

How Can Meaning in Life be Reached by Mothers of Children with Special Needs?

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Abstract

The study of meaning in life is exciting and valuable to do because everyone always craves meaning in his life. This study aims to test the effect of patience and gratitude to meaning in life. Data were taken from 100 mothers who have children with a special need. Data was obtained through The Meaningful in Life Questionnaire (MLQ), The Patience Scale and The Gratitude, Resentment, and Appreciation Test (GRAT). Data were analysed through regression analysis techniques. The results for the analysis showed that patients and gratitude influenced meaning in life both in search for meaning and presence in meaning, but for partial analysis showed that patients effect only to search for meaning, and gratitude effect only for presence in meaning. The implication is that patience and gratitude are essential as a foundation in reaching meaning in life.

Keywords: *gratitude, meaning, search, patience, presence*

I. INTRODUCTION

The study of meaningful life and happiness is a critical and strategic study that must be done. This view is based on the assumption that every human being has a desire to live meaningfully, but not everyone can get it. For people who find, that person will develop healthy behaviours in their lives [1] and can get happiness [2], whereas, for those who do not get it, that person will experience an existential emptiness which in turn can experience psychological disorders [3]. In the view of Logotherapy, meaningful in life does not only occur but is a side effect of the success of someone fulfilling his desire to live meaningfully. Those who succeed in achieving it will experience a meaningful life and the reward of useful life is happiness [4].

Research conducted by Steger and Frazier[1], and Steger et al. [5] showed that meaning in life can be seen in two main dimensions[6]: the existence of meaning and the search for meaning. The first concerns to the extent to which individuals view their lives as significant and meaningful. The second reflects the area to which people are involved in the search for meaning in life. The two dimensions have different characters and express different attitudes toward life. The presence of meaning makes people inclined to experience their lives as something understandable and essential and to feel a purpose or mission in their daily efforts. The search for meaning

represents the dynamic and active efforts made by individuals when they try to understand the meaning, meaning, and purpose of their lives.

In the context of meaning in life for mothers who have children with special needs, the way to do this is to take the right attitude with patience, it means that having children who have special needs is not a disaster to be regretted but something to be grateful for because there must be wise to withdraw from the condition[7]. Every parent hopes to have an average child who does not lack anything both physically and psychologically. This hope is something that makes sense and is legal for anyone. It's just that, for some people that hope can not be realized into reality. They are even blessed with children who have various deficiencies that make it different from other normal children. This condition has made many people feel helpless and cause stress[8]. This condition might even be the development of negative attitudes and self-image which then makes life meaningless[9].

There are several attitudes that are important and important for one's success in the process of finding meaning in life and happiness, including patience and gratitude. Several studies have found that patience is positively correlated with meaning in life and happiness[10], [11]. Other studies have found that gratitude is positively correlated with the meaning of life and happiness[12]–[14]. This research is an attempt to examine the influence of patience and gratitude for meaning in the lives of children with special needs.

II. THEORETICAL REVIEW

The meaning of life is a person's concept of the world inside and outside him. In other words, the meaning of life is how individuals judge themselves and the world around them based on their basic values. One approach that can be used is the Logoanalysis approach. The substance of this approach according to Crumbaugh[15], that in the form of expanding conscious awareness, namely an understanding of self and others, and in the form of stimulating creative imagination, namely the use of original values that exist in themselves.

According to Bastaman[16] said that characteristics of the meaning of life including 1) is unique and personal. It means that what is considered meaningful by someone does not necessarily mean to others. Maybe even what is deemed to be essential and significant at this time by someone, not necessarily the same meaning for that person at another time. In this case, the purpose of one's life and what is meaningful to him is usually unique, different from others, and may change from time to time; 2) are specific and concrete. It means that the meaning of life can be found in everyday experience, and 3) is to provide guidelines and direction for the activities carried out so that the meaning of life seems to be challenging and inviting (inviting) someone to fulfil it. Once the meaning and purpose of life are found, it is as if called upon to carry out and fulfill it so that its activities become more focused.

