

SELF-ACCEPTANCE OF SINGLE MOTHERS WITH MULTIPLE DISABILITIES

(Case Study in Lakarsantri, Surabaya)

Aisha Nadya^{1*}, Dwi Jayanti Kurnia Dewi^{2*}, Dika Putri Rahayu^{3*}

¹Universitas Islam Syekh Yusuf, ²Universitas Lampung, ³UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung

aishanadya@unis.ac.id, dwi.jayanti@fkip.unila.ac.id,
[dikapurtrirahayu24@gmail.com](mailto:dikaputrirahayu24@gmail.com)

ABSTRACT

Single mothers who have young children with multiple disabilities have full responsibility for raising children, without the presence of a partner who acts as both mother and father for their children. Single mothers who raise children with multiple disabilities face extra challenges and difficulties compared to other parents. Various challenges for single mothers include meeting the special needs of children, limited access to services and support, to multiple financial and emotional burdens. Self-acceptance is a crucial factor that affects the well-being and quality of life of single mothers with children with multiple disabilities. This study was conducted to explore and understand more deeply the phenomenon of self-acceptance in single mothers with children with multiple disabilities using a qualitative approach. The method used is a case study involving single mother participants who have young children with multiple disabilities, living in the Lakarsantri area, Surabaya. The multiple disabilities experienced by the subject's child are hard of hearing and low vision. This research method uses observation, interviews, and documentation. The data analysis technique uses thematic analysis. The process of accepting the child's condition is a journey in itself for single mothers through five stages, namely denial, depression, anger, bargaining, and finally acceptance and adjustment. This process involves seeking knowledge, consulting with professionals, and interacting with other families who have similar experiences. Single mothers are still potentially experiencing emotional fluctuations especially when faced with new challenges in child development. Single mother self-acceptance is an active process in adjusting, learning, and growing with the child.

Key Words: *self-acceptance of single mothers, single mothers with multiple disabilities*

ABSTRAK

Ibu tunggal yang memiliki anak usia dini dengan disabilitas ganda mempunyai tanggung jawab penuh dalam pengasuhan anak, tanpa adanya kehadiran pasangan yang berperan sebagai ibu sekaligus ayah bagi anaknya. Ibu tunggal yang membesarkan anak disabilitas ganda menghadapi tantangan dan kesulitan yang ekstra dibandingkan dengan orang tua lainnya. Berbagai tantangan bagi ibu tunggal antara lain mulai dari pemenuhan kebutuhan khusus anak, keterbatasan akses terhadap layanan dan dukungan, hingga beban finansial dan emosional yang berlipat ganda. Penerimaan diri menjadi faktor krusial yang memengaruhi kesejahteraan dan kualitas hidup ibu tunggal dengan anak disabilitas ganda. Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk mengeksplorasi dan memahami lebih dalam fenomena penerimaan diri pada ibu tunggal dengan anak disabilitas ganda dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif. Metode yang digunakan adalah studi kasus dengan melibatkan partisipan ibu tunggal yang memiliki anak usia dini disabilitas ganda, tinggal di daerah Lakarsantri, Surabaya. Adapun disabilitas ganda yang dialami oleh anak dari subjek yakni hard of hearing dan low vision. Metode penelitian ini menggunakan observasi, wawancara dan dokumentasi. Teknik analisis data menggunakan analisis tematik. Proses penerimaan kondisi anak merupakan perjalanan tersendiri bagi ibu tunggal dengan melalui lima tahapan yaitu penolakan, depresi, kemarahan, tawar-menawar, dan yang terakhir penerimaan dan penyesuaian. Proses ini melibatkan pencarian pengetahuan, konsultasi dengan profesional, dan interaksi dengan keluarga lain yang memiliki pengalaman serupa. Ibu tunggal masih berpotensi mengalami fluktuasi emosi terutama ketika dihadapkan pada tantangan baru dalam perkembangan anak. Penerimaan diri ibu tunggal sebagai sebuah proses aktif dalam menyesuaikan diri, belajar, dan bertumbuh bersama anak.

