

# Parents' Psychological Well-Being in Educating Children With Autism at Mitra Ananda Special School

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## ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan dinamika *Psychological Well-Being* orang tua dalam mendidik anak autis di SLB Mitra Ananda. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif studi fenomenologi. Subjek penelitian adalah 4 orang tua yang memiliki anak autis yang bersekolah di SLB Mitra Ananda dan terlibat langsung dalam mendidik anak di rumah yang ditentukan dengan teknik pengambilan sampel jenis *purposive sampling*. Teknik pengumpulan data menggunakan wawancara semi terstruktur yang merupakan bagian dari kategori dalam *in-depth interview* dan dokumentasi. Uji validitas dalam penelitian ini menggunakan triangulasi sumber dengan 7 *significant others* dan triangulasi teori. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa adanya dinamika *Psychological Well-Being* yang dialami masing-masing orang tua dalam proses mendidik anak autis. Keempat subjek menunjukkan pemaknaan yang sejalan dengan enam dimensi PWB menurut Ryff (2014). Namun, intensitas dan cara setiap subjek dalam menjalani dimensi tersebut menunjukkan variasi yang selaras dengan perbedaan faktor seperti latar belakang pendidikan, perbedaan kepribadian, pengalaman keluarga, serta perbedaan jenis kelamin. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa *Psychological Well-Being* orang tua yang mendidik anak autis di SLB Mitra Ananda bersifat multidimensional pada setiap individu.

**Kata kunci:** *Psychological Well-Being*, orang tua, dan autis.

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## ABSTRACT

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*This study aims to describe the dynamics of the Psychological Well-Being parents in educating children with autism enrolled at SLB Mitra Ananda. This study uses a phenomenological qualitative research method. The subjects of the study were 4 parents who have children with autism enrolled at SLB Mitra Ananda and are actively involved in their children's education at home. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. Data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews, categorized under in-depth interviews and documentation. The validity of the data was ensured through source triangulation involving 7 significant others, and theory triangulation. The results of this study show there are the dynamic processes in the psychological well-being of parents. The results of this study show the dynamic processes in the Psychological Well-Being of each parent throughout their journey in educating a child with autism. All four participants demonstrated a conceptualization that aligns with the six dimensions of Psychological Well-Being as articulated by Ryff (2014). However, the intensity in which these dimensions were experienced and expressed varied among individuals, reflecting differences in educational background, personality characteristics, family experiences, and gender. These findings highlights that the Psychological Well-Being of parents raising children with autism at SLB Mitra Ananda is inherently multidimensional and shaped by diverse contextual and personal factors.*

**Keywords:** *Psychological Well-Being, parent, and autism.*

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## Introduction

Parents hold the primary responsibility in shaping and educating their children, and must be able to guide them toward becoming individuals aligned with meaningful life goals (Arsini et al., 2023). Dirman (as cited in Puspito & Rosiana, 2022), in accordance with Indonesian Law No. 20 of 2003 Article 1 Paragraph (1), stated that educating children is a conscious and planned effort to seek appropriate training, teaching, and methods to enhance their skills in personality, psychological, spiritual, intellectual, self-regulation, morality, and other competencies needed by themselves, society, the nation, and the state (Puspito & Rosiana, 2022).

In the modern era, educating children has become a critical concern for every parent. Guiding a child to grow and develop well is a lifelong learning process for parents. Generally, parents are expected to educate their children by setting good examples in everyday life. A comprehensive understanding of parenting is crucial to shaping a future generation that is competent and of high quality (Ayub et al., 2024).

In relation to this, it is essential for parents to understand certain developmental conditions that children may experience, such as developmental disorders. The Autism Society of America (2004) (as cited in Yuwono, 2012) defines autism as a complex developmental disorder that appears within the first three years of life as a result of neurological disturbances affecting brain function. Autism is characterized by distinctive impairments in the nature and quality of social and communication development, influenced by biological and environmental conditions unique to each individual (Bregman, 2005).