Humans have a strong desire to understand themselves and the world around them which is indicated by cognitive activity and behaviour to support these desires. Humans theoretically experience the presence of meaning when they understand themselves and their world. Thus, everyone will try to have and look for meaning in life. But the search results will be different. Humans, according to Viktor Frankl[4], are divided into three associated components, namely physical or biological, psychological and spiritual. These three components are interrelated if a person experiences pain; each element plays its role with its own mechanism. The only part that distinguishes humans from other living things such as animals and plants is the spiritual aspect. Viktor Frankl later found that one's ability to survive in suffering was supported by supporting the meaningfulness of the individual who experienced it. Happiness is obtained in the struggle carried out to fulfil the meaning of his life. Frankl in explaining the meaning of meaning has a more definite concept. Based on his life experience in the German concentration camp he stressed that the meaning is outside of humans. Therefore, Humans must pursue and find meaning. Meaning according to him is in the world, and the world is outside humans. The importance of meaning is what makes the intentionality of consciousness need to be raised in humans so that noos (spiritual) becomes strong and healthy in facing all problems in life.

III. METHODE

Participant. The subjects were 100 mothers who have children with special needs. Research subjects are they who send their children to special schools of Yayasan Pendidikan Tunas Bangsa (YPTB) and Autism Service Center in Malang. The number of subjects at each school is as follows:

Table 1. The participant

| No | Schools name | Sum | |
|-----|------------------------------|-----|------|
| | | F | % |
| 1 | Kindergarten of YPTB | 11 | 11% |
| 2 | Primary School of YPTB | 32 | 32% |
| 3 | Junior High School of YPTB | 12 | 12% |
| 4 | Senior High School of YPTB | 11 | 11% |
| 5 | The centre of Autism Service | 34 | 34% |
| Sum | | 100 | 100% |

Variables and Measurements. There are three variables measured in this study, namely: the meaning in life, patience and gratitude. The measurements of these variables are as follows:

1. The meaning in life is defined as a way of how individuals judge themselves and the world around them based on their basic values. This data was obtained through a measuring tool The meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) created by Steger, et al [5]. The aspects revealed in this measuring instrument are the meaning in life that is search for meaning and presence of meaning. This scale consists of 10 items. 5 items for search for meaning and 5 items for the presence of meaning.
2. Patience is defined as the ability of a person to refrain from something that is liked or disliked. This data was obtained through a patience scale developed by Dudley[17], Agte and Chiplonkar[18] which explained that patience as the ability to be calm, the ability to control oneself, and the ability to delay gratification. This scale consists of 15 items.
3. The gratitude is defined as a person's attitude in the form of receiving, taking benefits, and evaluating positively in response to what God has given both something pleasant and unpleasant. The measurement of gratuity is the Gratitude, resentment, and appreciation test (GRAT) that Watkins et al.[19] developed. This scale is a Likert scale measuring gratitude from the aspects of lack of sense of deprivation, simple appreciation, and appreciation for others. This scale consists of 16 items.

IV. RESULT

The results of the correlational analysis show that patience and gratitude are positively correlated with the meaningfulness of life, both in the aspects of search and presence. Observed variable findings from correlation analysis are presented in table 2.

Table 2. Statistic descriptive and correlational result

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|-----------|--------|--------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Patience | 1 | .614** | .293* | .300** |
| Gratitude | - | 1 | .119 ^(ns) | .570** |
| Search | - | - | 1 | -.114 ^(ns) |
| Presence | - | - | - | 1 |
| Means | 47.18 | 54.80 | 15.54 | 19.94 |
| SD | 11.07 | 8.93 | 3.55 | 3.10 |
| Kurtosis | 3.294 | 1.095 | -.383 | 1.318 |
| Skewness | -1.585 | -1.162 | -1.141 | -.816 |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

The results of the first regression analysis showed that patience and gratefulness simultaneously affected search for R = .303 $p < .05$, but in the partial report it was found that gratitude did not affect search $\beta = .098$ $p > .05$. The results of the second regression analysis showed that patience and gratitude simultaneously affected the presence of R = .573 $p < .01$, but in the partial report it was found that patience did not affect presence $\beta = -.079$ $p > .05$. The results of the regression analysis are shown in table 3.

