



The experiences of gratitude in female ulama: An interpretation from Sufi psychology and PERMA-Model perspective

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Abstract: Amidst the social-cultural predominance of male ulama in the religious context, female ulama play important roles and yet are often trapped in life-role complexity and gender bias, as they have a responsibility in both the domestic and public domains. This study aims to explore the meaning of the experience of gratitude among female ulama based on the perspective of positive psychology, with reference to the PERMA (Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationship, Meaning, and Accomplishment) model, with further interpretation of gratitude (*shukr*) from Sufi psychology. Using a qualitative (phenomenological) approach, we held online in-depth interviews with five female ulama participants from across Indonesia and Germany. The research demonstrates the interconnection between themes related to gratitude according to PERMA-Model and the embodiment of gratitude (*shukr*) in Sufi psychology. These findings provide evidence to support the practical implication of the integrative intervention of Positive and Sufi psychology for clinical purposes or to promote flourishing and well-being among women.

Keywords: female ulama; gratitude; PERMA; Sufi psychology

Abstrak: Di tengah dominasi ulama laki-laki yang secara umum diakui dalam budaya dan tatanan sosial dalam konteks keagamaan, ulama perempuan sejatinya memiliki peran penting, namun sering terjebak dalam kompleksitas tuntutan peran dan bias gender dalam ranah domestik dan publik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggali makna atas pengalaman kebersyukuran yang dilihat dari sudut pandang psikologi positif (*PERMA: Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationship, Meaning, and Accomplishment*). Sudut pandang Psikologi sufi kemudian digunakan untuk pemaknaan lebih lanjut. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif (fenomenologis) dengan metode wawancara mendalam secara daring melibatkan lima orang ulama perempuan dari berbagai daerah di Indonesia dan Jerman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan kesalingterkaitan antara tema-tema kebersyukuran yang diinterpretasikan menggunakan perspektif PERMA dan Psikologi sufi. Temuan penelitian ini memungkinkan adanya intervensi yang mengintegrasikan prinsip Psikologi positif dan Psikologi sufi sebagai intervensi klinis maupun promotif untuk meningkatkan *flourishing* dan kesejahteraan psikologis perempuan.

Kata Kunci: ulama perempuan; kebersyukuran; PERMA; Psikologi sufi

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Introduction

The term “ulama” in Indonesia usually refers to people regarded as Muslim scholars who have mastered a significant level of Islamic knowledge and acquired religious authority (Ismah, 2016). This authority usually relates to their role in the public sphere, especially in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). Male ulama, or in *pesantren* known as *Kyai*, are primary agents who play decisive roles and have earned absolute authority. Along with their deep religious knowledge, problem solving, and conflict resolution skills, *Kyai* perform, lead, manage, and serve the public environment. On the other hand, *Nyai* (*Kyais'* wives) play subordinate roles, have less authority, and act more in domestic rather than public affairs, and always under the supervision of *Kyai* (Dhofier, 2010; Marhumah, 2010). However, beside engaging in domestic affairs inside the *pesantren*, female ulama have also been associated with many public actions, such as being religious speakers, lecturers, or *mubalighah* (Islamic preachers) (Hasanuddin, 2018). They can also be professionals with various tasks, such as educators, teachers, lecturers, politicians, *pesantren* caregivers, and Islamic teaching forum (*majelis ta'lim*) caretakers (Asmani, 2015).

Amidst the patriarchal tradition in Indonesia, female ulama are united and act as leaders in agencies inside Islamic organizations. They have also fought for their voices, established, gathered and developed many forms of agencies, foundations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Activities inside these agencies consequently add to the complexity of their life roles and tasks, as they require the skill to create a balance while being challenged by gender bias, tradition, and social expectations regarding female ulama.

Syukur (2018) highlights the fact that in Indonesian Islamic institutions, even if a woman

has a brilliant capacity, she may not be automatically regarded as an ulama. Williams and Dempsey (2014) identify this condition as one form of gender bias toward women in the professional context. Society tends to align professionals with masculine rather than feminine stereotypes. This situation means that women (in this case, female ulama) have to prove themselves over and over again, and make more effort and perform actions to convince others that they have equal potential and the right to exist in the religious sphere as men. The combination of the multiple roles and challenges to achieve a work-life balance potentially manifests itself as a stressor, and may affect women's well-being as well as their mental health (Cabrerera, 2015; Matlin, 2012). Female ulama face the same risks as any other women. Therefore, the experience of female ulama as women who constantly juggle their multiple roles need to be explored, to understand how they manage to experience gratitude and thrive to achieve a happy and meaningful life.