The onset of developmental disorders in autistic children typically occurs without clear early symptoms and tends to emerge gradually, requiring parents to undergo a progressive process of awareness and adaptation (Shulman, 2002). Parents who educate children with autism often face a complex emotional journey, encountering unfamiliar challenges. In coming to terms with their child's unique needs, many parents go through certain emotional stages and experience a range of difficulties, including psychological challenges. Adjusting to their child's condition often takes time, which highlights the importance of ensuring parents' psychological well-being to optimally support their child's development.

Parents carry full responsibility for monitoring the developmental progress of children with autism to ensure that all their needs are met. However, in doing so, it is also important that parents maintain their own psychological well-being. The emotional burden and demands associated with parenting a child with autism may place parents at risk for a range of challenges that can impact their psychological well-being (Cohrs & Leslie, 2017).

The term psychological well-being in this context refers to Psychological Well-Being (PWB). According to Ryff (2014), PWB emphasizes an individual's evaluation of how far they have progressed in fulfilling life goals and potentials, how meaningful their life is, how well they maintain positive relationships with others, their ability to accept themselves and manage their environment, and their sense of personal responsibility. PWB is essential for individuals of all ages, including parents.

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## METODE

This study uses a qualitative approach using the phenomenological method to explore the experiences of parents in educating their children with autism. The research was conducted at SLB Mitra Ananda.

The participants in this study were four parents of children with autism who are directly involved in the educational process at home. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, with criteria including willingness to be interviewed, direct experience in educating their child, and the child being currently enrolled at SLB Mitra Ananda.

Data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews, which fall under the category of in-depth interviews, and documentation. The validity of the data was ensured through source triangulation involving seven significant others, as well as theoretical triangulation.

Data analysis followed the steps of data collection, data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions or verification. Each piece of information from the participants was analyzed to uncover the meaning behind the dynamics of Psychological Well-Being (PWB) based on the six dimensions developed by Ryff (2014).

### HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

#### Result

Based on the explanation above, a comparison of the dynamics of Psychological Well-Being (PWB) among the subjects BK, BB, IB, and II is as follows:

##### 1. Subject BK

The subject demonstrated maturity in dealing with the situation as a parent of a child with special needs. BK appeared capable of making independent decisions without fully relying on others' opinions, especially in determining the appropriate therapy for his child. Despite experiencing some doubts, BK adhered to his own principles based on journal research and professional consultation. This reflects his confidence in his own values and considerations, even when differing from those around him. The process of adaptation and learning stood out in how BK responded to his child's development. He sought to understand the child's condition by gathering information, discussing with peers facing similar situations, and actively finding environments that support the child's growth. His decision to enroll his child in SLB Mitra Ananda was made after thorough consideration based on the child's needs, not merely following others' suggestions. BK also showed openness to continuous learning, including receiving feedback from others and reflecting on daily experiences with his child. In his relationship with his wife, BK showed cooperation and mutual respect. There was no significant conflict or dominance, as they often worked together and built supportive communication. This suggests a harmonious family relationship that serves as a key source of support for him. However, BK tends to be less involved in social activities at school with other parents. Although he did not explicitly mention having personal aspirations, BK demonstrated future-oriented thinking, particularly concerning his child's long-term welfare. He chose to build a passive-income-based business as a long-term effort to ensure stability, especially in the event he can no longer accompany his child. Nevertheless, BK stated that he is not an ambitious person and prefers to go with the flow of life. Becoming a parent of a child with autism has led BK to many life lessons. He admitted that raising a child with autism was a new experience for him, yet he continues to grow in understanding and handling his child's condition with greater wisdom. His willingness to keep learning and recognizing personal transformation illustrates positive personal growth. BK showed full acceptance of his child's condition. He did not feel the need to treat his child as special or consider the condition a burden. Instead, he viewed everything as a natural part of life. He expressed contentment with his child's current development without burdening them with excessive expectations. His responses throughout the interview indicated that despite various challenges and personal struggles, BK was still able to fulfill all six dimensions of PWB. This process was shaped by contributing factors such as educational background, family experiences, personality traits, and gender differences.

