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Fostering The Future: Examining The Meaning Of Life And Optimism In Generation Z

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Abstract

The study of meaning, in philosophy and psychology, is important to reveal the influences on individual well-being, including optimism. This systematic literature review examined various factors, such as social media, family environment, education, and personal experiences, influencing Generation Z's perception of the meaning of life and their optimism. The researcher employed the PRISMA model to select articles included in the study. Age, gender, and spirituality are influential factors in the search for meaning in life. Age influences a person's search for life's meaning and their optimism. Gender also plays an important role; women tend to discover meaning in life through family roles and social relationships, while men tend to find meaning through achievement and independence. Spirituality, such as religious practices and spiritual beliefs, offers individuals a framework to discover the meaning of life and remain optimistic, especially through the social support of the spiritual community.

Kata kunci:

makna hidup;
optimisme;
generasi Z

Abstrak

Eksplorasi makna kehidupan dalam ilmu psikologi dan filsafat penting karena hal tersebut memengaruhi kesejahteraan individu, termasuk optimisme. Studi literatur sistematis ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki bagaimana persepsi makna hidup berhubungan dengan tingkat optimisme di Generasi Z, dengan mempertimbangkan dampak berbagai faktor seperti media sosial, lingkungan keluarga, pendidikan, dan pengalaman pribadi. Peneliti menerapkan model PRISMA dalam pemilihan artikel yang dilibatkan dalam studi literatur ini. Ditemukan bahwa terdapat beberapa faktor yang berperan dalam penemuan makna hidup yakni, faktor usia, gender, dan spiritualitas. Usia memengaruhi cara individu menemukan makna hidup dan sikap optimis. Gender juga memainkan peran penting, wanita cenderung menemukan makna hidup melalui hubungan sosial dan peran keluarga, sementara pria lebih condong pada pencapaian dan kemandirian. Faktor spiritualitas, seperti praktik keagamaan dan keyakinan spiritual, memberikan kerangka dasar bagi individu dalam menemukan makna hidup dan mempertahankan sikap optimis, terutama melalui dukungan sosial yang diberikan oleh komunitas spiritual.

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INTRODUCTION

Background Of The Study

The "meaning of life" is a critical concept in understanding existentialism. Questions about humans' purpose and value are often associated with the meaning of life. These questions make one's life valuable and useful, giving them a reason to live (Arif, 2016). There has not been a clear definition of the meaning of life since everyone interprets it differently, making the concept seem abstract (Kleftaras & Psarra, 2012; George & Park, 2017). However, it can shape a person's life, guiding their path. Every individual's life has a meaning, but not everyone is aware of their meaning of life (Ningsih, Hidayah, & Lasan, 2017). It becomes a philosophical domain and subject matter within positive psychology (Arif, 2016).

The meaning of life concept is part of PERMA (Goh et al., 2022). PERMA is a theory of well-being proposed by Martin Seligman. PERMA refers to the controllable matters in the quest for happiness (Kovich, Simpson, Foli, Hass, & Phillips, 2023) and stands for: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement (Seligman, 2012). According to Seligman, who is recognized as the father of positive psychology, these five elements contribute significantly to human well-being and happiness (Juwitaningrum & Wyandini, 2022). Positive emotion can be interpreted as feelings or emotions that are joyful or pleasant, e.g., love, gratitude, and happiness (Hamdan, 2016). In improving individual well-being and happiness, fostering positive emotions in daily life is necessary (Simanungkalit, 2014). It can be manifested by celebrating small moments like joking with friends or enjoying the beauty of nature, which trigger pleasure in individuals (Tan & Titova, 2024; Ching & Chan, 2020).

Meanwhile, engagement means a state when someone is involved and enjoys what they are doing at the moment; an individual must be fully aware of it and be consistent, which is commonly referred to as "flow" (Sekarini, Hidayah, & Hayati, 2020). Individuals in a state of flow tend to focus on the task at hand and lose track of

time. Activities that cause flow can be different for each individual, some mundane examples are reading a book or listening to favorite music (Elfida, Milla, Mansoer, & Takwin, 2021).

The next element considered important in improving well-being is relationships. Having good relationships with others, e.g., family, friends, or certain groups, can provide social support and a sense of happiness. Happiness arises from meaningful social interactions, and strong emotional connections make one feel more valued and cared for, which in turn increases happiness and life satisfaction (Effendy, 2016).