Kata Kunci: *penerimaan diri ibu tunggal, ibu tunggal dengan disabilitas*

*Corresponding author: dwi.jayanti@fkip.unila.ac.id

Department of Early Childhood Teacher Education, Faculty of Education, Universitas Negeri Surabaya.

Email: jp2kgaud@unesa.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

A single mother can be called an individual who bears full responsibility for raising children without the presence of a partner (Nur, 2021). A single mother bears a great responsibility to act as both a mother and a father to her children. The challenges faced by single mothers include limited time, energy, and resources, even social pressure and stigma (Vegasari, 2020).

The role of a single mother creates its own burden, especially if you have a child with multiple disabilities. Multiple disabilities are defined as a condition where an individual has two or more types of disabilities that interact with each other and affect their development and functional abilities (Gulo et al., 2023). There is limited research on single mothers with children with disabilities. Existing research reveals a variety of challenges faced, including responsibility for the financial and emotional well-being of their families and the care of children with disabilities. Single mothers often experience high levels of poverty, social isolation, increased stress levels, and stigma (Gottlieb, 1997). In several studies, single mothers were the recipients of discrimination either because of their own stigmatizing conditions (i.e., culture or single mother status) or their children (i.e., culture or disability) (McHatton, 2007). The types of difficulties include meeting the special needs of children, limited access to services and support, and multiple financial and emotional burdens.

Based on previous studies, single mothers who are the backbone of the family have to struggle to meet the family's financial needs, while their job opportunities may be limited because they have to focus on childcare (Saputri & Rahmandai, 2021). Single mothers who raise children with multiple disabilities face extra struggles and difficulties compared to other parents. They have to shoulder all the responsibilities of care and care alone, while children with multiple disabilities need more attention and support.

The process of caring for children with multiple disabilities is prone to stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders (Pradani, 2023). Meanwhile, children with multiple disabilities have complex and diverse needs, ranging from physical care, therapy, to assistance in daily activities. Single mothers have to devote a

lot of time and energy to meet all their children's needs without help from others (Fitriani et al., 2022). Single mothers may have to sacrifice their social life, time for themselves, and even career opportunities to care for their children. The costs of care, therapy, and special equipment for children with multiple disabilities are quite high (Lestari et al., 2018).

Amidst these challenges, self-acceptance is a crucial factor that influences the well-being and quality of life of single mothers with children with multiple disabilities. Self-acceptance is an important foundation for a mother, especially for those who have children with disabilities. Accepting yourself means acknowledging, understanding, and appreciating all aspects of yourself, including your strengths, weaknesses, and the conditions you face (Izzah, 2022). For a mother with a child with multiple disabilities, this self-acceptance not only affects herself, but also her child and family as a whole. When a mother is able to fully accept herself, she will find it easier to accept her child's condition as it is, will not focus too much on the child's limitations, but will instead see the child's potential and uniqueness (Cahyani, 2015).

Self-acceptance will also help mothers to manage negative emotions that may arise, such as guilt, disappointment, or despair (Siregar & Hermanto, 2023). When accepting themselves, mothers will be calmer and able to face parenting challenges more wisely. Sesa & Yarni, (2022) in their research stated that self-acceptance will increase the mother's self-confidence in carrying out her role, will believe in her ability to raise and educate children well, even in the midst of existing limitations. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore and understand more deeply the phenomenon of self-acceptance in single mothers with children with multiple disabilities. Specifically, this study aims to describe the process of self-acceptance experienced by single mothers with children with multiple disabilities.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore and understand the meaning of a phenomenon based on an individual's perspective, exploring personal experiences, and life stories (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Qualitative research is a method used in order

to try to understand or interpret the meaning of a phenomenon that involves personal experiences and life stories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The method used is a case study. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore complex phenomena and gain a deep understanding of the process of self-acceptance of single mothers with children with multiple special needs. The uniqueness of case studies allows researchers to explore in depth specific and rare phenomena, situations, or individuals (Rahardjo, 2017).