## 2. Subject BB

The subject displayed the ability to make decisions based on personal judgment without being entirely influenced by others' opinions. BB stated that when receiving unsolicited advice about what not to do with autistic children, he did not immediately follow them but tested the advice to see its actual impact. This reflects his independence in parenting decisions. BB also demonstrated strong capability in handling challenging situations. He recounted the early realization of communication difficulties in his child and how he proactively sought help from doctors to pediatricians. He continued to consult professionals even when service conditions were not ideal, showing a strong effort to manage his environment and resources for the child's needs. Socially, BB emphasized the importance of engaging with communities of parents with similar experiences. He shared that these meetings provided him with valuable support and knowledge in understanding his child's condition. BB also highlighted the importance of kindness and initiative in building supportive relationships, which he developed alongside his spouse, whom he considered an equal partner in parenting. BB expressed a clear sense of life direction, especially regarding his hopes for his child's future. Aware of the differences between his child and others, he avoided comparisons and focused on realistic goals such as self-care independence. For his personal career and education goals, BB willingly sacrificed them to fully educate and support his child. Furthermore, BB showed reflective thinking regarding his child's development, noting how puberty helped him understand behavioral patterns. This effort illustrated his adjustment in parenting over time. BB accepted his child as they are, regarding them as an irreplaceable responsibility. He stressed that no matter what, his child is his only one and must be protected wholeheartedly. This signifies deep acceptance and long-term commitment.

His journey in raising his child intertwined closely with efforts to fulfill various PWB dimensions, shaped by factors such as family experiences, educational background, and gender differences.

## 3. Subject IB

IB chose to adjust her career to meet her child and family's needs, deliberately deciding not to pursue higher professional positions to remain physically and emotionally available.

Her ability to handle difficult situations and manage daily life was reflected in early recognition of her child's condition through various information sources and ensuring early therapy. Family role distribution also became a part of their adaptive strategy, where she and her spouse complemented each other in caring for the child.

According to IB, being open to the community of other parents with special needs children was a valuable source of support that strengthened her parenting journey. Her friendly, socially accepted attitude and open communication with her spouse revealed a healthy and cooperative interpersonal relationship. She also stated clear parenting goals for her child, such as achieving independent self-care when parents are no longer present. Like BB, she sacrificed her career aspirations to focus fully on raising her child. IB experienced positive life changes, particularly in spirituality and personal development. She stated that through her child, she and her spouse became more disciplined, religious, and better understood life's meaning. This experience

was a turning point in shaping maturity and perspective. IB's acceptance of her child's condition was stable and strong. She did not exhibit deep denial or sadness but instead a calm, realistic, and sincere attitude, choosing to live as it is and focusing on actionable steps. Her experience reflected the fulfillment of all PWB dimensions, shaped by a combination of family experiences, personality differences, and gender.

4. **Subject II**

II demonstrated autonomy in making important decisions, including major ones in her household life and the courage to stay in Sragen when her husband was relocated for work. She understood the importance of self-care through personal time to maintain her psychological well-being while raising her child. Her ability to manage daily life was evident in her responsiveness to her child's health needs through practical actions such as physical therapy and other treatments. She also gradually planned her child's education, starting with PAUD and kindergarten to develop basic social skills, showing realistic adaptability. While raising her child, II maintained a strong relationship with her spouse and actively participated in social activities. She nurtured interpersonal relationships, gaining social support. Open communication with her husband helped maintain emotional stability.

II once aspired to become a career woman, but due to family and child responsibilities, she willingly set that aside, viewing the sacrifice not as a burden but a conscious life choice. Her reflections on parenting revealed inner struggles, she once questioned fate and meaning behind her situation, but eventually developed a positive understanding, viewing her child's presence as part of God's plan and a special role she was chosen for. II's journey in raising her child reflected the achievement of psychological well-being, influenced by contributing factors such as family experiences, educational differences, and gender.

