



## Subjective well-being of the mothers of children with special needs in long-distance marriages

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### Abstract

This study aims to explore the subjective experiences of mothers in long-distance marriages (LDM) while raising a child with special needs, focusing on dimensions of subjective well-being (SWB), including life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect. Using qualitative methods with the Moustakas phenomenological approach, participants consisted of two primary subjects (mothers in long-distance marriages with a child with special needs) and four secondary subjects (close family members), selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis, then analyzed through the stages of *epoche*, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and meaning synthesis. The results showed that mothers experienced significant emotional challenges, such as loneliness, stress, physical and mental exhaustion, and anxiety in parenting. However, sources of positive affect were also found in the form of family support, small successes in child development, and communication with partners. Determinants of subjective well-being (SWB) include self-acceptance, social support, and life experiences. This study emphasizes the importance of adequate emotional and social support to maintain mothers' subjective well-being in the context of long-distance marriage with children with special needs.

**Keywords:** *subjective well-being; long-distance marriage; special needs of children's mothers*

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## **Introduction**

Raising a child with special needs carries continuous emotional, physical, and social demands (Brown & Knight, 2020). Recent studies confirm that mothers of children with disabilities are at elevated risk of parenting stress and psychological distress compared to mothers of typically developing children (Rahayuningsih & Andriani, 2020; Sugiharto et al., 2022). More recent findings further demonstrate that caregiver burden is negatively associated with psychological well-being and quality of life (Krisnandari et al., 2024; Ludji et al., 2024). This is due to the children's more complex needs, limited access to services, and social stigma. Meanwhile, research on long-distance marriages (LDM) found that couples in long-distance marriages face challenges such as loneliness, decreased emotional intimacy, limited communication, and a sense of loss of support from their partners (Wahyuni, 2023). Therefore, when these two conditions converge, it can be assumed that mothers face double pressures that have the potential to reduce their subjective well-being. Subjective well-being (SWB) encompasses affective and cognitive components: positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction (Diener, 1984).

Separate literature streams also explore long-distance marriages (LDM), documenting increased loneliness, reduced marital satisfaction, and psychological strain attributable to prolonged physical separation (Rizkina et al., 2021). However, research integrating LDM with child caregiving demands, particularly for children with special needs, remains scarce. Most studies investigate parenting stress or marital distance effects separately, leaving the intersection underexplored.

The phenomenon of long-distance marriages (LDM) is becoming increasingly common in Indonesian society. Globalization, job mobility, and economic demands mean many couples must live together without sharing a home. According to Armadi & Muhtadin (2025), long-distance marriages (LDM) arise due to work, education, and social factors that require couples to live apart for extended periods. This situation presents significant psychological challenges, especially for mothers left behind and responsible for the daily care of their families. The physical absence of a partner in a long-distance marriage (LDM) can reduce emotional support, increasing the risk of stress, loneliness, and a heavy parenting burden. Previous research (Raharja et al., 2020; Nugraha et al., 2023) shows that parents of children with special needs tend to experience higher levels of stress, and long-distance marriages (LDM) can exacerbate this psychological distress. However, some mothers are able to find sources of happiness through self-acceptance, spirituality, and social support. Communication quality and spirituality have been identified as resilience factors in LDM contexts (Mirzayanti et al., 2025).

However, on the other hand, several studies in positive psychology show that humans have the capacity to find happiness and subjective well-being even in difficult circumstances. The concept of subjective well-being (SWB) proposed by Diener (1984) explains that subjective well-being consists of three main components: positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction. Subjective well-being (SWB) is seen as an individual's evaluation of their life as a whole, both emotionally and cognitively. This means that even when facing difficulties, a person can still feel happiness and meaning in life if they are able to manage negative emotions, find sources of satisfaction, and maintain positive affect.

