

## THE MEANING OF HAPPINESS FOR PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITY IN EARLY ADULTHOOD

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### ABSTRACT

*Physically disabled is a term used for individuals who have physical disabilities. Physical disabilities can be caused by life events or have been present since birth. People with disabilities are often considered to have a miserable life, but they can also feel happiness. Happiness can be seen through 5 indicators, including: (1) positive emotion; (2) engagement; (3) relationships; (4) meaning; (5) advancements. This study aims to obtain an overview of the happiness of early adulthood as a physically disabled person. There are 4 research subjects in their early adulthood, with characteristics aged 20-40 years in which 2 have a disability from birth and 2 others acquire physical disabilities through life events. This qualitative research uses in-depth interviews and interpretive phenomenological analysis. The research findings show that the four subjects have happiness, both which is a pleasant experience (hedonic) and that is achieved through meaning and purpose (eudaimonic). It was found that there was a relationship between the indicators that appeared in the four subjects, where all indicators led the subjects to feel happiness.*

**Keywords:** Happiness, Physically Disabled, Early Adulthood

### 1. PREFACE

People with physical disabilities are individuals who have physical disabilities in their limbs [1]. As of 2018, the number of people with physical disabilities in Indonesia stood at 30.38 million people [2]. 18.8 percent of them are male and 25.2 percent of them are female [3]. It is also known that 62% of them are in the adult age of 18-44 years [3]. Physical disability itself can occur in individuals because it is congenital or genetic [4] or acquired during life due to accidents or other events [5].

People with physical disabilities are often the subject of research related to psychological disorders such as levels of depression [6] and suicidal tendencies [7].

It is important to conduct research related to positive psychology and persons with physical disabilities. This is done to illustrate that the life of people with physical disabilities is not only suffering, but there is also prosperity and happiness in it. This statement is supported by the term disability paradox, which means that the general public often sees individuals with disabilities as unhappy and tormented [8]. However, people with disabilities can also feel happiness with the conditions they have [9]

Happiness has been known since Greek times and several philosophers have expressed their views on this topic, one of them being Aristotle. Aristotle described happiness as a euphoria obtained through the discovery of a meaningful life and the role of the individual in that life [10]. As science develops, the understanding of happiness also develops and becomes more detailed. When viewed from the perspective of positive psychology, happiness is not

considered as something that is fleeting or volatile, but is described as a permanent feeling and is felt by individuals from time to time [11].

The pioneer of happiness in the world of positive psychology, namely Martin Seligman, put forward a theory about authentic happiness. In his latest book, Seligman explains that the state of happiness is achieved when individuals find positive things in life and are in a state of peace [12]. In the same book, he also suggests that when individuals achieve authentic happiness, happiness can be seen from five indicators with the PERMA acronym: Positive Emotion (positive emotions), Engagement (attachment), Relationships (relationships), Meaning (meaning), and Accomplishment (achievement) [13].

Apart from indicators of happiness, there are also factors that can affect a person's happiness. Happiness is influenced by three factors: (1) the starting point for individual happiness which is generally stable and settled; (2) indirect factors such as self-quality, life events, and situations; (3) intentional actions such as how individuals think and behave in their daily lives [14].

An experimental study by Brickman et al [14] also showed that the happiness of subjects with spinal cord injury was reported to be lower than the control group where depressive symptoms were thought to be one of the causes. Dunn, Uswatte and Elliott provide an explanation that an individual's response to life events can be so extreme that it causes them difficulty adapting to situations and not returning to the starting point of happiness [14]. This explanation provides an important overview of the individual differences that play a role in the adaptation process.

Some of the studies that have been described involve individuals with physical disabilities acquired through life events. There are also studies and cases involving persons with congenital or congenital physical disabilities. Nick Vujicic was born without limbs and legs, but has various achievements such as being a world-acclaimed speaker, New York Times award-winning writer, coach, and entrepreneur [15].

Based on several previous studies, it appears that the results of the study show that there is a difference in the happiness that is interpreted by people with physical disabilities who are obtained with congenital physical disabilities. Thus, research on the description of the happiness of people with physical disabilities needs to be carried out in more depth. In this study, researchers will explore the meaning of people with physical disabilities on the happiness they have in life. This study will also provide an overview of the achievement of happiness for people with physical disabilities which is understood through happiness indicators. Broadly speaking, the researcher will focus the research topic on the meaning of happiness in early adulthood who are people with physical disabilities.

