *et al.*, 2025).

Conversely, other studies report contrasting findings. Some mothers experience disappointment, anger toward God, and difficulty accepting the reality of their child's autism diagnosis (Aurelia *et al.*, 2022; Nieuw Amerongen-Meeuse *et al.*, 2025). A lack of gratitude may lead to rejection of the new life circumstances that must be faced, exerting negative effects on child-rearing practices. As a result, children may fail to develop in alignment with their conditions. Mothers in such situations often experience anxiety, depression, and parenting stress that impede their ability to function positively. In severe cases, mothers report thoughts of death and exhibit low levels of psychological well-being (Mathew *et al.*, 2019; Rezq *et al.*, 2025). Based on these findings, the authors were motivated to conduct a meta-analysis by integrating two or more studies for quantitative synthesis. Two primary considerations underlie this research: first, the existence of inconsistent results in prior studies, and second, the need to statistically integrate and draw conclusions regarding the relationship between gratitude and the psychological well-being of mothers raising children with autism. Therefore, this study aims to examine the correlation effect size between gratitude and the psychological well-being of mothers of children with autism.

Method

This study employed a meta-analysis approach. According to Retnawati *et al.* (2018), a meta-analysis is an effort to integrate two or more previous studies using statistical techniques, with a focus not on the conclusions of individual studies but rather on the data within those studies. The present research was conducted by synthesizing findings from prior studies. The authors selected several research articles based on predetermined criteria: studies published within the last eight years (2018–2025), published in national journals, and meeting the requirements for statistical analysis. The final stage involved calculating the effect size between gratitude and psychological well-being.

Data analysis was conducted using the Jamovi application. This study followed the reporting guidelines of the *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses* (PRISMA). The databases used to identify relevant prior research were Google Scholar, Portal Garuda, and Indonesia ONESEARCH. Keywords employed to locate relevant studies, including synonyms and related terms, were *kesejahteraan psikologis*, *psychological well-being*, *ibu* (mother), *kebersyukuran* (gratitude), and *anak autisme* (children with autism). Searches were conducted using both Indonesian and English keywords, with the inclusion criteria limited to studies published in Indonesian Journals.

The authors sought journal articles that reported correlation coefficients (r) and sample sizes (N). The initial search yielded 497 articles, consisting of 296 from Google Scholar, 113 from Portal Garuda, and 88 from Indonesia ONESEARCH. A total of 53 duplicate articles were identified. In the first stage of exclusion, 271 articles were removed due to irrelevant themes, 21 articles were inaccessible, and 29 had incomplete manuscripts, leaving 123 articles. Next, an abstract screening was conducted. Among these, 27 articles employed non-parametric techniques, 12 did not specify the data analysis methods used, 13 utilized data analyses inconsistent with the hypotheses, and 38 did not investigate gratitude as a variable. This left 33 articles.