The research participants were single mothers who had early childhood children with multiple special needs who lived in the Lakarsantri area, Surabaya. The double blindness experienced by the subject child was hearing difficulties and low vision. This research method used observation, interviews, and documentation. The data analysis technique uses thematic analysis, which essentially views the data analysis process as a continuous and interrelated interactive cycle (Miles et al., 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on observations and in-depth interviews with several participants, it was found that self-acceptance in parents with children with multiple disabilities is not a single event, but rather a dynamic and ongoing journey. In the early stages, most parents experience shock, denial, anger, and deep sadness. There are fluctuations in emotions which are a natural response as parents with children with multiple disabilities (Kartika & Rahakbau, 2022). The process of accepting a child's condition is also a journey in itself for single mothers. According to the theory of "The Five Stages of Grief" (King, 2016), they go through five stages, namely:

1. Denial

Initially, an individual may find it difficult to accept the fact that they must face this situation alone. The denial or denial stage is the first stage in the grieving process, the individual is reluctant to accept the reality or truth of a difficult situation (Cohen, 2013). This response arises because of a situation or condition that is difficult to accept, he firmly rejects and is reluctant to face facts that are painful or that are not in line with his beliefs and views, even though the actual reality is different. In this context, individuals tend to deny having negative characteristics (Rahmi, 2018). Subject R as an

individual or parent has difficulty accepting the initial diagnosis. When his child, F, was diagnosed as a child with low vision and hard of hearing, he sought a second opinion and refused to believe the results of the medical examination by seeking alternative treatments and even thinking about superstitions. This was acknowledged during the interview process as follows.

“.....when the doctor said that my child had low vision and hearing problems, I looked for alternative treatment outside the city, not believing what the doctor said....” (R)

“....or maybe because I ate bones when I was pregnant....”(R)

Subject R, meaning parents with children with multiple disabilities, places their hopes on interventions that have not been scientifically proven, such as alternative medicine, "miracle" therapy, or prayers that are believed to be able to cure the child completely. Scientifically, disability is not a disease that can be cured. Disability can be interpreted as a condition that limits a person's ability to carry out certain activities or participate in community life fully and effectively (Sholihah, 2016). At this stage, parents are obsessed with finding the cause of their child's multiple disabilities by blaming themselves and even God. This blame can be a way to seek control over a situation that feels out of control. In addition to self-blame, individuals usually tend to isolate themselves due to the conditions they are experiencing. This act of isolation is a manifestation of disbelief in the tragedy or event that befell them (Qayumah, 2019).

2. Depression

Feelings of hopelessness, confusion, and overwhelm often arise as they struggle to adapt to the child's condition and carry out the role of a single parent.

".....it's all my fault, maybe because of my bad behavior when I was pregnant, I often think like that..." (R)

".....it feels like I failed to be old, where my husband left me. I got divorced because of my child like this, I also have difficulty getting a job. I work with my child and my mother..." (R)

Depression is a serious problem often experienced by mothers with special needs children (Olsson & Hwang, 2001). The more complex the child's needs, the higher the level of stress in the mother (Lee, 2013). Common characteristics that appear are sad, empty, or irritable moods (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). In

this study, Subject R was abandoned by her partner and went through a divorce, causing depression and even feeling hopeless. Several studies have shown that lack of support from partners, family, and social environment can increase vulnerability to depression (Burke, 2003; Vardanyan (2013); Ridings et al., 2018).

Single mothers with special needs children often have to sacrifice their social life, time for themselves, and even career opportunities to care for their children (Hogan, 2012). As a result of being a single mother, the subject's burden becomes heavier, especially in terms of finances. Therefore, financial hardship is an important factor to consider in the context of depression in mothers of children with special needs (Resch et al., 2010). Children with special needs often require intensive and ongoing medical care and therapy, such as physical therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and consultations with various specialists. The costs of these therapies and treatments are often expensive and may not be fully covered by health insurance. Financial hardship can worsen depression, and depression can make it difficult for mothers to find solutions to their financial problems.