### **Our Contribution**

Based on the explanation above, it is understood that people with physical disabilities can also feel happiness. This study was conducted to understand early adults with physical disabilities as a whole in interpreting happiness in their lives.

### **Paper Structure**

This paper is organized as follows. Section 1 is the introduction of this paper, giving a generalized explanation on the topic that is going to be furtherly discussed. Section 3 will be

discussing the result of the paper findings. Section 4 concludes the paper and presents direction for future research.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Happiness**

The latest theory of happiness was put forward by Martin Seligman with the term authentic happiness. According to Seligman, happiness is when individuals are able to live a good life and are in a prosperous condition [12]. He associates happiness with well-being and meaningful life closely. Seligman defines authentic happiness as the presence of the characteristics of positive emotions, attachment, and meaning in the individual [11]. Based on the definition of happiness from the four figures, it can be understood that happiness is a condition in which individuals have goals and directions in life so that they can feel pleasure and satisfaction in their lives.

In his book entitled “Authentic Happiness”, Seligman defines only three of the five indicators of happiness [11]. Positive emotions include sensations such as pleasure, joy, ecstasy, and comfort that individuals find in other people. Then attachment is associated with a state in which the individual loses himself while doing activities that are considered pleasurable. Finally, Seligman relates meaning to the individual's search for a purpose in life that includes belonging to and serving something greater than himself.

Each indicator was defined by Butler & Kern in the development of the PERMA measuring instrument [13]. Positive emotions are defined as an individual's tendency to feel pleasure and joy. Attachment refers to an individual who is fixated or attracted to activities and circumstances that continue to flow. Relationships mean that individuals feel loved, supported, and valued in the eyes of others. Meaning is defined as an individual's understanding of the direction and purpose of his life. Achievement refers to individuals who feel in control and have achievements. Based on the explanation of each indicator, the individual is said to have had happiness if he can feel happy when doing various activities with people who appreciate him and he directs his life to achieve various achievements.

### **Physically disabled**

The term disability is defined by the World Health Organization as an umbrella for other terms such as impairment, restricted activity or limited participation [16]. Disability is divided into three types of categories based on its severity, which are progressive, constant, and episodic [16]. Progressive disability is categorized as a condition in which the individual's disability will continue to gradually worsen [16]. Constant disability is a disability condition that has been present since birth and that occurs in individuals through life events [16]. The last category, namely episodic disability, is “disability that occurs suddenly and is difficult to predict, such as people with epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, and lupus” [16].

There are various types of disabilities. Based on Law no. 8 of 2016, disability is divided into five types or categories, namely physical, intellectual, mental, sensory, and combined [17]. Individuals who have physical disabilities have limitations in their means of movement so that it is difficult to carry out activities [16]. Several figures gave their

definition of physical disability, one of which is Batchhurst and Bedine stating that people with physical disabilities experience problems in their physical condition so that they are hampered to function normally and require special treatment [16]. It can be said that individuals with physical disabilities have problems when carrying out activities because of their physical limitations, as a result they need special assistance.

There are several opinions regarding the causes of individuals having physical disabilities. The Handicaps Welfare Association classifies the causes of physical disability into two, namely congenital (congenital or genetic) and acquired (acquired) [18]. Congenital disabilities are divided into three conditions, namely: (1) the individual has had a physical abnormality since birth; (2) problems occur during the birthing process; (3) disability that occurs in adulthood due to genetic factors [18]. The disability obtained is also divided into three conditions, namely: (1) disability occurs due to traffic accidents or work accidents; (2) infection; (3) illness or medical disorder [18].

Physical disabilities can affect some to all parts of the body, such as the arms and legs [19]. Physical disability itself is divided into several types, including spinal cord injury, spina bifida, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, epilepsy, sclerosis, muscle disorders, and dwarfism (Aruma, 2019). Spinal cord injuries cause limitation of motion and affect certain limbs, depending on the part of the spine that is injured [19]. Cerebral palsy is a physical disability that causes “abnormalities in muscle tone, posture, and movement” [19]. Musculoskeletal disorders are “a progressive condition involving “degeneration of skeletal muscles throughout the body, resulting in an inability to walk” [19].