In the final stage, full-text screening was

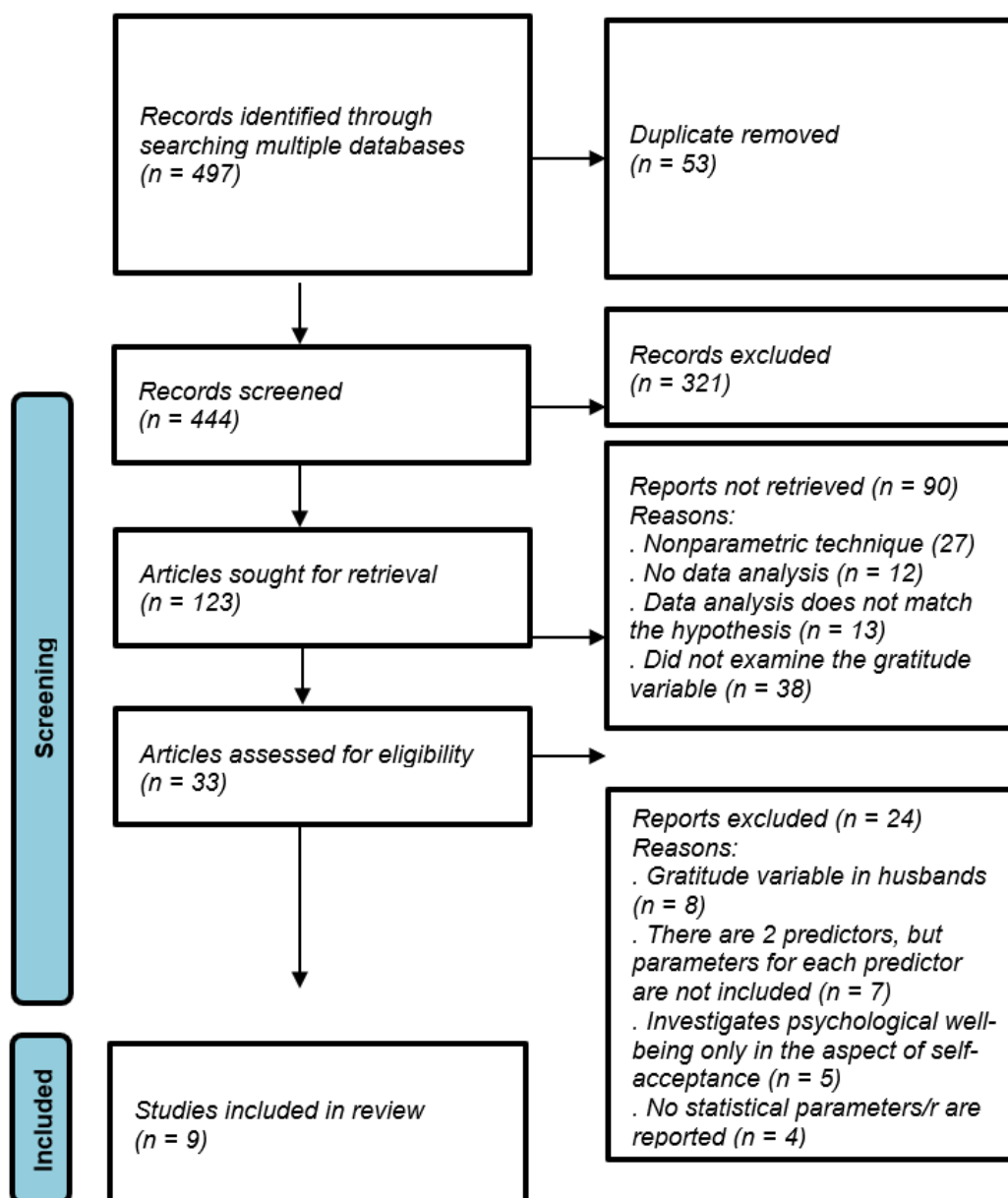


FIGURE 1. PRISMA-ScR Flow Diagram

carried out. Eight articles examined gratitude in husbands, seven used two predictors but did not provide parameters for each predictor, five investigated psychological well-being only in terms of self-acceptance, and four did not include statistical parameters (r). Following this final screening process, a total of nine Indonesian articles met the inclusion criteria: published between 2018 and 2025, published in Indonesian journals, and reporting correlation coefficients (r) along with sample sizes (N). All eligible articles were quantitative studies, most of which employed psychological well-being measurement scales.

Results and Discussion

Based on the article search, nine studies met the eligibility criteria for analysis using meta-analysis. The details of these studies are presented in Table 1.

A meta-analysis was conducted on 9 articles. In the Random Effects Model, an estimated value of 0.878 was found. The average correlation between the variables above was 0.878 ($p < .001$ with a 95% confidence interval [0.568–1.188]). This correlation effect size of 0.878 indicates a strong relationship between gratitude and maternal psychological well-being in raising children with autism.