Then, meaning is defined as having a greater purpose and meaning in life. Finding meaning in life often involves contributing to something bigger than oneself, e.g., working for a worthy cause, following spiritual beliefs, or participating in volunteer activities. Having meaning in life provides a sense of purpose and direction, which helps a person feel more satisfied and fulfilled (Elfida, Milla, Mansoer, & Takwin, 2021).

The last element, achievement, refers to one's ability to achieve goals and succeed in various aspects of life. These goals can be personal, academic, professional, or even related to one's hobby. Being able to complete goals provides a sense of achievement and recognition for the effort that has been made, which in turn increases self-confidence and happiness (Effendy, 2016).

Each element of PERMA is interrelated, one of which is meaning and positive emotions (Merritt, Heshmati, Oravec, & Donaldson, 2024; Rossetti, Jepson, & Albanese, 2024). Positive emotions can be derived from acknowledging that life is meaningful. For example, someone who thinks that their life is meaningful tends to feel more grateful, proud, and happy. Meaningful activities often generate positive emotions, e.g., the joy of helping others or the satisfaction of accomplishing something important. Positive emotions are linked with optimism. Optimism makes one more likely to focus on the positive aspects of a situation, even under challenging circumstances. This increases the likelihood of positive emotions. Optimistic people have good expectations about the future, inciting positive feelings like joy, anticipation, and excitement. Optimism helps one to bounce back from failures or difficulties more quickly, which in turn maintains emotional stability. An optimistic person is more likely to experience happiness, contentment, and gratitude. They see the future with

hope and believe that good things will happen, which increases positive feelings in daily life.

The eudaimonia perspective explains that happiness is based on self-actualization, goal achievement, and the meaning of life. The meaning of life can affect one's mental health. People who live meaningfully tend to feel valuable and experience positive emotions (Krok & Telka, 2019). This influences their psychological well-being (García-Alandete, 2015). The PERMA concept also emphasizes the role of positive emotions, with optimism as a positive emotion associated with the meaning of life (Farmer & Cotter, 2021). Optimism refers to an individual's belief about a good future for themselves. Optimism also refers to a mental state that perceives the future positively and believes in the best outcomes of various situations. It provides many psychological and physical benefits. An optimistic individual has low-stress levels, excellent mental health, high durability, and a high-quality life (Krok & Telka, 2019).

They also exhibit higher levels of happiness and satisfaction in life. However, perception of the meaning of life, among other things, influences optimism (Krok & Telka, 2019). This perception can come from different factors, including religion, interpersonal relationships, personal achievements, or social contributions (Qoriah & Ningsih, 2020). These factors shape how individuals perceive the world and influence their optimism (Lusiawati, 2016).

Like other generations, Generation Z frequently deals with happiness and meaningfulness. Gen Z is a group of people who were born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, and they grew up in a world that was very different from the previous generation (Firamadhina & Krisnani, 2021). This generation was the first to grow up with digital technology in their daily lives and faced complex global challenges, such as climate change, economic uncertainty, and rapid social change (Hidayat, Saefuddin, & Sumartono, 2017). Amid these challenges, the relevant meaning of life becomes a crucial question. For Gen Z, the meaning of life is not only existential, but also something to provide them direction and purpose in life. Personal experiences, family environments, education, and social relationships can affect their perception of the meaning of life. Technology and social media also shape their perception of the world and themselves. For many Gen Z, the meaning of life constantly changes within social

and environmental issues and discovering identity and authenticity in this constantly evolving world (Saepudin S & Oktaviani, 2023).

This generation has grown up in a highly connected digital age, with significant technological advances and social changes. Half of this generation is also in their 20s and 30s and likely experiencing a quarter-life crisis (Daffa, Arthuro, Fernanda, & Pratama, 2024). Finding meaning in life is significant for Gen Z, as it is for every other generation. However, specific factors make the search for meaning in life particularly relevant and urgent for Gen Z. They need to find meaning in their lives for several: Gen Z faces high levels of stress and anxiety due to various pressures, including academic pressures, career uncertainty, and concerns about global issues like climate change (Hamid & Taslim, 2024). Finding meaning in life can give them a clear sense of purpose and direction, which can help reduce stress and anxiety. This is related to the quarter-life crisis that is being experienced.