Factors supporting subjective well-being (SWB) have been extensively researched, including self-acceptance and social support. Ryff (1989) emphasized that self-acceptance is a core aspect of psychological well-being, enabling individuals to face limitations with a positive attitude. According to Sarafino and Smith (2014), social support acts as a buffer against stress and helps individuals cope more adaptively with life's pressures. These two factors are believed to play a crucial role for mothers facing the dual burden of caring for a child with special needs while maintaining a long-distance marriage (LDM).

In Indonesia, research on subjective well-being (SWB) in mothers of children with special needs has begun to develop, as has research on the dynamics of long-distance marriages (LDM).

However, research specifically combining these two conditions remains very limited. This phenomenon is quite evident in society, particularly in middle-class families where the husband works out of town or abroad while the wife is solely responsible for childcare, including children with special needs. In other words, there is a research gap in the study of family psychology in Indonesia, particularly regarding how mothers build and maintain subjective well-being (SWB) amidst the pressures of long-distance marriages (LDM) and raising children with special needs.

This research is significant because it offers a novel approach to maternal subjective well-being (SWB) in a context rarely explored before. Furthermore, it utilizes Moustakas' phenomenological approach, which allows researchers to delve deeply into subjective experiences, allowing the results to be not only descriptive but also reveal the essence of the experience.

Thus, this study aims to: (1) understand the subjective experiences of mothers in undergoing a long distance marriage (LDM) with a child with special needs, (2) describe the dynamics of negative affect, positive affect, and life satisfaction that form subjective well-being (SWB), and (3) identify factors that support subjective well-being (SWB) , especially self-acceptance and social support. This study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of subjective well-being (SWB) studies in the family context, as well as practical contributions in the form of recommendations for psychological and social interventions for families with similar conditions.

## Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with the Moustakas phenomenological method to deeply understand the subjective experiences of mothers in long-distance marriages and with children with special needs. Participants (Table 1) consisted of two main subjects: mothers who met the criteria for being married, had been in a long-distance marriage (LDM) for at least one year, had a child with special needs aged 5–18 years, and were willing to be interviewed. In addition, four secondary informants, namely close family members, were involved to enrich the research data. This study employed purposive sampling to select participants who met the criteria relevant to the research focus.

Table 1. Participants of the Study

Subject	Age	Duration of LDM	Child's Condition	Secondary Informants
FH	47	7 years	Cerebral palsy	Mother, child
NN	36	3 years	ADHD	Siblings

In phenomenological research, depth of experience is prioritized over sample size. The focus is on rich, detailed exploration of lived meaning rather than generalization (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, two primary participants were considered sufficient to achieve thematic saturation. All participants provided informed consent before participation. They were informed about the research objectives, voluntary participation, confidentiality of data, and their right to withdraw at any time. Pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were used to explore mothers' personal experiences related to subjective well-being in facing the challenges of parenting a child with special needs in the context of a long-distance marriage (LDM). The next step was to obtain verbal permission from the three subjects to participate by providing factual information and data. Furthermore, interview guidelines and informed consent were prepared to be given to the subjects to be willing to participate in this study. Observations were conducted to understand the mother's interactions with her child and their environment, while document analysis was used to complement the information from the interviews and observations.

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Data analysis followed Moustakas's four phenomenological stages: epoche (the researcher suspends personal assumptions and prejudices regarding the phenomenon under study), phenomenological reduction (identifying the essential meaning of participants' experiences), imaginative variation (exploring possible structures of experience), and synthesis of meaning (combining textural and structural descriptions to gain a holistic understanding of the essence of the experience). Data credibility was maintained through source triangulation, extended observation, and increased researcher diligence in the data collection and analysis process.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Result**