TABLE 1. Study Data

No.	Study Label	Title of Study	Sample Size (N)	Correlation Coefficient (r)	95% CI
1.	Fredella & Sundari (2023)	The Role of Gratitude and Family Support on Psychological Well-Being of Mothers with Autistic Children	41	0.577	0.34-0.98
2.	Hizbullah & Mulyati (2022)	The Role of Gratitude and Family Support on Psychological Well-Being of Mothers with Autistic Children	98	0.417	0.24-0.65
3.	Irawan & Kamaratih (2022)	Pengaruh Kebersyukuran terhadap Kesejahteraan Psikologis Orang Tua yang Memiliki Anak dengan Gangguan Autisme [The effect of gratitude on the Psychological Well-Being of Parents of Children with Autism]	50	0.917	1.28-1.86
4.	Laili <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Psychological Well-Being Profile: The Role of Gratitude and Social Support for Parents with Children with Special Needs	54	0.350	0.09-0.64
5.	Purbasetya <i>et al.</i> (2024)	The Effect of Gratitude on Psychological Well-being of Parents Having Autistic Children at SLB X, Samarinda City	61	0.617	0.46-0.98
6.	Sari & Qomariyah (2023)	Conscientiousness, Kebersyukuran, dan Psychological Well-being pada Orangtua dengan Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus [Conscientiousness, Gratitude, and Psychological Well-Being among Parents of Children with Special Needs]	55	0.652	0.51-1.05
7.	Syahidah <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Pengaruh Syukur terhadap Kesejahteraan Psikologis pada Ibu dengan Anak Bergangguan Spektrum Autis [The influence of Gratitude on the Psychological Well-being of Mothers of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder]	30	0.480	0.15-0.90
8.	Wahyudi <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Hubungan Kebersyukuran dengan Kesejahteraan Psikologis Ibu yang Memiliki Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus di Kota Balikpapan [The Relationship between Gratitude and Psychological Well-Being of Mothers of Children with Special Needs in Balikpapan]	100	0.843	1.03-1.43
9.	Yudiati & Rahayu (2021)	Kesejahteraan Psikologis pada Orangtua Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus Ditinjau dari Kebersyukuran dan Tingkat Resiliensi [Psychological Well-Being of Parents of Children with Special Needs in Relation to Gratitude and Resilience]	34	0.926	1.28-1.98

The analysis results of the Jamovi application are as follows:

TABLE 2. Random-Effects Model ($k = 9$)

	Estimate	se	Z	p	CI Lower Bound	CI Upper Bound
Intercept	0.878	0.158	5.56	<.001	0.568	1.188

Note. τ^2 Estimator: DerSimonian-Laird

TABLE 3. Heterogeneity Statistics

Tau	Tau ²	I ²	H ²	R ²	Df	Q	P
0.451	0.2033 (SE=0.1122)	91.63%	11.942	.	8.000	90.429	<0.001