**Table 4.5**  
**Description of the PWB Dynamics of Subjects in Educating Children with Autism**

<b>Dimensio</b> <b>n</b>	<b>BK</b>	<b>BB</b>	<b>IB</b>	<b>II</b>
<i>Autonomy</i>	BK demonstrated autonomy in determining the form of education and therapy for his child without relying heavily on medical diagnoses. He made decisions	BB was selective in responding to external input. He preferred to try and evaluate each suggestion independently before applying it, reflecting a self-directed decision-	IB showed autonomy through career choices, which were adjusted to meet her child's needs. She declined high-responsibility job opportunities in order to remain	II emphasized her dominant role in family decision-making. She also scheduled personal time as a way to meet her own needs. Her decision to remain in Sragen despite

	based on the child's actual needs and personal experiences, even when there were differing opinions within the family.	making process.		present in her husband's caregiving, job relocation indicating that her decisions were grounded in family values.	reflects the courage to independently determine the course of her life.
<i>Environmental mastery</i>	BK demonstrated adaptive abilities by accepting his child's condition, actively seeking information, and choosing appropriate therapy and schooling. He was also responsive during crisis situations and showed decisiveness in the post-pandemic period.	BB was proactive in seeking medical referrals and did not remain passive in responding to his child's condition. He sought to understand the situation through consultations and exploring healthcare services.	was in	IB showed the ability to adjust lifestyle and work arrangements with her partner to remain directly involved in the child's development.	II took steps not to rely solely on diagnostic labels. She structured therapy and education schedules and quickly responded to the child's physical and social needs.
<i>Personal growth</i>	BK demonstrated personal growth through a gradual learning process about his child's condition. As a first-time parent, he	BB experienced a deepened understanding of his child's behavior through direct experience. He learned to recognize developmental phases,		IB expressed that having a child with autism brought valuable lessons, both spiritually and in terms of discipline. This reflects holistic growth, encompassing	II demonstrated personal growth through shifts in roles and life priorities. She showed a willingness to adjust to family demands and acknowledged

	acknowledged the need to start learning from scratch. This reflection illustrates his openness to new experiences and his readiness to grow alongside his child.	including puberty, and showed adaptability in responding to those changes.	both emotional and spiritual dimensions.	the sacrifices made regarding personal desires in order to focus on her child.
<i>Purpose in life</i>	BK demonstrated personal growth through a gradual learning process about his child's condition. As a first-time parent, he acknowledged the need to start learning from scratch. This reflection illustrates his openness to new experiences and his readiness to grow alongside his child.	BB experienced a deepened understanding of his child's behavior through direct experience. He learned to recognize developmental phases, including puberty, and showed adaptability in responding to those changes.	IB expressed that having a child with autism brought valuable lessons, both spiritually and in terms of discipline. This reflects holistic growth, encompassing both emotional and spiritual dimensions.	II demonstrated personal growth through shifts in roles and life priorities. She showed a willingness to adjust to family demands and acknowledged the sacrifices made regarding personal desires in order to focus on her child.
<i>Positive relations with others</i>	BK demonstrated a harmonious relationship with his wife in raising their child. He and his partner tended to	BB showed strong social skills within the family and the broader community. He actively built relationships	IB maintained positive social relationships with both her partner and the surrounding environment. She emphasized the importance of	II actively participated in social activities. She maintained open communication with her husband in decision-