The results of this study indicate that the subjective perceptions and personal experiences of mothers with special needs are fraught with complex emotional, physical, and social challenges. Mothers view their lives as a struggle that requires extra patience, acceptance of their children's conditions, and the ability to manage their emotions sustainably. Long-distance marriages (LDMs) often leave them feeling lonely, anxious, and afraid of making the wrong parenting decisions, especially when their children exhibit challenging behaviors. However, mothers also feel joy and pride when they see their children's small progress, which motivates them to persevere. Subjectively, both participating mothers described their lives as a series of struggles that require patience, determination, and deep self-acceptance. They face situations where parenting decisions often have to be made alone without their partners' physical presence. This situation gives rise to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and worry about their children's development. However, they also feel pride and joy when they see their children show progress, whether in cognitive, social, or emotional skills. This study produced several main themes that describe the subjective experiences of mothers who are in long-distance marriages (LDMs) while simultaneously caring for children with special needs (Table 2). Based on Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological analysis, the following themes were obtained:

### **1. Negative Affect: Pressure, Stress, and Loneliness**

Both participants indicated experiencing strong negative affect in their daily lives.

- **Subject FH (47 years old, 7 years in a long-distance marriage (LDM), child with spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy):**

*"Sometimes I feel tired, tired from overthinking, especially for children who are going through puberty."*

*"For W, mobility is because his body is already big, while his height is this, handling W is just overwhelming."*

- **Subject NN (36 years old, 3 years in a long distance marriage (LDM), child with ADHD.**

*"That month was the worst. It was like this, every time I prayed, I thought, 'Oh God, why did I get this, Oh God? What did I do wrong? What is this, this, this?' I felt like I couldn't accept it."*

She also sometimes experiences emotional challenges due to the lack of physical support from her husband, especially when dealing with her child's tantrums.

*"Well, the weight is just right when the child's mood is really down... he misses his papa. We have to cut it off first, take off all the therapy first. That's where it is. Sometimes I feel like "oh, I've been in for a week, there's no therapy going on" baa, that's the most. I feel like I've just lost like that, you know. I'm not sorry, it's not a financial loss, no... I just mean a loss "oh, it's been a week, I should have made progress." Well, that's how it is. It means."*

This negative affect is consistent with research by Rahayuningsih and Andriani (2020), which shows that parents of children with special needs are more susceptible to parenting stress and emotional exhaustion. Combined with long-distance marriages (LDM), the level of stress experienced by mothers is multiplied.

## 2. Positive Affect: Gratitude and Happiness in Small Things

Even though they were colored by negative affects, both subjects still showed positive affects in their lives.

- **FH:**

*"As for W in particular, he seems to be becoming more independent. W is actually the disciplined type, and if we just tell him to, he can do it. He's a diligent kid. He's a great student of the Qur'an, even when we're in the village, he asks for the Qur'an. "Where's W's Qur'an?" That's quite encouraging and makes me happy."*

Apart from that, the presence of her husband at home and the moments of togetherness when the family members gather together also give FH a special sense of happiness.

*"Nowadays, spending time together is truly a joy, meeting with family. Weekends can be complete, with everyone together."*

- **NN:**

*"Of course. Look at his progress. In the first three months, he was already able to communicate with his father. Where's Dad? So I feel like, oh, it's not in vain."*

This positive affect indicates self-acceptance in the mothers. They are able to find small sources of happiness that reinforce a sense of meaning even in difficult circumstances. This finding aligns with Seligman's (2002) research on positive psychology, which emphasizes the importance of *gratitude* as one of the keys to happiness.

## 3. Life Satisfaction: Acceptance and Meaning of Life

Both mothers expressed satisfaction with life despite facing great challenges.

- **FH:**

*"Why should we be ashamed? Well, that's what reinforces that. Our children aren't our choice. We can't choose what kind of children we want to have. It's God's way of raising us that may be what He wants us to have. Perhaps our patience is being tested."*

- **NN:**

*"Yesterday I chatted with the principal, he said he doesn't need therapy anymore, he said. But his mother was still like, "Oh, he's already 8 years old, he still can't differentiate between tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, yesterday, that feels a bit difficult, you know. But that's it, according to the miss, the principal, the principal is a psychologist, he has a Master's degree. If the principal said he doesn't need therapy anymore, as time goes by he will understand on his own, he said. But his mother, it's not that she's demanding too much, no, it's just that she's annoyed, "oh, just a little bit more." That's annoying."*

*"Yeah... at least my brother is just more settled, right? What do you mean by that, eee... if there's still homework right now, I don't know tomorrow, the day after tomorrow or now. That's all. I just hope he can get along with the other kids."*

These findings support Diener's (1984) concept of life satisfaction, which emphasizes an individual's cognitive evaluation of their life as a whole. Despite facing difficulties, subjects still judged their lives to be meaningful and worth living.