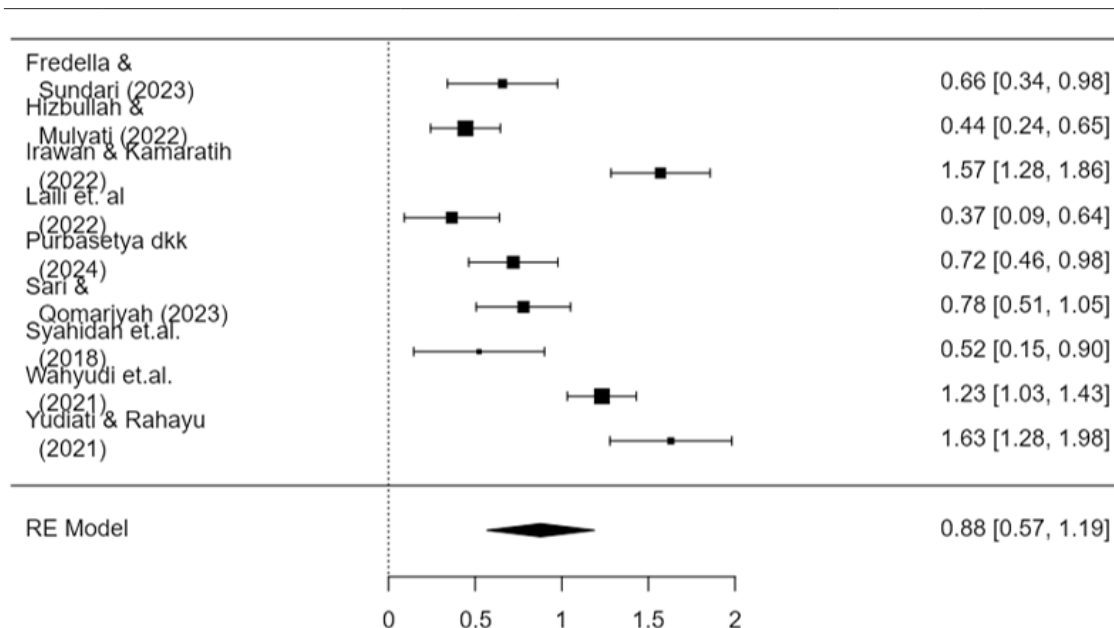


FIGURE 2. Effect Size Meta-Analysis Plot (Random Effects Model)

The I^2 value of 91.63% indicates that the data are heterogeneous, as it exceeds 50%. The I^2 statistic shows the proportion of variance in the observed effects that is due to sampling error. Cochran's Q test was conducted to examine the variation in the observed correlations attributable to sampling ($Q = 90.429$, $p < .001$). If $p < .05$, the results of the meta-analysis indicate that gratitude plays a role in achieving psychological well-being.

Figure 2 presents the statistical calculation through the effect size analysis. Based on the data processing of r and N , the overall effect size was found to be 0.90, which falls into the category of a strong correlation. The results of the publication bias assessment are that the

Fail-Safe N test yielded a value of 1183.000 ($p < .001$), indicating the possibility that a substantial number of unpublished studies may exist. This could result from methodological errors or other factors influencing non-publication. In principle, $p < .05$ suggests potential publication bias. However, further tests provide stronger evidence against the presence of bias. Specifically, Egger's Regression produced a value of 0.330 with $p = 0.741$, which is not statistically significant ($p > .05$), thereby suggesting no indication of publication bias. Similarly, Begg and Mazumdar's rank correlation test was also non-significant ($p = 0.919$). The Trim and Fill method detected no missing studies, further supporting the robustness of the findings.

Based on data processing using the meta-analysis method, a random effect value of 0.878 was obtained. This value falls into the category of a large effect size. Gratitude has a strong relationship with the psychological well-being of mothers who have children with autism. The role of mothers is very important for children with autism, as they spend the most time with their children (Ling & Teng, 2025; Shabbir *et al.*, 2025). A mother is considered the person who best understands her child and knows how to behave appropriately. It is not an easy task when a mother is faced with a child with autism. Mothers must deal with challenges related to themselves, both physically and mentally, as well as problems arising from the responses or behaviors of children with ASD. Children may display behavioral disturbances such as tantrums, which require efforts to calm them down. Intervention strategies to address the behavioral problems of children with ASD are urgently needed, as these behaviors can become sources of stress and may sometimes cause parents, particularly mothers, to experience feelings of shame due to the child's excessive behavior (Cai *et al.*, 2020; Hsiao, 2018). Such behavioral problems may also occur in school, requiring teachers to adopt positive attitudes to manage them effectively. Parents can gain new, more accurate knowledge that enables them to adapt more easily in caring for children with ASD and to exercise self-control to reduce parenting stress. A mother's adaptation is closely related to the child's adaptation, which requires the mother to engage in a continuous process of adjustment in line with the child's developmental stages. These stages constantly evolve with new experiences for both the child and the mother, who must also cope with significant changes over time, in accordance with the era (Périard-Larivée *et al.*, 2024).