Second, having meaning in life provides mental and emotional strength to face challenges and difficulties. When someone acknowledges that they have a greater purpose in life, the person is more capable of bouncing back from setbacks and surviving difficult situations (Ernadewita, Rosdialena, & Deswita, 2019). Third, the meaning of life provides strong motivation to achieve goals. When Gen Z has a clear understanding of what is important to them, they are more likely to work hard and commit to achievements that align with their values and life goals (Putri, 2024). In addition, understanding the meaning of life can help Gen Z build deeper and more meaningful relationships with others. When they know their values and things that are meaningful to them, they can seek out and foster relationships with people who share similar values and goals (Sulastrri & Kusuma, 2022).

The meaning of life refers to an individual's belief in the greater value and purpose of life. For Gen Z, it may come in various forms, such as academic, professional, social, and general personal matters. Compared to previous generations, Gen Z tends to prioritize their professional and personal life (Andrea, Gabriella, & Tímea, 2016). Social media, for example, is a platform where they can share experiences and gain support from people with shared interests (Ardi & Putri, 2020). On the other hand, without healthy management, social media can negatively influence their

physical and social aspects (Yohanna, 2020). Therefore, balanced use of technology is important to maintain mental health and life meaning.

One important component of mental health is optimism, defined as a mental attitude in which one tends to see things and the future in a positive way (Parveen, Maqbool, & Khan, 2016). Optimism affects physical, mental, and social health. Optimistic people are more resistant to stress, more creative in solving problems, and better at social interactions. For Gen Z to remain optimistic, the meaning of life is critical. When people have values and a purpose in their lives, they tend to be more optimistic and satisfied (Grouden & Jose, 2015). The meaning of life helps people understand their experiences, overcome challenges, and discover a purpose in action. An adolescent who discovers meaning from joining an organization in his environment, for example, may be more optimistic about the future because he sees that his efforts can change the world. As a result, having meaning in life not only provides direction in life but also increases one's strength and optimism (Kardipranoto, Anakaka, & Benu, 2021). Overall, it enhances an individual's desired qualities (Fridayani, Kusuma, & Yuniarto, 2022).

Education and social environments are important for Gen Z to discover the meaning of life (Venida, 2022). The integrated curriculum with character education, mindfulness, and self-development could facilitate adolescents in exploring the meaning of life and foster an optimistic attitude (Singh, 2019). Besides those, family and community support are also important (Craig et al., 2022).

Research Gap

Research by Krok & Telka (2019) examined the mediating role of optimism in the relationship between the meaning of life and subjective and psychological well-being in late adolescents. In this study, correlational results showed that the meaning of life and optimism have a significant relationship with subjective and psychological well-being in late adolescents. The mediation model shows that optimism plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between the meaning of life and well-being. Adolescents who understand the meaning of life tend to have higher levels of optimism, which in turn improves their subjective and psychological well-being. Optimism served as a similar mediator in both male and female adolescents. This study had several limitations: the sample size was relatively small (205 participants),

which limits the generalizability of the results. This study used a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to draw causal inferences. Longitudinal research is needed to understand the direction and strength of the causal relationship between meaning in life, optimism, and well-being. This study used only one indicator of subjective and psychological well-being. Finally, the sample in this study was late adolescents who likely did not experience serious mental challenges like adults.

Research conducted by [de Vries et al. \(2022\)](#) found that most of the sample showed a decrease in optimism (48.9%) and meaning of life (28.4%) during the pandemic. This suggests that not everyone experiences a decline in well-being in response to the pandemic and lockdown. Women experienced a greater decline in optimism and meaning of life than men during the pandemic. There is a nature-environment interaction where factors affecting optimism and the meaning of life are slightly different before and during the pandemic. Based on the results of this study, there are several things that need to be explored: the long-term effects of the pandemic and prolonged lockdown on individual well-being, including nature and environment changes over time, have not been explained in more detail. There needs to be a study involving a more representative sample from a wider population to ensure the generalizability of the findings, given the limited representativeness of the sample in this study.