3. Angry

Negative emotions such as anger and sensitivity increase in response to challenges faced, including stigma from the surrounding environment.

"Why did God give me this difficult trial? I have many sins?"

"My ex-husband doesn't care about our child."

"He should be here to help me. This is also his responsibility."

When a child is diagnosed with multiple disabilities, it is often a big shock for parents (Parrish, 2010). Ignorance, fear, and uncertainty about the future can trigger intense anger. The process of parenting a child with multiple disabilities requires extra patience, energy, and resources (Nurullah, 2013). Single mothers with children with multiple disabilities can feel overwhelmed, frustrated, and angry when faced with daily challenges, such as difficulties in communication, challenging behavior, or complex medical needs. Evidenced by the subjects in this study asking "why did this have to

happen to my child?" This feeling of injustice can lead to anger at oneself, others, destiny, or God.

Mothers who care for children with multiple disabilities experience higher levels of physical and emotional exhaustion than mothers in general (Anclair & Hiltunen, 2014). Physical and emotional exhaustion is caused by lack of sleep, prolonged stress, lack of time for oneself which can trigger anger and irritability. Moreover, single mothers with children with multiple disabilities face stigma and discrimination from society which can affect their self-esteem and make them feel isolated or trigger anger (Green, 2003).

4. Bargaining

At this stage, they are between accepting and not accepting the child's condition. The question "why me?" may often arise.

"If only the father of the children met the children's needs."

"I'm not asking for much, just a little support."

"If I had more money, my child could go to therapy."

"If I hadn't divorced, it wouldn't have turned out like this for sure."

Limitations in children with disabilities cause parents to have less understanding of the potential of their children (Wahyuningsih, 2022).

5. Acceptance and Adjustment

The final stage where they have sincerely accepted their condition and started to develop coping strategies to overcome psychological stress.

"Divorce is painful, but I have to stay strong for my child."

"I can't change the past, but I hope the future will be better."

Over time, parents begin to adapt to reality and gradually process information about their child's condition. This process involves seeking knowledge, consulting with professionals, and interacting with other families who have similar experiences. Social support and access to accurate information play an important role in facilitating the process of self-acceptance in individuals (Plexico et al., 2019). However, self-acceptance is not a finished line that is achieved and completed. Emotional fluctuations

are still possible, especially when parents are faced with new challenges in their child's development.

Self-acceptance is more appropriately viewed as an active process in which parents continue to adjust, learn, and grow with their children (Nugroho & Saferi, 2021). Self-acceptance allows parents to focus on their child's abilities and potential, rather than on their disabilities (Insani et al., 2021). When parents have achieved self-acceptance, they will be better able to control negative emotions and inhibiting thoughts. Every child, including children with multiple disabilities, has unique abilities and potential that can be developed (Zahara et al., 2024). Focusing too much on the limitations of children with multiple disabilities can hinder their development and cause parents to lose their potential.

CONCLUSION

A single mother bears a great responsibility to act as both a mother and a father to her children. The role of a single mother creates a burden, especially for those who have children with multiple disabilities that mutually affect their development and functional abilities. In this study, the subjects were single mothers with children with multiple disabilities, namely hard of hearing and low vision. Self-acceptance is a crucial factor that influences the well-being and quality of life of single mothers with children with multiple disabilities. Single mothers begin to adapt to reality and gradually process information about their child's condition. The process of accepting their child's condition is a journey in itself for single mothers with children with multiple disabilities through five stages, namely denial, depression, anger, bargaining, and finally acceptance and adjustment. This process involves seeking knowledge, consulting with professionals, and interacting with other families who have similar experiences. Single mothers still have the potential to experience emotional fluctuations, especially when facing new challenges in their child's development. Self-acceptance of single mothers is an active process of adjusting, learning, and growing with their children.

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