As the primary caregivers, mothers also deserve broader access to knowledge and education in order to effectively raise their children (Ling & Teng, 2025; Reich *et al.*, 2025; Simatupang *et al.*, 2022). Family quality of life and education form a crucial collaboration, as both dimensions have positive impacts not only on mothers but also on parents as a whole, including income, social resources, and psychological well-being. These factors

collectively enhance self-regulation, thereby reducing behaviors that could increase health risks (Hsiao, 2018; Mathew *et al.*, 2019; Rezq *et al.*, 2025). Education, in this context, is considered capable of providing positive suggestions that decrease the tendency to rely on negative emotions.

Zhao and Fu (2022) highlight that in China, many parents are currently reading traditional Chinese classics to acquire moral principles embedded within them, which serve as guidance for self-evaluation and self-regulation in order to mitigate negative energy when confronted with family-related challenges. Such readings are believed to foster patience and suppress negative thoughts, thereby preventing mothers from comparing their children with ASD to typical children. Similarly, a study conducted by Rios *et al.* (2020) on Latina mothers who participated in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) revealed that they perceived caregiving as an integral part of their maternal role. After engaging in the IEP, these mothers reported gaining valuable knowledge about special education, which in turn helped reduce parenting stress. However, the findings also indicated that the mothers were more concerned with how schools treated their children with ASD than with addressing their own personal needs.

In addition to being the first and primary educator, mothers also need to involve other individuals with professional qualifications in their respective fields to participate in providing the best education for their children. The decision to enroll children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Special Schools (*Sekolah Luar Biasa*) is considered appropriate, as the implementation of learning adopts both general and specific principles tailored to the characteristics of children with special needs (Kadhim Nayyef *et al.*, 2025). The presence of teachers is crucial for delivering specialized instruction based on well-grounded theoretical practices. During treatment and educational interventions, the so-called "teacher effect" or "therapist effect" may occur, indicating that the characteristics and competencies of teachers can lead to improvements or specific achievements among their students (Anderson *et al.*, 2024). Parents and teachers are therefore expected

to collaborate within their respective roles to address behavioral challenges in children with ASD.

Collaboration between parents and teachers not only facilitates communication and evaluation but also contributes significantly to the development of children's skills (Astuti *et al.*, 2025; Chaudhry *et al.*, 2025; Tenerife *et al.*, 2023). Parents play a key role in fostering children's communication abilities at home, while teachers support communication development in both group and individual classroom settings by engaging peers in the process. Children are likely to experience substantial progress when parents recognize and appreciate their developmental strengths and maximize their role in supporting growth. Yazici and Akman (2022) highlight that cooperation between teachers and parents serves a common goal, namely supporting child development toward achieving specific indicators of progress. Beyond enriching their knowledge, mothers also begin to show openness to initiating social interactions with new individuals in the school environment. Such interactions, whether with professionals or with other parents of children with ASD who face similar circumstances, can be more effective in reducing mothers' feelings of helplessness and shame due to the social stigma they may have encountered (Cai *et al.*, 2020; Kadhim Nayyef *et al.*, 2025; Papadopoulos, 2021; Kusumawati *et al.*, 2024).

The random effect value of 0.878 indicates a strong correlation. Gratitude is positively associated with mothers' psychological well-being (Fredella & Sundari, 2023; Irawan *et al.*, 2022; Hizbullah & Mulyati, 2022; Laili *et al.*, 2022; Purbasetya *et al.*, 2024; Sari & Qomariyah, 2023; Syahidah *et al.*, 2018; Wahyudi *et al.*, 2021; Yudiati & Rahayu, 2021). The higher the level of gratitude, the higher the psychological well-being of mothers in educating children with autism. Gratitude can elicit emotional responses grounded in moral behavior (Irawan *et al.*, 2022). Such positive emotions accompany mothers throughout their caregiving journey, helping them to avoid parental stress. Mothers become more capable of coping with life pressures and restraining negative tendencies in order to adhere to

