
Optimizing Self-Acceptance in Mothers with Children with Down Syndrome Through a Reality Counseling Approach

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Abstract:

Mothers often experience profound sadness upon learning that their child has Down syndrome. The initial reactions include denial, shock, disbelief, and shame, which can lead to low self-acceptance, such as self-blame and refusal to accept the current situation. This research aims to increase self-acceptance in mothers with children who have Down syndrome through reality counseling (konseling realitas). The research uses a qualitative approach, with data collection methods including observation, interviews, and documentation. The reality counseling was conducted over four stages within six weeks. The results of this study indicate that reality counseling can effectively improve self-acceptance in mothers with children who have Down syndrome. This finding suggests that this counseling approach can assist mothers in adapting to their situation and improving their emotional well-being, which ultimately supports better parenting.

Keywords: *down syndrome children, mothers, quality of life, psychological support, reality counseling, self-acceptance.*

1. Introduction

The birth of a child is a moment that every parent cherishes. The hope of having a child who grows and develops normally is a common expectation. However, not all parents are given the opportunity to have children who develop as expected. Some parents, especially mothers, must accept the reality that their child has a developmental disorder, one of which is Down syndrome. Down syndrome is a condition caused by a chromosomal abnormality in which individuals are born with an extra chromosome, resulting in a total of 47 chromosomes instead of the normal 46 (Shafuria, Dwiarie & Hidayat, 2022). Children with Down syndrome generally experience delays in physical and cognitive development, affecting their quality of life and the well-being of their caregivers.

Upon discovering that their child has Down syndrome, many parents, especially mothers, experience shock and are unprepared to face this reality. The initial reactions often include denial and an inability to accept the child's condition (Istiadji & Wardhani, 2024). Mothers may feel like failures, leading to guilt, anxiety, and even stress due to the mismatch between their expectations and reality (Lestari & Fitri, 2021). This sense of helplessness often arises because mothers feel they have no control over their child's condition and struggle to plan for their child's future, which differs from that of typically developing children.

Self-acceptance, as a psychological concept, is crucial in overcoming the emotional challenges faced by individuals. Self-acceptance refers to the ability to acknowledge both one's strengths and weaknesses without rejection. Individuals who can accept themselves, both physically and psychologically, are better equipped to face life challenges, including those related to having a child with special needs. Low self-acceptance in mothers can lead to difficulties in parenting and building a positive relationship with their child. Conversely, higher self-acceptance allows mothers to provide better attention, love, and support to their children, optimizing the child's development (Afiyyah, Sarasati & Nugraha, 2023).

Various studies indicate that positive self-acceptance significantly impacts an individual's quality of life, particularly in mental health and social interactions. Individuals with high self-acceptance tend to have greater self-confidence and face life's challenges more calmly and optimistically. Self-acceptance is also closely related to a positive self-concept, which is essential for parents caring for children with special needs. Mothers with high self-acceptance can better support their children emotionally and physically, enhancing their overall well-being.

One psychological approach that can be used to improve self-acceptance is reality counseling. Developed by William Glasser, reality counseling focuses on individual responsibility for behaviors and decisions in facing life's realities. This approach teaches individuals to accept reality, take responsibility for their emotions and behaviors, and focus on achieving goals and solutions to problems (Glasser, 2010). Reality counseling can help mothers understand and accept their child's condition and develop concrete steps to provide the best support for their child, despite the challenges they face.

Recent studies show that reality counseling effectively improves self-acceptance across various groups, including children and adolescents experiencing psychological difficulties. However, despite its proven effectiveness in various contexts, limited research has explored its application for mothers of children with Down syndrome. This study aims to fill this gap by examining how reality counseling can enhance self-acceptance in mothers with children with Down syndrome.

This research is expected to contribute to developing more effective psychological interventions, particularly for parents of children with special needs. Through reality counseling, this study aims to provide new insights into effective ways to enhance mothers' self-acceptance and enrich knowledge in the field of counseling and psychology, focusing on parents' needs in raising children with Down syndrome.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research method with a case study approach, allowing the researchers to explore the deep meaning behind mothers' experiences in facing their child's Down syndrome condition. The research population consists of mothers with children diagnosed with Down syndrome registered at RS Ibnu Sina, particularly in the medical records department. The study subjects were selected using purposive sampling, with two mothers meeting specific criteria as research participants.