[Ju et al. \(2013\)](#) studied the mediating role of the meaning of life on the relationship between optimism and subjective well-being in the elderly. This study involved 252 elderly women, recruited from four elderly welfare centers in Seoul. The results showed that optimism was positively related to subjective well-being. Optimism was also positively correlated with meaning in life. Meaning of life served as a partial mediator in the relationship between optimism and subjective well-being. The results of the structural equation modeling (SEM) showed that optimism has a significant direct effect on subjective well-being and the meaning of life. In addition, there is an indirect effect of optimism on subjective well-being through the meaning of life, which suggests that optimism can improve subjective well-being by enhancing the meaning of life. Based on this study, some gaps need to be addressed in future research: this study only involved elderly women who live at home. Further research could involve a more diverse population. This study was cross-sectional, so it could

not show a causal relationship between optimism, meaning of life, and subjective well-being. This study did not examine the effects of interventions designed to increase optimism or meaning in life on subjective well-being. The study did not take into account contextual factors, e.g., social support, economic status, or health conditions that might influence the relationship between optimism, meaning of life, and subjective well-being. This study was conducted in South Korea, so these results cannot be generalized to other cultural contexts.

Rationale Of The Study

The meaning of life is an important component in fostering an optimistic attitude in Gen Z. Amid challenges and rapid changes, discovering the meaning of life can provide clear direction and purpose, enhance endurance, and encourage a positive outlook (Robbins, 2021). We can help Gen Z grow into optimistic, resilient, and hopeful individuals by understanding the importance of discovering meaning in life and creating an environment that supports the search for meaning. If Gen Z does not find meaning in life, they may face various negative impacts on mental, emotional, and social well-being. Without meaning in life, Gen Z may experience higher levels of stress and anxiety. Uncertainty about life's purpose and direction can lead to constant restlessness and worry. A lack of meaning in life can contribute to hopelessness, which can increase the risk of depression (Soumokil-mailoa et al., 2022). Without a clear sense of purpose, Gen Z may struggle to find motivation to achieve personal and professional goals. This can lead to decreased productivity and difficulty in achieving meaningful accomplishments (Lee, 2024).

Without a sense of purpose, Gen Z may be more prone to procrastination and dissatisfaction in their work or studies (Nabahani & Riyanto, 2020). This dissatisfaction can reduce the quality of life and overall well-being. Those who experience a lack of meaning in life may have difficulty in building deep and meaningful relationships. This can lead to social isolation and loneliness, which negatively impact mental and emotional health. Gen Z may find it difficult to find people with shared values and goals, which are essential for strong emotional connections. They may also experience an identity crisis, where they feel confused about who they are and what they want in life (Hidayah & Huriati, 2016). This can lead to emotional instability.

Novelty of the Study

The present study offered several novelties. The literature review method was used to address inconsistent findings on the meaning of life and optimism. In addition to this, the study analyzed previous findings, offering a more detailed explanation of varying age groups, from adolescence to late adulthood. This study did not only focus on certain cultures, as the studies examined came from different countries with varying cultural contexts. It explained gender differences in finding meaning in life and highlighted how gender affects perspectives on meaning in life and optimism. This study targets Gen Z, in contrast to previous studies that have focused on late adolescents or older women, so that it can explain more generally.

Purposes/Hypothesis Of The Study

This study investigated individuals' perceptions of life's meaning and optimism, particularly in Gen Z. By understanding how life's meaning influences optimism, researchers can gain a comprehensive insight into this matter. This research aimed to enhance optimism and overall quality of life in people by exploring the search for meaningfulness.

METHODS

Research Design

This systematic literature review evaluated target articles comprehensively to identify the gaps in the previous research structurally, analytically, and comprehensively (Xiao & Watson, 2019; Carrera-Rivera, Ochoa, Larrinaga, & Las, 2022; Mariani, Perez-Vega, & Wirtz, 2022). The present study employed the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) method (Page et al., 2021).

Data Collection Technique

The researcher implemented the following criteria to select articles used in the study: a) international journals indexed by Google Scholar; b) published from 2019 to 2024; c) discussing both the meaning of life and optimism.