societal norms. Timmons and Ekas (2018) assert that mothers who cultivate gratitude are more likely to experience psychological well-being early on, as they have reached the stage of finding joy in parenting children with ASD. Wahyudi *et al.* (2021) and Shokouhi-Tabar *et al.* (2025) further emphasize that gratitude fosters mothers' acceptance of their present life circumstances. Mothers are willing to make sacrifices in raising their children—not merely with resignation, but with renewed energy to continue learning and practicing patience when faced with their children's potential emotional outbursts. Spiritual or religious beliefs also play a supportive role in helping mothers accept reality, channeling their experiences into gratitude to God, which allows them to face life events with greater openness and resilience (Abd Latif *et al.*, 2023; Wahyudi *et al.*, 2021; Shokouhi-Tabar *et al.*, 2025; Utami *et al.*, 2025).

Mothers perceive all aspects of life positively and reassure themselves of their ability to be the best parents. They consistently strive to guide their children's life journey, as well as their knowledge and life skills, for their future. Timmons *et al.* (2017) and Rezaq *et al.* (2025) reported that mothers who have achieved psychological well-being tend to perceive their child's ASD condition as a positive contribution to their lives and as a source of family happiness. Such perceptions and embedded mindsets lead to lower levels of parenting stress. A grateful mother also expresses appreciation for the kindness of others who have contributed to her life. This gratitude fosters motivation to build warm relationships with others and achieve mastery of her environment.

A strong social support system can reduce mothers' stress levels, as they feel surrounded by other mothers who truly understand their detailed experiences (Burkett *et al.*, 2022; Chaudhry *et al.*, 2025; Kadhim Nayyef *et al.*, 2025). Furthermore, grateful mothers accept themselves in their current circumstances, treating such experiences as valuable lessons. Grateful mothers accept themselves positively and demonstrate a consistent desire to do good (Gao & Drani, 2025; Sa'diyah, 2016; Shokouhi-Tabar *et al.*, 2025). Positive attitudes can influence the body across various dimensions; Meleady

et al. (2020) demonstrated that optimism is associated with parental well-being, serving as a coping resource against stress. Ryff, as cited in Ardani & Istiqomah (2020) and Shabbir *et al.* (2025), emphasized that individuals attempt to think positively about themselves despite being aware of their limitations. Mothers grow into more meaningful individuals who contribute to others, possess a clear sense of purpose in life, and remain independent in pursuing it. They continuously take the initiative to learn and enrich their knowledge about parenting (Astuti *et al.*, 2025; Liu *et al.*, 2021; Mittal & Sinha, 2025). Based on the foregoing discussion, this study concludes that the effect size correlation value derived from nine previous articles demonstrates the relationship between gratitude and mothers' psychological well-being. Statistically integrated, these findings indicate a positive correlation between gratitude and the psychological well-being of mothers raising children with autism.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates a positive correlation between gratitude and the psychological well-being of mothers raising children with autism. The higher the level of gratitude, the greater the psychological well-being of mothers. Gratitude plays a significant role in achieving psychological well-being in mothers who are responsible for raising children with autism children who often experience communication difficulties, challenges in social interactions, and behavioral problems. Educational support provided by mothers aims to foster independence, resilience, and adaptability in their children. To help children achieve developmental expectations, mothers need to equip themselves with gratitude as a foundation for sustaining psychological well-being.

The limitations of this study lie in the use of research articles sourced only from Indonesia, which reduces the generalizability of the findings to other countries. Nonetheless, the results may serve as a comparative reference for future studies on the psychological well-being of mothers of children with autism in Indonesia and beyond. Another limitation is the heterogeneity of research subjects, which

may allow the correlation to be influenced by intervening variables. Future research is encouraged to involve more homogeneous samples and to examine potential intervening variables related to maternal psychological well-being.

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