Having a physical disability can affect their psychological and social life. People with physical disabilities have difficulty carrying out their social roles so that there are social restrictions that affect their daily lives [20]. The social restrictions they experience lead to psychological problems, namely decreased quality of life which also includes anxiety, depression, and self-efficacy [20]. Chronic pain experienced by persons with physical disabilities is associated with high depressive moods and easy fatigue [20]. People with disabilities also have low self-efficacy because of their view of themselves that their physical limitations cause an inability to succeed in performing tasks in the future [20].

#### Early adulthood

Early adulthood includes the age of 20-40 years [4]. This age stage is described as a period of exploration and is known as emerging adulthood or the emergence of adulthood [4]. Individual maturity can be seen based on 2 things, namely sociological and psychological. Sociologically, an individual is considered an adult if he already has a career, has a romantic partner, or is married [4]. Psychologically, maturity is determined from achievements, such as self-identity, independence from parents, having self-worth, and building relationships [4].

In early adulthood, health is an aspect that needs to be maintained to ensure the survival of the individual for the rest of his life. Health can be influenced by several things, including genetics and lifestyle [4]. Bad lifestyles such as smoking, drinking alcohol, and using drugs can lead individuals to various health problems. Even so, congenital or genetic diseases can also cause individuals to experience physical limitations. The NCHS reports that “the main reasons individuals have limitations in daily activities are arthritis, muscle disorders, and other bone disorders” [4].

Being in an early adult developmental stage leads to more mature thinking as well. Dewey explains that early adulthood is associated with their ability to think reflectively, that is, they often and spontaneously use critical thinking and have complex intellectual systems [4]. Education is a stimulation for individuals to have reflective thinking skills [4]. Then the cognitive development of early adulthood is also explained that individuals have achieved postformal thinking which is characterized by abstract thinking abilities including dealing with uncertainty, contradiction, and compromise [4]. Then it is further explained that postformal thinking includes ideas that are not absolute, namely the ability to see a problem from various points of view [4].

### **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Researchers found that there was a relationship between each indicator of happiness. This is in accordance with the findings which also state that each PERMA indicator is correlated with one another [21]. It was found by researchers that the positive emotion indicator is related to engagement in WN and SN subjects, where they feel positive emotions when doing activities they like. Meanwhile, it was found in ML and SS subjects that positive emotion indicators were related to relationships, where both subjects felt grateful for their relationships with fellow physically disabled persons. Then it was also found that the meaning indicator is related to relationships, where the life goals of WN, ML, and SS subjects involve providing assistance to their closest people. It was found on the subject of SS that the meaning indicator is related to accomplishment, in which the purpose of life includes achieving achievement. Another finding is the relationship between the indicators of accomplishment and meaning, where the four subjects feel mastery and excel in the activities they enjoy.

This study also found that to achieve the five indicators that the four subjects currently have, a process needs to be passed. These findings are related to the theory of Sheldon, Boehm, and Lyubomirsky regarding the starting point of happiness which is an individual characteristic since birth [22]. This theory is then used as the basis for the theories of other psychological figures, one of which is adaptation to circumstances which explains that when individuals experience bad events, it will take a lot of time to return to their initial point of happiness [23]. Through this theory, it can be understood that the achievement of the five indicators of happiness is included in the adaptation process to achieve happiness. WN subjects are known to go through a period of one and a half where the negative emotions he feels are so high that there are thoughts of suicide because of his disability that comes suddenly. Likewise, the subject of SN is known to have passed three years without having any meaningful activities due to an accident that caused him to have a physical disability. The adaptation process for WN and SN is an increase in the five indicators so that they can achieve happiness as they are today. Meanwhile, ML and SS subjects go through a process of adaptation throughout their lives by finding the best way to do new activities with only one hand. Then there is the meaning of happiness which can be seen from the five indicators of happiness when the four subjects have adapted to their physical disability conditions.