Happiness is a construct deeply rooted in the hedonic perspective of well-being. Being happy consists three elements: having positive emotions, engagement, and meaning (M. Seligman, 2004; Seligman, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Despite focusing only on positive emotions, Diener defined well-being as being associated with life satisfaction and the frequency, as well as intensity, of positive and negative emotional experiences (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1999; Ng et al., 2021; Warsah, 2020). As the concept of well-being evolved from the hedonic to eudaemonic perspective, subjective or individual areas are not the only element to promote well-being, which must also include social, community, and institutional aspects. Having social support and being treated with respect create the feeling of happiness and are absolutely necessary for achieving well-being (Diener et al., 2018; Diener & Seligman, 2002, 2004). The highest level of well-being is

achieved when an individual lives a healthy life with positive experiences, in the role of an individual and social being, in a process known as flourishing (Effendy, 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

PERMA-Model constructed by Seligman (2011) refers to the way to flourish, and is an acronym of the five domains: Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationship, Meaning, and Achievement or Accomplishment. Positive emotions refer to hedonic and self-satisfaction feelings of happiness (being joyful, content, ecstatic, or cheerful). The second domain, engagement, refers to the mental connection with activities or organizations (being absorbed, interested, and engaged). The third domain of positive relationships concerns the feeling of being socially integrated, cared for and supported by others, and satisfied with social connections. The fourth domain, meaning, refers to a sense of belief that one's life is valuable and the feeling of being connected to something greater than oneself. The final domain, accomplishment, involves the progress made towards goals, feeling capable to perform daily activities, and the sense of achievement.

Seligman (2011) emphasizes that these five pillars contribute to overall well-being, are important notions that people pursue for their own sake, and can be measured independently of one another. In explaining the idea of flourishing, Seligman discusses the importance of gratitude, which he states constitutes human flourishing, and simultaneously contributes to well-being with other elements: happiness, flow, meaning, love, accomplishment, growth, and better relationships. Gratitude can make life happier and more satisfying. When people feel gratitude, they will benefit from the pleasant memory of a positive event in life. Moreover, when people express gratitude to others in terms of actions, they strengthen their relationship with them.

Gratitude can be perceived as “a moral virtue, an attitude, an emotion, a habit, a personality trait, and a coping response” (Emmons et al., 2003; Lambert et al., 2009). Gratitude has also been defined as the feeling a person has when they experience a benefit purposely provided by another individual, by resources, objects, and places, or even by qualities of the self (Emmons et al., 2003). Bausert and Froh (2016) define gratitude as a disposition or mood that enables people to respond positively to others to receive benefits from them.

Emmons et al. (2003) conceptualized four dimensions or perspectives of the experience of gratitude. First, the dispositional perspective concerns how gratitude is manifested in general terms, referring to the labelling of tendencies of how people value their overall life experiences in all circumstances in relation to being grateful or ungrateful. This refers more to how people label themselves as being grateful in general, across a wide time range and life situations. Second, the benefit perspective refers to how people respond to a benefit they have received. It concerns how people are grateful for *something*. Third, the benefactor perspective views gratitude as how much people value other particular person who has constantly given them benefits in the past and who has not. It is particularly concerned with how they are grateful to *someone*. Fourth, the benefit from benefactor perspective is the gratitude resulting from the merger between a particular benefit and a particular benefactor. It refers to how people are grateful *to someone for something*.

Describing the lived experience of gratitude in female ulama may lead the topic toward spirituality or religious domain. A few studies have underlined the centrality of gratitude in spirituality. Fredrickson (2004) found that gratitude builds and strengthens it. The concept of gratitude in Islam is clearly described in the work of Emmons and Crumpler (2000) through verses

in the Holy Qur'an, the pillars of Islam, and sufism. Many verses and chapters in the Holy Qur'an repeatedly assert the importance of gratitude and thankfulness to God in all circumstances. True and sincere gratitude will draw more abundant graces upon the believer. Daily Islamic prayers (*salat*) and fasting during the month of Ramadhan do not merely serve as religious routines, but also as leading emotional states to express praise, adoration, and gratitude to God.

Gratitude in Sufi terminology is known as *shukr*. As stated by Ibn al-Qayyim, this is the appearance of God's grace, expressed by the tongue of His servant, by praise and acknowledgment, in heart by witnesses and love, and in limbs by submission and obedience (al-Qayyim, 1996). According to al-Ghazali (2008), *shukr* comprises: 1) knowledge (*'ilm*), 2) condition (*hāl*), and 3) action (*'amal*). The knowledge of *shukr* refers to understand that blessing comes from Allah, the One who ever create blessings. The second state of gratitude is the condition that comes from His bounties, and it is the joy of the one who is blessed with the form of submission and humility. The third level is to act with gratitude, which is to do what is intended by the one who seek to please and loves Allah. The action pertains to the heart, the limbs, and the tongue. The action of gratitude in the heart, as the good intention to thank that Allah is loving and merciful. As for the act of giving thanks with the tongue, it is expressing gratitude to with the praises that indicate the gratefulness. As for the act of gratitude with the limbs, it uses the blessings of Allah as the expression of obedience and to refrain from disobedience.

As originally stated by al-Ghazali (2008), Schimmel (2011) highlights the same lines about the stages of gratitude. It is divided into different ranks: gratitude for the gift, gratitude for not giving, and gratitude for the capacity to be grateful. Although the common man deserves to be

applauded when he expresses his gratitude for receiving a gift, Sufi teaches that everyone should give thanks even if their wish is not fulfilled or a hope is not achieved. People are expected to be able to see the blessings veiled in affliction as God's work and wisdom. The final state of gratitude relies in the recognition that no amount of worship to God is sufficient, and that even the feelings of gratitude itself are a gift from God.