First, the researcher used the Publish or Perish application indexed in Google Scholar, identifying articles based on the research criteria by listing the keywords "meaning of life" and "optimism" and limited the search to articles published from 2019

to 2024. This approach yielded a total of 100 research articles. Then, the researcher was down to 18 articles by screening up to 82 irrelevant titles with the keywords. For example, a study by Mert et al. in 2021 entitled "Coronavirus stress and resilience: Exploring the role of hope and meaning in life undergraduate students" could not be used since the title does not include "optimism". After retrieving the articles, the researcher examined the abstracts and selected them based on the target research topic; this process yielded 14 journal articles. The abstracts selected describe research participants, methods, and results describing the relations between the two variables. By the end of the selection process, the researcher obtained four articles (Figure 1) (O'Dea et al., 2021).

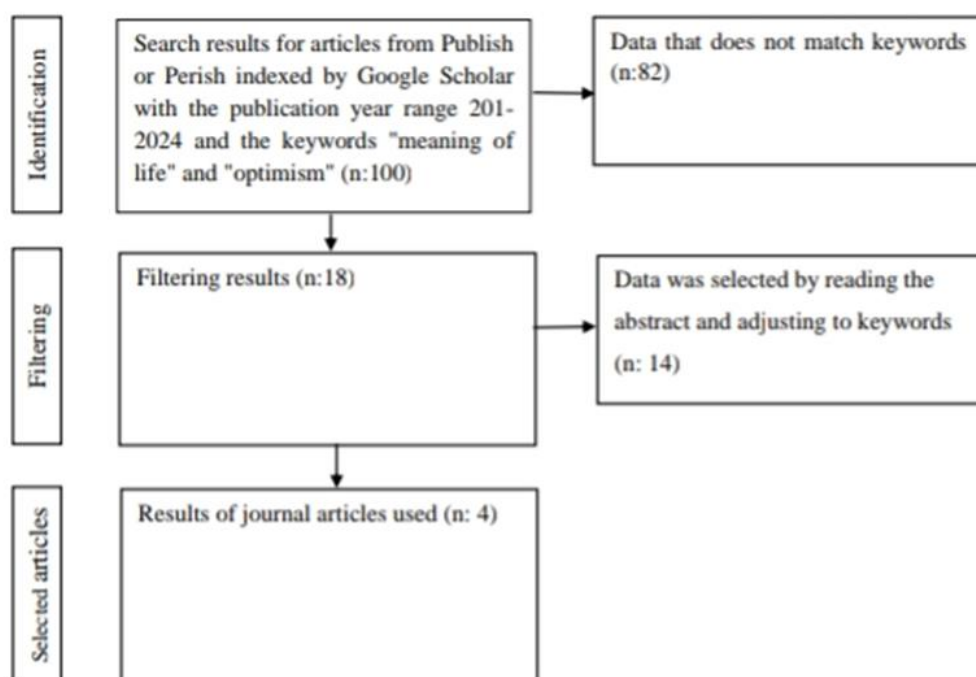


Figure 1. The PRISMA Diagram

Data Analysis Technique

The researcher identified the relevant articles based on the specified criteria. A table, which contained a summary of the article, authors, year of publication, research participants, methods, and research results, was then created. Then, the researcher

compared findings or results from selected articles to identify similarities and differences. The next step was synthesizing findings from the various articles to provide an overview of the research topic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

Based on the relevant article search about the meaning of life and optimism, the researchers obtained 6 articles with research-relevant topics. According to the literature, there are several influential factors toward the meaning of life, such as age, sex type, and spirituality. Table 1 shows the articles reviewed.

Table 1.
The Literature Review Analysis

No	Authors	Participants	Method	Results
1	Arslan & Yildirim (2021)	475 college students at public universities in urban areas Turkey (69.2% female participants; aged between 18 and 34 years old)	Online survey to collect the data and demographic items	The meaning of life and pessimism-optimism mediate the correlation between coronavirus-related stress and depression symptoms. Optimism and pessimism mediate the correlation between the meaning of life and depression symptoms. Optimism moderates the mediated effects of the meaning in life in the relationship between coronavirus-related stress and depression symptoms.
2	Oriol, Miranda, Bazán, & Benavente (2020)	275 high school students in Lima, Peru (132 girls, 123 boys)	A cross-sectional survey	A significant correlation between optimism and positive influence, but no mediating effect on life satisfaction. Besides that, gratitude and the meaning of life play roles as mediators in the correlation between optimism and life satisfaction. The study implies that prospective variables, e.g., dispositional optimism, can improve subjective well-being via different affective and cognitive mechanisms.