## 4. SWB Supporting Factors: Self-Acceptance and Social Support

The two main factors that support the subjective well-being of both mothers are:

- **Self-Acceptance:** Both subjects initially showed feelings of sadness and denial when they learned about their child's special needs, but over time both subjects showed the ability to

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accept their child's condition and the long-distance marriage (LDM) situation with an open heart.

Based on FH's statement:

*"It's so sad, he's embarrassed to leave the house"*

*"Well, that's what reinforces that. Our children aren't our choice. We can't choose what kind of children we want to have. It's God's way of raising us that might be what He wants us to have. Perhaps our patience is being tested."*

Based on NN's statement:

*"That was right at the beginning. Dad was already asleep, my older brother was already asleep. He opened Google, from 9 am sometimes until 4 am. That's what I really read. What is ADHD? What causes it? You know. So there's a sense of self-acceptance, so we don't get stressed. At first, it was true that my child had ADHD, especially since there were doctors who said ADHD couldn't be cured. There were things like, "ADHD can't be cured, it's permanent for life." If people don't understand, they'll be down. It turns out, "Oh, therapy can help, oh, it can, oh, like this, oh, there's a solution," aaa that."*

This matter is in accordance with the self-acceptance dimension in Ryff's (1989) psychological well-being theory.

- **Social Support:** Support received from the immediate family, especially the husband (even if long-distance), is a significant protective factor. This support takes the form of not only practical assistance but also emotional support, such as attention, empathy, and consistent communication. This finding aligns with the theory of Sarafino & Smith (2014), which states that social support functions as a buffer against stress.

Based on FH's statement:

*"Well, it's Dad who always encourages me. It's true that children are a test."*

*"... if not, if you feel alone... wow... I don't think I'll be able to take care of three children alone. Communication also needs to be intense, okay?"*

Based on NN's statement:

*"The only one who supported me at that time was my mother, my mother, and my younger sibling who was an elementary school teacher."*

Table 2. Aspect-indicator of responses of the participants

No.	Aspect/ Indicator	FH 47 years old, child with spastic quadriplegia cerebral palsy, 7 years old LDM	NN 36 years old, child with ADHD, 3 years old LDM
1.	<b>Negative Affect: Pressure, Stress, and Loneliness</b>	Feeling like you're carrying a "double burden" (mother, father, teacher, therapist). Experiencing physical and emotional exhaustion, especially as your child's physical needs increase.	Frustrated by stigma/comments. Distressed when a child's tantrums disrupt therapy. Sometimes asking "Why me?" at the lowest point.

No.	Aspect/ Indicator	FH 47 years old, child with spastic quadriplegia cerebral palsy, 7 years old LDM	NN 36 years old, child with ADHD, 3 years old LDM
2.	<b>Positive Gratitude and Happiness in Small Things</b>	<b>Affect:</b> Happiness in seeing your child's small progress (discipline, independence, perseverance, reciting the Qur'an). Feeling happy when the family gathers, when the husband comes home.	Feeling happy to see my child's small achievements (communication, progress in school). feeling strengthened by my husband's emotional support (even via video call) and the help of my family (parents, siblings).
3.	<b>Life Acceptance and Meaning of Life</b>	<b>Satisfaction:</b> Strong religious acceptance → viewing the child's condition as a test from God. Finding peace through prayer, struggles are seen as meaningful.	Gaining strength from daily companionship with your child. Finding meaning in your child's development, even if it's imperfect.
4.	<b>SWB Factors: Acceptance and Social Support</b>	<b>Supporting Self- and</b> Self-acceptance based on spirituality. Emotional support from a husband, even if limited by distance.	Self-acceptance through knowledge → actively seeking information about ADHD, reframing the condition as something that can be managed. Strong support from parents and siblings.