Sufism, as the mystical core of Islam, involves a broad context of teachings and mechanisms, resulting in a variety of applied sciences or practices. Sufi psychology concerns the application of sufism, as the science of the soul. It seeks unified oneness, in which every aspect of one's being is in harmony, based on the concept *Lā ilāha illā Allāh*, which means there is only one God. Through his actions, the Prophet taught that whatever exists in an individual has to come to a point and present itself. When this occurs, the absolute knowledge of oneness with existence is attained (Wilcox, 2014).

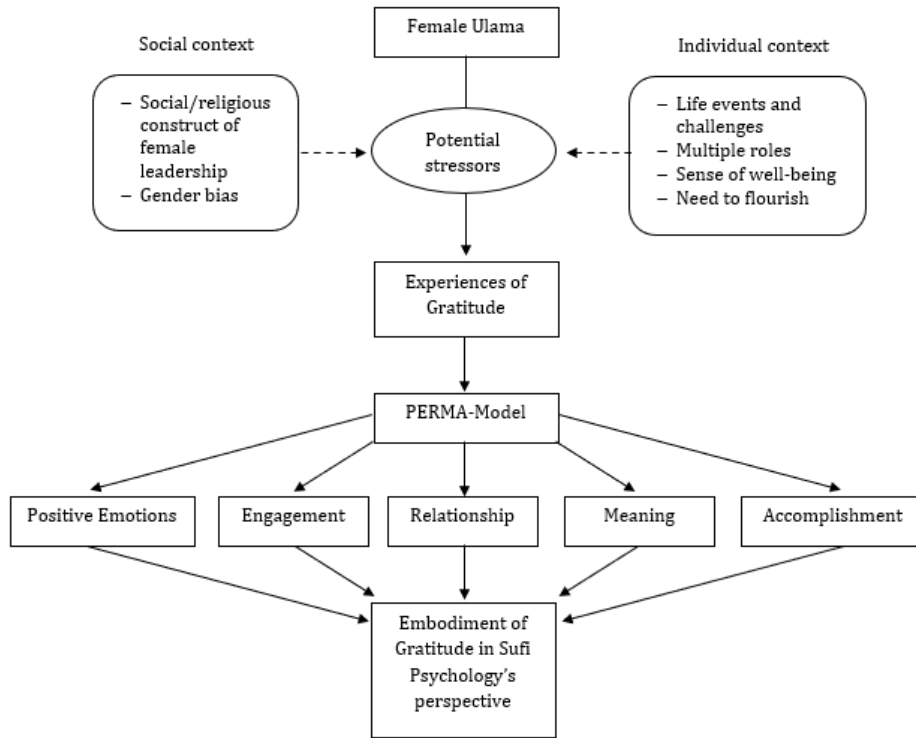
Despite the large numbers of studies and theories on gratitude, the approach of this study is notably distinct, as it uses a multi-perspective to explore the living experience of gratitude from the perspective of the PERMA-Model and Sufi psychology. The research, which is conducted using the qualitative approach of phenomenological analysis, is framed in two research questions: 1) How does the PERMA-Model explain the experience of gratitude in female ulama? and 2) How does Sufi psychology interpret the experience of gratitude in female ulama? The conceptual model of the analysis of gratitude in this research is shown in Figure 1.

Method

Design

The study used qualitative research methods with a phenomenological design to gain insight into the lived experiences of gratitude among

Figure 1
Conceptual Model of the Analysis of the Experience of Gratitude



female ulama in managing the complexities of women with multiple roles. The qualitative research method is considered an appropriate tool for researchers to frame phenomena with an interpretive paradigm through descriptions, the reading of symbols, and the giving of meaning (Merriam, 2009). In addition, the phenomenological approach helped the researchers to explore self-awareness while allowing the participants to narrate their stories of gratitude based on their lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Participants

All the study participants were female ulama who were members of the same organization of *Jam'iyah Perempuan Pengasuh Pesantren dan Muballighoh* (JP3M). Five participants were selected by considering the need for a reasonable

sample size for a phenomenological research design, which according to Creswell and Creswell (2018) is in the range of 3 to 10. Table 1 summarizes the participants' characteristics, with pseudonyms used.

The participant inclusion criteria were as follows: that they were regarded as female ulama currently leading an Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) and/or organization in their local region and were willing to participate in the study. As shown in Table 1, the participants were adult women aged over 30, representing different regions of Indonesia. One was a female ulama from Indonesia, but currently living in Germany. The consideration in selecting participants from different regions and cultural backgrounds and with characteristics are refers to the nature of

Table 1
Characteristics of the Participants (N=5)

Characteristics	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Initials	HN	UM	FR	CH	FF
Age (years)	55	43	37	59	47
Region	Lampung, Sumatra	Banyumas, Central Java	Sidoarjo, East Java	Germany	Magelang, Central Java
Education	High school	S2	S3	Islamic boarding school (<i>Pesantren</i>)	S1
Leadership status	<i>Pesantren</i> Leader and Caregiver	<i>Pesantren</i> Leader and Caregiver	<i>Pesantren</i> Leader and Caregiver	Head of Islamic Organization	<i>Pesantren</i> Leader and Caregiver
Marital status	Widow	Married	Married	Married	Married
Current marital status	Not married	Married	Married	Married	Married
Number of children	3	5	3	3	2

phenomenology itself. Moser and Korstjens (2018) suggest that phenomenological researchers select participants who have shared an experience in relation to the phenomenon under study, but vary in characteristics and individual experiences.