No	Authors	Participants	Method	Results
3	Aftab et al. (2019)	1,042 adults in San Diego, US	Questionnaire and phone interview	<p>Meaning shows a reverse U-shaped correlation, while discovering has a U-shaped correlation with age (with the peak point of the presence and meaning and the lowest point of the variable of discovering within the age of approximately 60 years).</p> <p>The physical well-being (the physical composite score, SF-36) is negatively correlated to age ($p<0.001$) but positively influences the variable of presence ($p<0.001$). The results found a correlation between age and the variable of presence ($p=0.018$), indicating a significant correlation among the subjects aged older than 60 years old. Mental well-being is positively correlated to age ($p<0.001$) and the variable of presence ($p<0.001$). However, mental well-being is negatively correlated to the variable of discovering ($p=0.002$). The cognitive function is reversely correlated to age ($p<0.001$) and the variable of discovery ($p=0.001$). The covariates of presence and discovery have low effects except for life satisfaction and presence in adults older than 60 years ($p<0.001$).</p>
4	Haghighi & Majreh (2019)	150 university students in Iran (96 girls, 54 boys)	The correlational predictive study design	<p>There is a significant positive correlation between optimism, meaning, and problem-focused coping strategy ($p<0.01$). However, there is no significant correlation between the efforts of discovering meaning with happiness ($p>0.05$). Problem-focused coping strategy was negatively related to emotion and</p>

No	Authors	Participants	Method	Results
				happiness ($p < 0.05$). The findings also found that optimism and problem-oriented coping contribute up to 42% to happiness.

Discussion

There are significant gaps due to the lack of adequate sample representation and cultural differences that make the results of previous studies difficult to generalize to other cultures. Previous research tends to focus on a limited population or cultural context, which does not provide a comprehensive picture or cover a wide range of groups. This limitation poses a serious challenge, especially in understanding important variables such as gender, age, and spirituality that have broad implications in various cultures and age groups, including Gen Z.

To address these gaps, the author used the literature review method as a more holistic and comprehensive approach. By reviewing a wide range of existing literature, the author was able to gain a broader understanding of how gender, age, and spirituality affect individuals from different backgrounds. This literature review study allowed the author to integrate results from various studies across cultures and populations, so as to cover all groups, including Gen Z, without being tied to a specific sample or culture. This approach is expected to produce findings that are more representative and relevant, and allow for broader generalization.

Age Factor In Discovery Of The Meaning Of Life And Optimism

Age changes the meaning of life. Often, the main focus of adolescents is discovering identity and exploring their values. Adolescents usually discover meaning through social relationships, academic pursuits, and extracurricular activities. Research shows that adolescents who have strong social support and engage in meaningful activities tend to have a more optimistic view of life. Compared to less-engaged adolescents, adolescents engaged in school and community activities report a higher rate of a sense of meaningful life and optimism (Krok, 2018). In early adulthood, attention shifts to career pursuits, marriage, and family formation. At this point in life, people often discover meaning in their professional and personal achievements. Young adults who are climbing their career and have strong interpersonal relationships report

higher levels of well-being and optimism after successfully achieving these goals (Harjani, Venti, & Susiati, 2023).

Reflections on social contributions and life achievements increase in middle and later adulthood. In this phase, people often discover meaning by helping families, communities, and future generations. Adults who participate in volunteer activities and maintain strong social connections experience increased meaningfulness and optimism due to reflections and contributions (Ryu & Heo, 2017).

Older people tend to have a more optimistic view of life because they are more focused on the meaningful and positive aspects of life than the negative ones. This behavior leads to an optimistic attitude (van der Groot, Bol, & van Weert, 2019). Older individuals are usually more adaptable to change and have stronger resilience. They show higher levels of optimism due to their ability to regulate emotions and focus on the positive aspects of life (Mehrotra & Wagner, 2018; Strough, Parker, & Bruine de Bruin, 2019).

Gen Z is in a stage where they are looking for identity and purpose in life. Erik Erikson explained that individuals in this age range (adolescents to early 20s) are trying to discover who they are and how they fit into society (Erikson, 1993). This age factor is significant because it is a critical period to foster a strong self-identity, an important component in discovering the meaning of life (Shiong & Wang, 2022). Erikson, a renowned developmental psychologist, proposed eight stages of psychosocial development that individuals face throughout their lives. Each stage is characterized by conflicts or crises that individuals must resolve to achieve healthy development. In the fifth stage, "identity vs. role confusion" (Erikson, 1993), which typically occurs from adolescence to early 20s, individuals face the challenge of developing a cohesive and authentic personal identity (Parveen, Maqbool, & Khan, 2016).