The research procedure began with selecting subjects willing to undergo reality counseling, followed by in-depth interviews to assess their self-acceptance before and after counseling. Additionally, observations were conducted to monitor changes in mothers' attitudes and behaviors during the counseling process, and documentation was used to collect relevant supporting data. The research instruments included in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation to obtain comprehensive data on the changes in mothers' self-acceptance. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes related to changes in self-acceptance after undergoing reality counseling. This analysis is expected to provide new insights into the effectiveness of reality counseling in enhancing self-acceptance among mothers of children with Down syndrome.

3. Results

This study aims to analyze the self-acceptance of mothers with children with Down syndrome after undergoing reality counseling. Based on interviews conducted with both subjects, A and SM, it was found that both initially had low self-acceptance. Subject A struggled to accept the reality that her third child had Down syndrome, experiencing feelings of helplessness and pessimism regarding her child's care. Subject SM, also a mother of a child with Down syndrome, felt deep sadness, an inability to accept her child's condition, and a lack of support from her surroundings.

As stated by Ismail (2008), a mother's self-acceptance includes confidence in her abilities, self-appreciation, the ability to accept praise and criticism objectively, recognizing weaknesses without self-blame, and being aware of and unashamed of her

circumstances. Both subjects began the counseling process feeling unprepared and pessimistic. However, through the four stages of reality counseling following Glasser's (1965) WDEP procedure (wants, direction and doing, evaluation, and planning), both subjects gradually showed improvement in self-acceptance.

1) Subject A

In the first stage of counseling, Subject A engaged with the counselor and began sharing her experiences after learning that her child had Down syndrome. She expressed feelings of denial and disbelief about her child's condition, along with a heavy psychological burden, such as feeling incapable and pessimistic about the cost of care. Subject A found it easier to accept this reality after receiving support from her husband and understanding that some things cannot be changed. In the second stage, she began taking concrete actions, such as caring for her child more attentively, despite lacking support from her surroundings. In the third stage, she reported that she had started accepting the shortcomings in her life and no longer blamed herself. By the fourth stage, Subject A recognized that what happened was fate and began planning steps to take better care of her children, although she still faced discomfort from her environment.

2) Subject SM

In the first stage, Subject SM expressed shock, disbelief, and sadness after discovering that her long-awaited first child had Down syndrome. She felt deeply devastated, especially due to a lack of support from her family and environment. In the second stage, the counselor helped her focus on the happiness she could find in her husband and accept that her child's condition could not be changed. After adopting this perspective, she started discussing her child's condition with her family. In the third stage, she reported that her parents had begun supporting her child's care by taking them to therapy. By the fourth stage, Subject SM felt more at peace with herself, although she still struggled with an unsupportive environment.

4. Discussion

This study reveals that the self-acceptance of mothers with children with Down syndrome is greatly influenced by their emotional reactions upon learning about their child's condition, such as shock, sadness, and helplessness. If not properly addressed, these reactions can lead to low self-acceptance, as found in Faradina's (2016) research. Reality counseling, which focuses on individual responsibility and managing present behavior, has been proven effective in improving mothers' self-acceptance. This approach helps mothers accept reality and plan more realistic steps in caring for their children.

The WDEP techniques in reality counseling, as suggested by Glasser (1998), assist mothers in assessing their needs and making better choices, thereby enhancing self-acceptance. The results of this study align with the findings of Astuti & Hastanti (2021), which indicate that reality counseling can improve self-acceptance in individuals facing difficult life situations. Overall, this study highlights the importance of social support and counseling in helping mothers overcome life challenges, care for children with Down syndrome, and improve their quality of life.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to improve the self-acceptance of mothers with children with Down syndrome through reality counseling. The findings indicate that both subjects initially denied their child's condition and had low self-acceptance due to a lack of support from their spouses and surroundings. After undergoing reality counseling, both subjects demonstrated increased self-acceptance. This approach helped them understand and accept their situation, motivating them to take better actions in facing life's challenges. This conclusion confirms that reality counseling is an effective method for enhancing self-acceptance in mothers of children with special needs, providing solutions to their emotional and social struggles.

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