Data Collection

The data collection was based on semi-structured interviews. These were conducted online, due to the location of the participants. Synchronous online interviews were conducted via video call and text chats, while some of the follow up sessions were conducted asynchronously via text chat. According to Salmons (2015), all these online interview methods, are considered viable alternatives as researchers can choose from varied communication options and easily talk directly with participants anywhere and at any time with the help of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Regarding ethical issues, the study was carefully planned to ensure that the data were safe and protected. Informed consent was obtained and a guarantee of confidentiality given.

The semi-structured interview protocols to explore the meaning of gratitude were developed based on the PERMA-Profiler questionnaire of Butler and Kern (2016) and the Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6) of Grimaldy and Haryanto (2020). The close-ended items in these two questionnaires were modified, especially due to the different data collection technique employed. The interviews required open-ended questions to enable probing and follow-up questions for clarification in order to attain in-depth understanding. A list of the main interview questions and probing questions is shown in Table 2.

Data Analysis

The data analysis followed the procedure used in qualitative-phenomenological research, namely 1) organize and prepare the data; 2) read and consider all the data; 3) code and analyze the significant statements; 4) generate themes and meaning units; and 5) develop an essence description (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Table 2

Interview Guide (15 Questions with Probing Questions)

PERMA Dimension	Questions	Probing of Gratitude Experience
Positive emotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How often do you feel joyful? - How often do you feel positive? - To what extent do you feel contented? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can you describe your positive feeling? - In what situation did you most feel it? - When was the last time you felt very grateful? Can you describe the feeling?
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How often do you become absorbed in what you are doing? - To what extent do you feel excited and interested in things? - How often do you lose track of time while doing something you enjoy? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you mind if I ask you to elaborate the situation you've been engaged in recently? - In a situation when you truly engage in some activity and are forced to abandon another task. What do you feel more? Thankful or despair?
Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent do you receive help and support from others when you need it? - To what extent do you feel loved? - How satisfied are you with your personal relationships? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are you willing to explain your relationship further? - What is the most pleasing aspect of your relationship?
Meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent do you lead a purposeful and meaningful life? - To what extent do you feel that what you do in your life is valuable and worthwhile? - To what extent do you generally feel you have a sense of direction in your life? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In what situation exactly do you experience that your life is meaningful? - What are the things you are really honored with this life?
Accomplishment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How much of the time do you feel you are making progress towards accomplishing your goals? - How often do you achieve the important goals you have set for yourself? - How often are you able to handle your responsibilities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can you explain any recent accomplishment you gain recently? - Do you have any unresolved conflict or unfulfilled hopes? How well do you manage your feeling about these?

Results

Phenomenological analysis was performed by reviewing the transcripts of the interviews, identifying the significant phrases or sentences associated with gratitude, and by coding to find compare, and categorize the emerging psychological themes. The first part of this section focuses on answering the first research question on how the PERMA-Model explains the experience of gratitude in female ulama. Themes representing the experience of gratitude will be identified from the responses to the PERMA-related questions (see Table 2). A total of 52 phrases were identified from these responses (see Table 3). Five themes emerged based on the data analysis regarding the meaning of gratitude from the PERMA-Model perspective: 1) gratitude as a positive emotion; 2) gratitude for an engaged life; 3) gratitude for any kind of positive relationship; 4) gratitude for a meaningful life; and 5) gratitude for accomplishment.

Gratitude as a Positive Emotion

Seventeen different words/phrases were found in the participants' statements when questioned about the first PERMA factor, positive emotion, with "grateful" appearing the most, in 34% of the answers. This was considered by the female ulama participants to be the most representative word to define positive emotion. For example, participant number 4 (P4), CH, a 59-year-old female ulama who is currently living in Germany, and P2, UM, a 43-year-old ulama from Central Java, made clear statements on this:

"... It's every time in my life that I feel grateful. Always have to be positive. Just need to be grateful for all the thing I have right now." (P4, CH, 59)

"It needs efforts to take the positive side of everything, I remember very much when I had to go back and forth to the hospital a lot,

every time I went to the hospital, in every corner I saw many people with various conditions which was so suffocating, that's when I realized "Oh God, I'm so grateful, I'm so grateful I was given pain but the pain can still be like this, I was given a disease, I had to take so much treatment, but I'm still given so much relief than those people." (P2, UM, 43)

Gratitude for an Engaged Life

The second PERMA factor, engagement, was described using nine different words/ phrases, with "occupied" (23%), "interest" (15%), "serious" (15%) and "into the moment" (15%) being the most frequent (see Table 3). The sense of being engaged and involved with the flow of life activities was also associated with the expression of gratitude, as stated by P5:

"I have so many activities under a tight time-schedule.... I made daily plans, I always put it near, stick to my bed, and I intend to do all activities as a way of worship ... I am grateful for always having support, especially from my husband. Most of the time he will drive to organization meetings where I need to attend." (P5, FF, 47)