At this stage, adolescents begin to explore various aspects of their identity, including personal values, interests, beliefs, and aspirations. They also begin to consider how they want to be perceived by others and how they fit in society. This process often involves experimenting and adjusting to different social roles, such as those of a friend, student, worker, and family member. The inability to form a clear and

cohesive identity can lead to role confusion, where individuals feel they have no clear direction or purpose in their lives.

The establishment of a strong self-identity during this stage is crucial as it has a lasting impact on psychological and emotional well-being (Naini et al., 2024). A clear identity helps individuals feel more confident in making important life decisions, e.g., choosing a career, forming interpersonal relationships, and setting life goals. A strong identity also provides individuals with a sense of stability and continuity in the face of life changes and challenges (Anggreni & Immanuel, 2020). Conversely, role confusion can lead to insecurity, anxiety, and depression. Individuals who are unsuccessful in forming a cohesive identity may feel trapped in a state of uncertainty and lack of direction, which can hinder their personal and professional development (Lakhmani et al., 2022). Therefore, support from family, friends, and the social environment is crucial in helping adolescents and young adults find their identity.

Finding meaning in life is an important component of forming a strong identity. Life meaning provides individuals with a sense of purpose and motivation to achieve their personal and professional goals. In the context of Gen Z, the search for life meaning often involves questions of personal values, social contributions, and the balance between personal and professional life (Maylivasari, Qonita, & Hayati, 2024). Gen Z tends to be more oriented toward values like sustainability, inclusiveness, and social justice. They seek meaning in life through involvement in activities that support these values, e.g., joining social movements, doing volunteer work, and choosing careers that have a positive impact on society and the environment.

Gender Factor In The Discovery Of The Meaning Of Life And Optimism

Women tend to discover meaning in life through professional achievement, social status, and independence than men (Ermer, Segel-Karpas, & Benson, 2020). Meanwhile, career success and achievement become the primary sources of life meaning for men. Men tend to report their meaning of life related to success and independence (Stavrova, Pronk, & Kokkoris, 2020). Women are more vulnerable to it, but they are capable to mitigate it and discover meaning in difficult situations. It often helps them maintain optimism because women show a better ability to cope with stress through social support, which increases optimism (Paganini, Persson, & Mark, 2022). Men may demonstrate different levels of optimism depending on their social and

professional situations. Success in achieving professional and external goals usually influences men's optimism, whereas women rely more on social support and interpersonal relationships.

The search for meaning in life is a personal journey that is unique to each individual. However, social and cultural factors, like gender and the stereotypes that come with it, can greatly influence this process, including in Gen Z. Gender stereotypes place different pressures on men and women in terms of social expectations and the roles they must fulfill (Octavia, 2022). Women may feel pressured to fulfill beauty standards and traditional roles as caregivers, while men may feel pressured to demonstrate strength and independence. This pressure not only affects the way Gen Z seeks meaning in life, but also has a significant impact on their mental health and well-being (Bareket & Fiske, 2023).

Traditional gender stereotypes place women in positions that are often limited to domestic and nurturing roles. Although much progress has been made in terms of gender equality, these expectations still persist in various forms (Kinanti, Syaebani, & Primadini, 2021). Media and popular culture help promote unrealistic beauty standards for women. These standards include a certain physical appearance, ideal body size, and a style of dress that is considered attractive. On the other hand, Gen Z men face pressure to demonstrate strength, independence, and dominance.

Women who feel pressured to fulfill traditional standards of beauty and roles may find it difficult to explore and develop their full potential. They may feel trapped in roles that do not match their personal aspirations and values, which can hinder their search for authentic meaning in life. Similarly, men who feel pressured to demonstrate strength and independence may find it difficult to explore emotional and vulnerable aspects of themselves. They may feel weighed down by expectations to achieve financial and professional success, which can obscure the search for a deeper, personal meaning in life.