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<p>understand each other and shared parenting roles without significant conflict, maintaining closeness through joint work activities.</p>	<p>with parents of autistic children, open suggestions, and fostered social connections through a friendly approach. In addition, BB previously served as the head of POSMA during the past school year.</p>	<p>other of was to being friendly as a parent of a child with special needs and felt comfortable being part of a supportive community.</p>	<p>making and preserved strong social ties within her neighborhood. Moreover, she currently serves as the head of POSMA for the ongoing period.</p>
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<p><i>Self-acceptance</i></p>	<p>BK demonstrated strong self-acceptance regarding the reality of having a child with special needs. He did not feel emotionally or financially burdened. BK accepted the child's developmental progress as it is and expressed contentment with the ongoing process.</p>	<p>BB showed a positive attitude of acceptance. He did not perceive the child's condition as a burden, but instead focused on the responsibility of caring for and accompanying his only child with full commitment.</p>	<p>IB exhibited a realistic and rational form of acceptance. She faced her child's condition calmly, without becoming overwhelmed by sadness. IB chose to live according to the existing circumstances and continued to treat her child equally without underestimating their abilities.</p>	<p>II initially experienced emotional struggles in accepting the child's condition, including questioning the causes from both personal and spiritual perspectives. However, over time, II began to shift her perspective and interpret the presence of her child as a divine choice, believing she was selected by God to be a special parent.</p>
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The concept of psychological well-being (PWB), as defined by Ryff (2014), refers to the extent to which individuals perceive their lives as meaningful, purposeful, and directed; how well they manage life circumstances; the degree to which they utilize their personal capacities and potential; the alignment of their lives with their personal values; the depth of positive relationships they build with others; and their ability to recognize and accept all aspects of themselves. The psychological well-being (PWB) of each participant in this study demonstrated unique and varied dynamics.

In line with Ryff's (2014) perspective, these differences in PWB are influenced by several factors, including family experiences, differences in educational background, personality traits, gender, cultural background, and age. However, this study identified only four of these six factors, namely, educational differences, family experiences, personality differences, and gender differences. These factors contributed to the distinct processes through which each individual developed their psychological well-being.

The interview results from seven Significant Others (SOs) revealed that, overall, the four main subjects demonstrated the ability to fulfill the dimensions of psychological well-being (PWB) throughout their journey of raising a child with autism, in alignment with Ryff's (2014) framework. The SOs noted that each participant exhibited the capacity to manage daily personal challenges, maintain a sense of meaning and purpose in raising their child, and sustain positive relationships with those around them. Furthermore, the subjects showed acceptance of themselves and their child's condition, as well as a continuous effort to develop their personal potential.

However, the dynamics of achieving these dimensions varied among participants. These differences reflect the unique characteristics of each individual, influenced by factors such as educational background, personality traits, family experiences, and gender. In other words, variation in the process of achieving PWB is natural, especially given the non-uniformity of contributing factors. This supports the notion that the fulfillment of PWB dimensions is shaped through personal and contextual interpretations, according to each individual's lived experience.

Thus, the realization of psychological well-being is neither linear nor uniform; rather, it evolves over time in parallel with the parenting journey. These findings reinforce the understanding that psychological well-being is multidimensional and closely tied to the personal, social, and situational factors experienced by individuals.

This study has limitations related to the homogeneity of the participants' characteristics. All parents were within a similar age range, which constrained the analysis of psychological well-being differences based on age variation. In addition, the cultural similarity among participants limited the diversity of perspectives that could have enriched the understanding of PWB dynamics, as no cross-cultural differences were present to provide broader insights into parenting experiences.

### **SIMPULAN**

Based on the data obtained from this study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

The meaning of psychological well-being (PWB) among parents at SLB Mitra Ananda who are raising children with autism demonstrates varying dynamics for each individual. In constructing a new sense of purpose and life direction, all four participants expressed a belief that they still have meaningful life goals, even though they must adjust to the unique needs of their children. For example, participant BB was actively involved in a school-based parent community and demonstrated leadership in his child's educational environment, while participant IB interpreted her life purpose more through a spiritual lens.

In managing everyday life situations, some participants described going through long adaptation processes, yet still demonstrated the ability to organize their daily

routines, develop personal coping strategies, and make decisions based on their child's needs. Participant II, for instance, initially experienced psychological pressure but gradually learned to adapt to her new life circumstances. Acceptance of both oneself and the child appeared in various forms, including through religious understanding, prior experiences, and communication with other parents.

All participants were also able to establish supportive social relationships, although the form and extent of these networks varied. Some participants were more open and socially active, while others maintained more limited yet meaningful connections. Such variations in the dynamics of achieving PWB are expected, as each participant has a unique background, personality, and life experience.

Throughout the parenting journey, several contributing factors, such as educational background, family experiences, personality traits, and gender, played a role in shaping how each individual constructed meaning in their lives.

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