Gratitude for Any Kinds of Positive Relationship

Regarding the third PERMA factor, relationships, 13 different words/phrases were associated with the expression of positive relationships (see Table 3). The most mentioned were "children" (46%), "family/ parent" (12%), and "good husband" (10%). Words such as "support", "help" and "to be loved" were also used, describing the characteristics of positive relationships. Any kinds of positive relationship were a strong reason to be grateful, as stated by all the respondents:

"The support from the family and jamaah (congregation) make me feels so loved, I believe it is the manifestation of their love for me." (P1, HN, 55)

“The thing I am most grateful for in life is that God gave me the opportunity during the last days of my parent’s life, as for my mother, I was able to be by her side and took care of her until the end of her life.” (P2, UM, 43)

“In our family, within the culture of *pesantren*, women generally have less control, public matters are still considered taboo, but my husband is quite different and open-minded, so he continues to support my activities in my public role. I am also grateful in terms of living; all levels of need can be fulfilled.” (P3, FR, 37)

“Alhamdulillah, I get a lot of help here (in Germany), hopefully all of my family and fellow Moslems love me with all of their heart, eternally until the afterlife.” (P4, CH, 59)

“What I am most grateful for is that my children always ask me for advice, which I am grateful for, it means that they consider my opinion to determine what they are going through with their lives.” (P5, FF, 47)

Gratitude for a Meaningful Life

The fourth PERMA factor was associated with nine words/phrases; for example, “beneficial” (19%), “goal/target” (17%), and “process” (15%) (see Table 3). The connection between the concept of a meaningful life and the experience of gratitude was mentioned in the following statements:

“I can feel my life is on track when everything is organized, my activity as a lecturer on campus, my activity in Nahdatul Ulama (NU), and the women’s community which I really love ... I think my work in those fields matter because a lot of people do care, and it is my chance to serve the community.” (P3, FR, 37)

“The meaning of my life continues to flow as it seeks its form. At the present day, just being able to continue small wadzifahs (regular practices of litany and Qur’an recital) previously run by my parents, has brought a feeling of relief and happiness. ON the other hand, I feel happy when I organize

or actualize myself in scientific organizations or forums. But there is a different kind of happiness that leads to a sense of calm, just by accompanying students, leading routine recital with women in the village, continuing banian routines and so on that are far from popularity.” (P2, UM, 43)

Gratitude for Accomplishment

Finally, the factor of accomplishment was manifested in eight different words/phrases. The word “education” was the most mentioned to represent accomplishment (24%), referring to academic accomplishment, followed by “achievement” (19%), “competent” (19%), “effort” (14%), and “progress” (10%). The correlation between accomplishment and gratitude was expressed by as follows:

“It is a great blessing and progress, to be able to guide my fellow Moslem brothers and sisters here in Germany.” (P4, CH, 59)

“There are several life events that I think I am grateful for in life, the first of which was being able to go through a very difficult process to defeat my illness in 2015/2016. Then, after that Allah gave me the opportunity to continue my doctoral education, which was something that was completely unexpected.” (P2, UM, 43)

The interpretation of the experience of gratitude from the Sufi psychology perspective will be explained in this section, with the aim of answering the second research question. As in previous section, qualitative data analysis was performed to identify and analyze the embodiment of *shukr* (gratitude), in order to determine its features and levels/ranks as experienced by the female ulama respondents. Four themes emerged related to the interpretation from the sufi perspective: 1) gratitude as an essential way of living; 2) gratitude as knowledge of Allah’s blessings; 3) gratitude for the benefactors; and 4) gratitude through actions of charity.

Gratitude as an Essential Way of Living

Viewed from the perspective of Sufi psychology concerning *shukr*, the respondents' answers demonstrated their levels of gratitude. All five respondents were shown to have

reached the essence of gratitude. They believed that living in a world with various roles was a process for achieving happiness in eternal life in the hereafter. Therefore, they had been able to reach the essence of gratitude in their life both

Table 3

Words or Phrases Associated with PERMA Factors based on the Interview Responses

PERMA Factor	Word/Phrase	Percentage	PERMA Factor	Word/Phrase	Percentage
Positive Emotion	grateful	34%	Relationship	children	46%
	positive	8%		family; parent	12%
	love	8%		good husband	10%
	happy	7%		social circle	9%
	<i>Alhamdulillah</i>	7%		support	8%
	pleased	7%		help	3%
	health	7%		to be loved	3%
	thankful	6%		close	2%
	content	3%		communication	2%
	ease	3%		harmonious	1%
	blessed	2%		understand	1%
	smile	1%		fulfill	1%
	relieved	1%		respect	1%
	wisdom	1%	Meaning	beneficial	19%
	affection	1%		goal, target	17%
sincere	1%	process		15%	
joy	1%	task		13%	
		important		9%	
Engagement	occupied	23%	meaningful	7%	
	interest	15%	responsibility	7%	
	serious	15%	<i>ridha</i>	6%	
	in the moment	15%	valuable	4%	
	absorbed	8%	<i>wasilah</i>	2%	
	all-out	8%	contemplation	2%	
	passion	8%	Accomplishment	education	24%
	priority	8%		achievement	19%
enjoy	0%	competent		19%	
		effort		14%	
		progress		10%	
		challenge		5%	
		constraint	5%		
		position	5%		

as individuals and as social beings. This was illustrated in the following answers:

“There are several assets of the hereafter that are in front of me that make me always reminded of the purpose of my life to continue to be grateful.” (P5, FF, 47)

“So far Allah has given me a lot of ease in my life, in the achievements of my life, even for the unexpected. For me to this day, with economic achievements, education, and family being part of the progress of my life, the more we accept or open our hearts to accept the good things from every event and not judge the bad things, gratitude will appear.” (P2, UM, 43)

“Everything on earth is under the will or destiny of Allah SWT. I'm sorry, so far, we have not been able to worship optimally, that's all.” (P1, HN, 55)

The perspective of Sufi psychology considers a person's gratitude from its manifestation in three spiritual-transpersonal levels, as conveyed by al-Ghazālī, namely: knowledge (*'ilm*), condition (*hāl*), and action (*'amal*).