The primary pattern (Table 3) of subjective well-being in both participants demonstrated a dual-process dynamic, in which negative and positive affect occurred simultaneously. However, the presence of self-acceptance and social support served as regulatory mechanisms that maintained the balance of subjective well-being.

Table 3. The Primary Pattern of Subjective Well-Being In Both Participants

Main Theme	Dynamics on FH	Dynamics on NN	General Pattern
Negative Affect	Dominant physical exhaustion	Dominant social frustration	Double burden & loneliness
Positive Affect	Spiritual gratitude	Informational coping	Joy in little progress
Life Satisfaction	Religious meaning-making	Developmental hope	Meaning-centered coping
Supporting Factors	Spiritual acceptance	Cognitive reframing	Self-acceptance & social support

## Discussion

This study demonstrates that the subjective well-being (SWB) of mothers in long-distance marriages (LDM) with children with special needs is dynamic. They experience significant psychological distress in the form of stress, loneliness, and fatigue. However, they are still able to find positive affect and life satisfaction. This suggests a dual process in subjective well-being (SWB), where negative and positive affect can coexist, but not always cancel each other out.

The findings of this study also support Diener's (1984) theory of subjective well-being (SWB), which states that subjective well-being is not simply the absence of negative emotions, but rather a combination of cognitive (life satisfaction) and affective (positive and negative affect) evaluations. Thus, even when negative affect is dominant, mothers can still maintain subjective well-being (SWB) through self-acceptance and social support.

### **1. Negative Affect**

The results showed that both subjects, FH and NN, experienced psychological distress in the form of stress, fatigue, loneliness, and frustration. In FH, negative affect arose due to the physical and emotional demands of caring for a child with cerebral palsy who requires full support. Meanwhile, in NN, negative affect was seen in frustration with the impulsive behavior of a child with ADHD, particularly during tantrums.

These findings support research by Rahayuningsih & Andriani (2020), which states that parents of children with special needs are vulnerable to parenting stress and emotional distress. In the context of long-distance marriage (LDM), negative affect increases due to the limited physical presence of the partner, consistent with Wahyuni's (2023) findings, which emphasize loneliness as one of the main psychological impacts of long-distance marriages.

### **2. Positive Affect**

Despite facing significant pressure, both subjects were able to experience positive affect. FH felt happy when she saw her child's small developments, while NN found joy in her husband's emotional support through long-distance communication and the presence of a community of parents with children with special needs.

This aligns with the concept of resilience in positive psychology (Seligman, 2002), which states that individuals can find happiness despite limitations. The positive affect that emerged demonstrates the two mothers' ability to engage in meaning-making, namely finding meaning in suffering. Furthermore, these results reinforce Diener's (1984) view that happiness is not simply the absence of negative emotions, but also the experience of positive emotions that provide a sense of balance in life.

### **3. Life Satisfaction**

Both subjects demonstrated life satisfaction through self-acceptance and a belief that their struggles were meaningful. FH emphasized accepting the condition of children and a long-distance marriage as a destiny that must be endured, while NN found meaning in the daily struggles with her children.

These findings support Diener's (1984) theory of subjective well-being, which states that life satisfaction is a cognitive evaluation of life as a whole. This satisfaction is not measured by the absence of difficulties, but rather by the extent to which an individual perceives their life as meaningful. This is also consistent with Surah Al-Insyirah, verse 5, which reminds us that every difficulty is always accompanied by ease, so acceptance and fortitude are key to maintaining life satisfaction.