Spirituality Factor In Discovery Of The Meaning Of Life And Optimism

Spiritual and religious beliefs often provide the basis for understanding and the search for meaning in life. These beliefs build greater purpose and moral guidance that help people discover meaningful life directions. Spiritual practices, e.g., prayer, meditation, and self-reflection, help individuals connect with the deeper meaning of

life and enhance their emotional well-being. People who have strong spiritual beliefs and actively participate in religious practices tend to find their lives more meaningful (das Chagas & Muñoz-García, 2023) and report higher levels of livelihood and well-being (Graça & Brandão, 2024).

Religion and belief can hinder or help an individual's psychological well-being, depending on their interpretation. Belief or spirituality helps the individual maintain an optimistic attitude even in difficult situations (Pastwa-wojciechowska, Grzegorzewska, & Wojciechowska, 2021). Individuals who have strong spiritual convictions tend to be more optimistic because they believe that their lives have a purpose and that they are not alone in the face of adversity. Spiritual community provides vital social support, which can help individuals feel connected and supported. This support often boosts optimism by creating a positive environment. Individuals active in spiritual communities report higher levels of optimism, partly because of the social support they receive from those communities.

Gen Z is in a stage of development where the search for identity and purpose in life is the main focus. They often use spirituality to understand themselves and the world. The search for spiritual identity helps adolescents discover the meaning of life and foster optimism (Clanton, 2021). Spirituality, which involves the search for meaning, purpose, and connection with something greater than oneself, can play an important role in this identity search process (Ardian, 2020). For many individuals, spirituality provides a framework that helps them understand who they are, what they believe, and how they want to live. Spirituality can help Gen Z in their search for identity and purpose in life (Zega, 2021). Spirituality often provides answers to fundamental existential questions, such as "Why am I here?" and "What is my purpose in life?" Through spiritual practices like meditation, prayer or personal reflection, Gen Z can find deeper meaning and purpose in life. This can help them feel more connected to themselves and to the world around them.

Spiritual values and beliefs can provide a strong foundation for an individual's identity (Ilal et al., 2022). For example, principles like compassion, justice and respect for all living beings are often part of spiritual teachings. By internalizing these values, adolescents can build a meaningful and authentic identity and make decisions that are consistent with those values. In addition to assisting identity search, spirituality also

play a role in building optimism and emotional well-being in Gen Z (Sahroni, Anwar, Sari, & Martini, 2024). Spiritual practices can help adolescents develop a more positive attitude towards life. Through reflection and introspection, they can learn to see challenges as opportunities for growth and to develop gratitude for the good things in life.

Studies show that spiritual practices can help reduce stress and anxiety levels (Nurfajrin, Nasichah, Isnaini, & Ardila, 2023). Activities like meditation, yoga and prayer have been proven effective in calming the mind and reducing physiological stress responses. By managing stress effectively, adolescents can feel more optimistic and confident in facing challenges. Spirituality can provide strong internal resources to overcome adversities in life (Prasetyo et al., 2023). The belief that there is greater meaning in their experiences can help adolescents develop resilience, the ability to bounce back from adversity. With greater resilience, they can face the future with confidence and hope.

This study has limitations in the articles used, only sticking to journals with indexed in Google Scholar. Additionally, some articles only explained three factors that influence the search for meaning in life and optimism, which might not represent the many facets related to the search for meaning in life and optimism. For future research, it is recommended to increase the number of articles used and not only including those indexed by Google Scholar so that the results obtained can be more comprehensive.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

The development of the meaning of life and and optimism vary depending on age, gender, and spirituality. Life experiences, both positive and negative, help individuals develop optimistic attitudes. Gender also affects ways of discovering meaning in life, where women are more likely to discover it through interpersonal relationships and family roles, while men do so through professional achievement and independence. Spirituality provides a framework for understanding and discovering the meaning of life, with spiritual convictions and involvement in religious practice contributing to higher levels of meaning and optimism in life. For Gen Z, the quest for

spiritual identity can help them discover the meaning of life and foster optimism amid stereotypical gender pressures and self-identity development.

Suggestions

Based on the results of the study, the researcher suggests that future research expand the research sample and use a mixed approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, to allow broader generalization. In addition, the researcher recommends an in-depth examination of the relationship between the meaning of life and an optimistic attitude.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Aliyatil Hamdaniati: Conceptualization; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Resources; Validation; Visualization; Writing Original Draft; Writing, Review & Editing

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