Gratitude as Knowledge of Allah's blessings

The first level is knowledge (*'ilm*). At this level, what is tested is the level of one's knowledge, whether individuals have knowledge of favors given to them, who these are given by, and whether they are aware that Allah is the One who bestows blessings, either directly or through human intercession. Respondents have reached this level, as illustrated in the answers below:

“We take the positive side of everything that happens in our lives, so that we find the goodness in our lives, and then from there we are grateful, first to the people involved in it, who in the end thank God have arranged everything.” (P2, UM, 43)

“Gratitude should always arise.... So, from there we are always grateful, grateful and grateful without any reason.” (P1, HN, 55)

Gratitude for the Benefactors

The second level is the condition (*hal*) of gratitude. That is a state in which a person feels grateful for the blessings of Allah. Almost all of the female ulama in this research had entered the second level described by al-Ghazālī, namely gratitude in which they felt joy toward the benefactor in terms of knowing that it would motivate them to be blessed in the future. This is the case of the righteous who worship God and thank Him for fear of His punishment and hope for His reward. All the respondents had entered this level, as their answers show:

“I am grateful that my husband is the type who really loves his family and is responsible. My husband is the biggest supporter of my activities, both morally, spiritually, and moreover materially.” (P5, FF, 47)

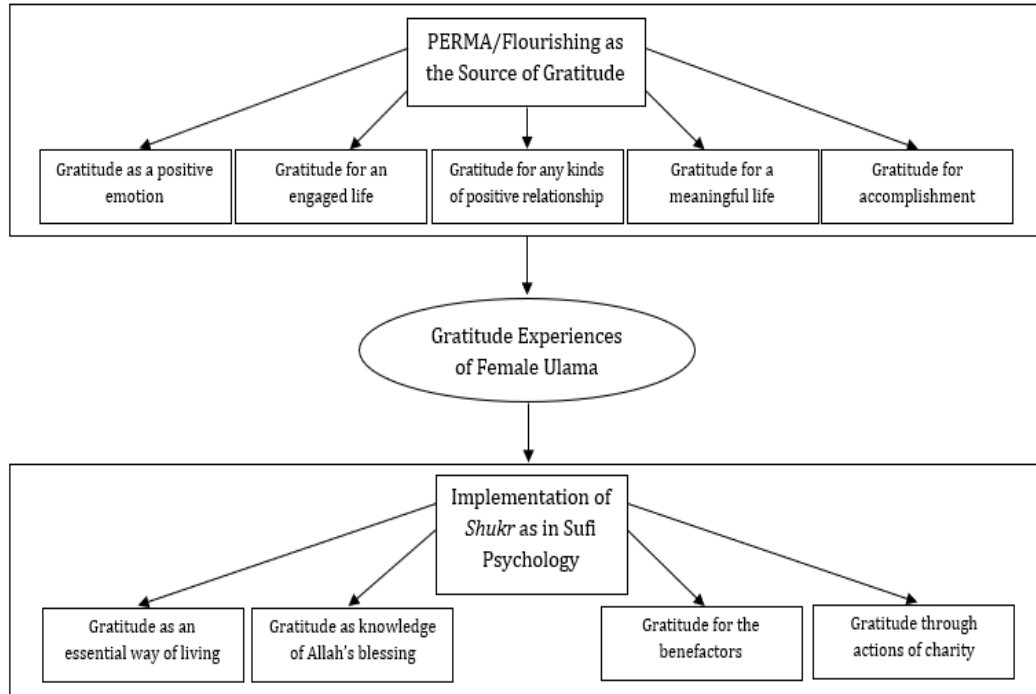
“I am grateful that my husband always supports my activities, even though our background is very different in all aspects; besides that, it is also facilitated in matters of livelihood, and various primary, secondary, and tertiary needs are well fulfilled.” (P3, FR, 37)

“I was able to go through a very difficult process in facing my illness in 2015/2016, then God gave me the opportunity to continue my doctoral study, and God gave me a baby boy who made our whole family happy.” (P2, UM, 43)

Gratitude through Actions of Charity

The third level is to act with gratitude, which according to al-Ghazālī (2008) is to do what is intended by the one who gives pleasure and loves him. Such action pertains to the heart, the limbs, and the tongue. As for the action of gratitude in the heart, it refers to the good intention as Allah's affection and grants mercy for all. In relation to the act of giving thanks with the tongue, this is an expression of gratitude to Allah, the Highest, with praises that indicate this.