#### **4. Supporting Factors: Self-Acceptance and Social Support**

The two main factors supporting the mothers' subjective well-being in this study were self-acceptance and social support. FH and NN both demonstrated high levels of self-acceptance, enabling them to reconcile with their child's condition and their long-distance marriage. This aligns with Ryff's (1989) theory, which states that self-acceptance is a core dimension of psychological well-being.

Furthermore, social support has been shown to play a significant role. FH felt helped by other children and her biological parents, while NN gained strength from communicating with her husband, family, and the community of parents of children with special needs. These findings are consistent with Sarafino & Smith (2014), who stated that social support serves as a buffer against stress. The emotional, instrumental, and informational support individuals receive can increase their psychological resilience in dealing with life's stresses.

This study shows that subjective well-being among mothers raising children with special needs in long-distance marriages (LDM) reflects the coexistence of psychological strain and adaptive meaning-making. This pattern supports Diener's (1984) multidimensional model, in which positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction interact yet remain distinct components.

Consistent with international research, life satisfaction among mothers in this study was shaped by acceptance and cognitive reframing, which resonates with findings on how social support strengthens life satisfaction through increased resilience in families with special needs children (Yildirim et al., 2025). This parallels evidence that supportive networks play a direct role in enhancing life satisfaction outcomes for mothers facing prolonged stress. In this study, marital distance intensified loneliness and fatigue due to reduced daily spousal support, extending findings on LDM-related strain. Despite these stressors, positive affect particularly gratitude and joy from children's developmental progress was evident. This aligns with resilience perspectives suggesting that positive emotions can coexist with stress and buffer its impact (Taylor et al., 2022). Similar findings from Canada and Australia indicate that small developmental gains foster parental meaning reconstruction and emotional recovery (Lee et al., 2023).

Importantly, this study integrates caregiving stress with marital configuration. While prior research examined these factors separately, the findings suggest that marital distance reshapes caregiving experiences by limiting shared parenting, though adaptive communication mitigates its impact (Mirzayanti et al., 2025). Spirituality functioned as a complementary coping resource rather than a primary determinant, consistent with evidence that religiosity moderates well-being processes (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2020). Social support remained a central protective factor; even in physical separation, emotional availability via communication technology strengthened perceived support (Desiningrum et al., 2025).

Overall, subjective well-being in this context is shaped not only by caregiving intensity but also by marital structure. Integrating caregiving demands and LDM expands family stress models by incorporating relational configuration into well-being analysis. From a positive psychology perspective, resilience and meaning-making were central processes. Mothers framed hardship as part of a meaningful life journey, supported by spiritual interpretations emphasizing hope and relational tranquility.

Practically, interventions should prioritize acceptance-based counseling and strengthened social support networks for mothers in LDM contexts. Community and governmental programs can reduce isolation and enhance psychological resilience.

#### **Conclusion**

This study aims to explore the subjective well-being (SWB) of mothers in long-distance marriages (LDM) while simultaneously raising a child with special needs, using Moustakas' phenomenological approach. The results showed that both participants experienced negative affect in the form of stress, fatigue, loneliness, and frustration due to the double burden of

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caregiving and the limited role of their physically absent husbands. However, the mothers were also able to experience positive affect, such as gratitude, happiness for their children's small achievements, and emotional support from their husbands through long-distance communication. Life satisfaction emerged through self-acceptance and the ability to interpret the struggles they underwent as a form of responsibility and a valuable trust.

Two key factors supporting mothers' subjective well-being are self-acceptance and social support. Self-acceptance allows them to come to terms with their circumstances, while social support from partners, family, and community serves as a buffer against stress. These findings corroborate Diener's (1984) theory of subjective well-being (SWB), Ryff's (1989) concept of psychological well-being, and Sarafino & Smith's (2014) theory of social support. They also align with religious values that emphasize patience, gratitude, and the meaning of life beyond hardship.