Table 3. Summary of regression analysis

| | B | SE | β | R | R ² |
|------------------------------|-------|------|-----------------------|------|----------------|
| Patience | -.113 | .039 | -.353* | .303 | .092 |
| Gratitude | -.039 | .049 | -.098 ^(ns) | | |
| Dependent variable: Search | | | | | |
| Patience | -.022 | .030 | -.079 ^(ns) | .573 | .328 |
| Gratitude | .215 | .037 | .618** | | |
| Dependent variable: Presence | | | | | |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

V. DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that gratitude influences happiness in parents of children with special needs. These results are in line with previous research which found that gratitude is correlated with the level of life satisfaction and happiness[12]–[14]. Likewise, patience is positively correlated with meaningfulness in life. The higher the level of patience and gratitude, the greater the chance to find meaning in life[10], [11].

This result is in line with other studies conducted by Fegg et al. [20] who examined the meaning of life in patients suffering from amyotrophic. The results of his research found that research subjects were able to find meaning in his life through his efforts to reduce the pain suffered and seek social support from others. It shows that the suffering will make a person sink in his life, as well as the social role that turns out to make a substantial contribution to the process of finding meaning in life. In other words, patience and gratitude are significant variables to develop meaningfulness in life. Likewise, other studies have been conducted by Jim and Anderson[21] which links social and physical functions with the meaning of life in people living with cancer. The results of his research found that the meaning of life acts as a mediator

variable in the relationship between physical and social damage to the tendency for life stress. It means that the subject will experience life pressure when they have problems both physical and social when the level of meaningfulness of their lives is in a low category.

Research conducted by Bastaman[22] showed that there is a psychological dynamic process when a meaning of life is found. The process that occurs includes a tragic event, which causes meaningless appreciation, but when there are social support and faith, the meaninglessness is directed at positive activities, so self-understanding is achieved and changing attitudes become positive. Next, face this reality realistically until it works. That's when the meaning of life is found so that happiness can be achieved [16].

The process of finding meaning in life for mothers who have children with special needs follows the following three stages: the stage of denial is characterised by the emergence of an attitude of not accepting reality accompanied by feelings of disappointment, depression, anger and so forth[23], [24]. For some people, after this process has passed, they will go to the next stage in the form of a compromised stage, the scene where the subject tries to get out of painful reality and try to accept the fact, usually accompanied by an effort or effort to find a solution. The last stage is the stage of the process of finding the meaning in life from the event. To illustrate this psychological condition, the Koran explains in Surah Al-Baqoroh (155-157) which means: *And indeed we will give you trials, in the form of fear, hunger, lack of wealth, soul, and food. And give good tidings to those who are patient (155) Namely those who when afflicted by disaster, they say: "Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him Allah we will return"*

(156) They are the ones who get blessed and mercy from his Lord, and they are the ones who are guided (157).

In the Koran, it is explained that Allah will only give trials according to the ability of his servant. It means that every problem or condition faced, of course the individual concerned can go through and deal with it well if he tries to deal with and treat it appropriately. In the Koran it is also explained that Allah will not burden an individual unless the person can shoulder it. Therefore, Islam forbids despair in facing any difficulties. Even in some verses of the Koran explained that the challenges or problems encountered are a means to achieve a higher degree. To illustrate, look at a Qudsi hadith which explains that: *"Truly I am God, There is no God but Me, Whoever is not patient with My trials, is not grateful for all my favours, and is not pleased with My decisions (destiny). Then he should come out from under heaven and look for God beside me."* The above hadith explains an attitude that must be possessed by every Muslim in addressing problems in his life. The above hadith, in line with the results of this study which shows that the attitude of patience, gratitude and pleasure is one of the critical views in the process of finding meaning in life to achieve happiness.

VI. CONCLUSION

The results showed that patience and gratitude are two necessary attitudes that can be developed to reach a meaningful life in mothers who have children with special needs. Therefore, to get prosperity in life, patience and gratitude must be carried out in daily life. The principle in life is patience when you have a disaster, and thankful when you receive grace.

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