Figure 2
Empirical Model of the Meaning of Gratitude



With regard to the act of gratitude with the limbs, this concerns the use of the blessings of Allah as obedience to Allah and to refrain from disobedience (al-Ghazālī, 2008). All the female ulama in this study had achieved all three aspects of gratitude with the charity mentioned by al-Ghazālī (2008). The following are excerpts from the respondents' answers:

“I think all the goals of human life, especially Moslem ones, are the same, yes, it’s hoping for Allah’s blessing by worshipping and worshipping is not only worship that is mahdlah (specific) but also worship that is ghoiru mahdlah (general). What is clear to me, even if we intend to do worldly deeds for worship, then it will be my worship which is rewarded by Allah.” (P5, FF, 47)

“To be grateful is to tasharruf (to manage; to maintain) what Allah has given us, we are

tasharruf of it all according to their respective places.” (P1, HN, 55)

Discussion

The study results confirm the causal-reciprocal relation between gratitude, flourishing/well-being, and *shukr*, with reference to the life experience of female ulama (see Figure 2). Based on the data findings shown in Table 3, certain words or phrases were used to express gratitude when the participants were asked questions related to PERMA. The words “grateful”, “thankful”, “loved”, “blessed”, and “*Alhamdulillah*” were associated with the first PERMA factor, positive emotion. This first theme demonstrated how gratitude represents the expression and existence of positive emotions, which is a sign of a good state of well-being in female ulama. In their

daily activities, the participants perform a wide variety of tasks. As leaders in the community, organizations and *pesantren*, they teach, guide, and empower groups of women through meetings, recitals, and many other types of social encounters. Domestic tasks also demand their efforts as wives and mothers, with numerous house chores. Some of them even had a professional career, thanks to their high education level. The multiple roles and complexity of tasks involved in being a female ulama require a high level of psychological resources, one of these being positive emotion. Fredrickson (2004) explains in his broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions that the subset of positive emotions, including joy, interest, contentment and love, have two main functions: to broaden and to build the state of well-being. Positive emotions expand the mindset, which may lead to actions that support the growth of women. Feeling of joy and love will spark the urge to create something fun, and to engage in close relationships. Positive emotions will also promote the discovery of novel and creative actions, ideas and social bonds, which in turn build an individual's personal resources. These range from physical and intellectual ones, to social and psychological ones. Importantly, these resources function as reserves that can be drawn on later to improve the odds of successfully coping and surviving.

Also, in relation to positive emotions, the words "grateful", "thankful", "loved", "blessed", and "*al-ḥamdu lillāh*" were expressed in almost every response, even when describing a difficult life experience. This finding demonstrates how female ulama respond to adversity they experience by expressing gratitude and developing positive emotions. As explained by Fredrickson (2004a) and Fredrickson and Joiner (2002), gratitude is an antidote to general stressors and mental as well as physical health problems. As one form of positive emotion, gratitude creates a mental shield which

empowers changes in people, making them more flexible and able to use creative thinking, as well as facilitating the ability to cope with stress and adversity. Moreover, gratitude refers to the appreciation of what is valuable and meaningful for an individual and represents a general state of thankfulness and/or appreciation (Sansone & Sansone, 2010).

All the participants were female ulama, regarded as superior individuals in terms of religious knowledge. Advanced religious knowledge, and high spirituality and wisdom make them worthy to be leaders in women's society and organizations. A high level of spirituality is also related to gratitude. Gratitude in Islam is not merely a skill, it is also a quality, which may differ across individuals, depending on their level of spirituality. Supported by the results of previous studies, gratitude boosts higher spirituality and mindfulness, higher self-esteem, enhanced accessibility to positive memories, facilitates goal attainment, enriches social resources, and improves physical health (Emmons & Mishra, 2010; Fredrickson, 2004a; Wood et al., 2010).

Researchers have made several findings underlying the relationship between gratitude and well-being. Wood et al. (2008) found that schematic biases allow grateful individuals to experience helpful actions from others as being more beneficial to themselves. Moreover, grateful individuals show the quality of positive self-cognition and introspective behavior, which make their happiness endure and preserves their well-being. Watkins et al. (2004) suggests that gratitude promotes happiness, and in turn happiness also probably increases the likelihood of gratitude. Watkins proposes that gratitude and happiness operate in an adaptive cycle of virtue. Grateful persons should be happier generally because of their enhanced enjoyment of life benefits, enhanced encoding and recollection of positive life

events. Happiness as a positive affect may enable a person to recognize and interpret life situations as good ones. Happy people are also more likely to acknowledge the good intentions of others and consider them to be beneficial. Gratitude promotes happiness, which in turn should promote more gratitude, just like in a repeated cycle. Watkin's proposition on gratitude and happiness was proven in research by Unanue et al. (2019), who showed that gratitude and happiness, specifically life satisfaction, mutually predicted each other over time. Gratitude and happiness/life satisfaction have a reciprocal relationship which suggests the existence of a virtuous circle of human well-being. Higher levels of gratitude will increase life satisfaction, which in turn increases gratitude, leading to a positive spiral of human flourishing and well-being.