Theoretically, this research contributes to expanding the study of subjective well-being in the unique context of mothers in long-distance marriages (LDM) with children with special needs, a topic rarely studied in Indonesia. Practically, this research emphasizes the importance of strengthening family and community support, as well as the need for psychological interventions to foster self-acceptance and resilience in mothers with similar conditions.

This study aimed to explore the subjective well-being (SWB) of mothers in long-distance marriages (LDM) while simultaneously raising a child with special needs using Moustakas' phenomenological approach. The findings indicate that mothers experience significant negative affect in the form of stress, fatigue, loneliness, and frustration due to the dual burden of caregiving and the limited physical presence of their husbands. However, these negative emotional experiences do not eliminate their capacity to experience positive affect, such as gratitude, joy in their children's small developmental achievements, and emotional strength derived from communication with their partners and family support. Life satisfaction emerges through self-acceptance, spirituality, and the ability to interpret their struggles as meaningful responsibilities and life trust.

Two central factors supporting mothers' subjective well-being are self-acceptance and social support. Self-acceptance enables mothers to reconcile with their child's condition and the realities of long-distance marriage, while social support functions as a psychological buffer against stress. These findings reinforce the multidimensional concept of subjective well-being proposed by Diener (1984), in which positive and negative affect coexist alongside life satisfaction, as well as Ryff's (1989) emphasis on self-acceptance as a core dimension of psychological well-being and Sarafino and Smith's (2014) theory of social support as a stress-buffering mechanism.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of family psychology and positive psychology, particularly in the Indonesian socio-cultural context. First, it expands the discourse on subjective well-being by demonstrating that SWB in mothers facing dual stressors long-distance marriage and parenting a child with special needs is dynamic and dialectical. Negative and positive affect coexist rather than operate in a mutually exclusive manner. Second, this study enriches the understanding of resilience and meaning-making within family systems, highlighting how self-acceptance and spirituality function as internal psychological resources. Thus, the findings offer a contextualized contribution to the literature on subjective well-being within vulnerable family structures and provide empirical support for integrating positive psychology perspectives into family psychology research.

### **Practical Contribution**

Practically, this study underscores the urgency of structured support systems for mothers in similar conditions. Several implications can be drawn:

1. Family Support Programs: Development of structured family support programs that involve husbands, extended family members, and parenting education to strengthen shared responsibility despite physical distance.

2. Acceptance-Based Counseling: Implementation of counseling interventions grounded in acceptance-based approaches (e.g., acceptance-focused coping strategies) to help mothers process emotional distress and foster adaptive meaning-making.
3. Community-Based Services: Strengthening community services, including peer support groups for parents of children with special needs, psychoeducational workshops, and accessible mental health services to prevent isolation and chronic stress.

These interventions may enhance protective factors and sustain mothers' subjective well-being in the long term.

### **Research Limitations**

This study has several limitations. First, the number of primary participants was limited to two mothers, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Second, the research context was relatively specific, focusing on particular family backgrounds and socio-cultural settings, which may not represent the broader diversity of long-distance marriage experiences in Indonesia. Third, as a qualitative phenomenological study, the findings reflect subjective interpretations and may not capture broader quantitative patterns of SWB.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Future research is recommended to involve a larger and more diverse sample to enhance representativeness across socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Quantitative or mixed-method studies could be conducted to measure levels of subjective well-being more comprehensively and test the relationships between self-acceptance, social support, spirituality, and resilience statistically. Additionally, longitudinal research would be valuable to examine changes in mothers' subjective well-being over time, particularly as children grow older and family dynamics evolve. Further studies may also explore intervention-based research to evaluate the effectiveness of acceptance-based counseling and community support programs in improving maternal well-being.

In conclusion, despite facing dual vulnerabilities, mothers in long-distance marriages with children with special needs demonstrate psychological resilience through self-acceptance, social support, and meaning-making processes. Strengthening these protective factors is essential not only for sustaining maternal well-being but also for fostering healthier family functioning overall.

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