The numerous tasks and multiple roles of female ulama take place in many domains, including the personal, interpersonal, and transpersonal. A great deal of gratitude is required to survive. This is supported by Hlava and Elfers (2014) findings about feelings of gratitude that occur naturally and spontaneously in the three domains above. An unexpected finding of this study was the frequency and depth at which the participants experienced gratitude in transpersonal relationships. For several participants, connection to a nonpersonal other was associated with the most profound states of immersion—states in which the self and other temporarily merged accompanied by feelings of awe.

Female ulama as leaders in communities or organizations are truly engaged with and socially cohesive in their surroundings. In the interviews, they expressed gratitude towards the people around them: their husbands, family, children, friends, neighborhood, communities, members of religious organizations, and their *jamaah* (congregation). Bayrami et al. (2021) found that gratitude

and social support are directly related to happiness and can positively predict it, especially in women. Another previous study on gratitude from the gender perspective also led to interesting findings. Preś et al. (2020) showed that women and young adults experienced the highest levels of gratitude, with gender and age significantly differentiating the preferred ways of showing it. The level of gratitude was found to be positively correlated with self-esteem, emotional intelligence, and readiness to help people, both the benefactor and others. Receiving an intangible good was associated with the strongest urge to reciprocate the benefactor, and was indeed an act of gratitude. Moreover, Kashdan et al. (2009) demonstrated that women were more likely to feel and express gratitude, made them less critical to evaluate something/someone to be grateful for, and derived more benefits from gratitude than men. This high-gratitude trait in women satisfies their need to belong and their autonomous feelings.

The female ulama have shown their success in being grateful and navigating life as individuals and social beings, despite their complex life roles. Gratitude is not only expressed in their speech, but is also practiced in life through charity and worship to become closer to Allah. According to al-Ghazālī (2008), if we use the theory of *shukr* then we can judge that all participants have achieved the *maqam shukr* or the essence of *shukr*. As illustrated in the statement by one of the female ulama: *"There are several assets of the hereafter that are in front of me that make me always reminded of the purpose of my life to continue to be grateful"* (P5, FF, 47). This expression indicates that she has realized that the life in this world is only temporary, merely as a provision to achieve eternal happiness in the hereafter.

In this context, it is very appropriate that what the female ulama do is the embodiment of their *shukr*, which marks the *maqām shukr*. Ibn

'Atā'illāh (1988) said in his book: "Let no bounty come to confuse you to fulfill your obligation to be grateful for it. Because doing so will lower your self-esteem." *Shukr* (gratitude) is sufficient for humans to express gratitude by their hearts, mouths, and deeds. He stated that there is no one blessing except "*al-ḥamdu lillāh*", it is better than this blessing. The pleasure of being inspired to read "*al-ḥamdu lillāh*" is more important than the first blessing. Because gratitude makes the blessings increase. This means that *shukr* is very easy to be performed by humans because Allah is the essence of making human deeds that are few in number become many. On the other hand, Allah is also the one who accepts *shukr* even with little gratitude.

In summary, the study has highlighted the important role of female ulama in the family, society and organizations, in public as well as domestic areas. It is a clearly possible for female ulama to perform well in their multiple roles. A case study by Adnani and Mahbub (2021) affirmed the fact that *Nyai*, female ulama in *pesantren*, play a major role in developing the institution. Therefore, women actually have high potential to actively participate in the public arena without neglecting their domestic responsibilities.

The acts of constant service and charity of female ulama in their environment confirm them as a grateful people. This is supported by the findings of Folkman and Moskowitz (2000), who found that grateful persons were more likely to offer emotional support to others and help those with problems. Bausert and Froh (2016) also claim that gratitude as a moral memory of mankind has certain social implications. Leaders who are grateful and develop positive emotions will influence the performance of the entire group they lead. Furthermore, evidence has shown that gratitude promotes social cohesion, relational and job satisfaction, and even the functioning of organizations. The findings of this study show how

gratitude as a living experience of female ulama as both leaders and women truly contributes to society.

Conclusion

Research on the constructs of gratitude has been conducted over many decades; studies have shown that it is a strong predictor of prosocial behavior, psychological health, and well-being. Previous studies have also been conducted on gender and populations. Despite the extensive research on gratitude and female ulama, no attempts have been made to understand how gratitude is experienced by them. Previous studies have mainly considered female ulama as leaders or their role in public religious spheres, regardless of their significant role as women. Therefore, this study provides a novel perspective for understanding the experience of female ulama from the human perspective, as women who are constantly juggling their multiple roles, but are still able to engage with and experience gratitude and thrive, thus achieving happy and meaningful lives. In relation to the research questions, it can be concluded that the experience of gratitude in female ulama can be explained using the perspectives of the PERMA-Model and Sufi psychology (see Figure 2). Furthermore, the research provides unique insights into the definition of gratitude as an important factor in women's well-being. The empirical model of the research is critical evidence for designing intervention programs for promoting women's well-being and mental health.

While providing insights into gratitude factors in specific samples of female ulama, there are several limitations to be noted. The research involved participants from different regions, which then left us with no choice other than to interview them virtually, thus making the observation data limited. Furthermore, the research on the experience of gratitude did not pay full attention to its development and changes across

time, situations, and life events. The personal characteristics of the participants can also be considered to be homogenous. Therefore, future studies should include more varied subjects and

multiple sessions of participative observations. Longitudinal data collection should be considered to determine which factors are the most consistent and contribute the most to gratitude.[]

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