Another finding in this study relates to factors that affect happiness. The theory put forward by Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade explains three main factors that influence happiness, namely (1) the starting point of individual happiness which is generally stable and permanent; (2) indirect factors; (3) intentional action [14]. Subjects WN, SN, ML, and SS show the starting point of happiness tends to be high because they generally feel happiness in

their daily lives. On the indirect factor, as they age, the four subjects are known to find happiness that involves something more than themselves. It was also found that the subjects SN, ML, and SS felt happy living in Solo because there were many people with physical disabilities so that the local community had an open mind towards individuals with disabilities. Then the intentional actions taken by the four subjects on a daily basis contributed to their happiness, where WN read a book, SN socialized with friends, ML practiced bicycle, and SS had a meal.

Researchers also found that the happiness felt by each subject had an impact on their daily lives and also several aspects of their lives. This is in line with the theory of Hermans and Meijers which suggests that happiness provides benefits for individuals who feel and also those around them [24]. These benefits are understood as social rewards, improved performance, benefits for the community, and being physically and mentally healthy [24]. Awards for WN subjects are known to come from residents of the foundation where they live, while social awards for SN, ML, and SS subjects come from fellow training members and also supporters in matches. The increase in the performance of the four subjects can be seen from the productivity in their respective jobs. WN subjects worked from 6 in the morning to 7 in the evening, then SN and ML subjects were known to often practice outside of the supposed hours, and SS subjects remained enthusiastic about practicing even though they were tired. The benefits of the four subjects for the community can be seen from the WN subject who often participates in foundation activities, the SN subject who often shares knowledge with friends during training, the ML subject who has friends who are willing to help when they have difficulty exercising, and the SS subject who is easy to work with others. training members. The physical and mental health of WN subjects is seen from their emotional stability and their efforts to forget the pain in their bodies by keeping their emotions in check. Then the subject of SN is known to also have stable emotions and keep his body in shape by continuing to feel happy. ML subjects are also known to maintain their body health by not thinking about negative things, and ML also has good self-control by keeping their emotions in check when they are in a bad mood. Then the subject of SS has good physical health because he is able to do everything, but it is explained that his mental condition has ups and downs like a human being.

### **Indicators Of Happiness**

On the positive emotion indicator, the four subjects have in common that they have gone through negative emotions before finally feeling positive emotions in the present. However, the difference between the four subjects is the form of negative emotions that have been felt and positive emotions that are currently felt. In WN and SN subjects, it is known that both of them had positive emotions before their disability, then negative emotions emerged in the form of a desire to end life and suspicion that lasted for some time, until now they have strength in themselves and are able to feel grateful. In the subject of ML and SS, it is known that both of them felt negative emotions in the form of sadness as a child, then now both of them feel grateful because their physical disabilities are considered mild so they can still carry out various activities.

In the engagement indicator, the four subjects have in common that each of them has activities that they enjoy. The difference between them is the feeling they feel when doing their respective activities. The subject of WN feels grateful for the busyness of his current job. SN and SS subjects feel lost when they share their hobbies, where their

hobbies are modifying automotive and bicycles. ML subjects make sports as a channel for the various feelings they have.

In the relationship indicator, the four subjects have similarities where the greatest and constant support comes from the family. WN and SN subjects have a good relationship with their father so that the feeling of being loved is felt from the father. ML and SS subjects get the freedom from their families, especially parents, to do what they want so that they feel the greatest support from their parents. The four subjects had received different treatment from their friends, before finally feeling supported by new friends who also had physical disabilities.

In the meaning indicator, the four subjects are known to have their own meaning and purpose in life. WN, ML, and SS subjects have in common that their purpose in life is to be useful and to be able to help others, especially those closest to them. While the subject of SN has a life goal to excel in his career. WN and SS subjects have experienced changes in their life goals since they first determined their life goals until now. Meanwhile, SN and ML's life goals are constant, namely SN to become an athlete, and ML to make her family and mother happy.

In the indicators of accomplishment, the four subjects are known to have similarities in which they feel they have mastered something in their lives and have achievements in that field. WN and SN subjects felt that they had no achievement when they had just experienced a physical disability. But both of them rediscover a sense of mastery when they find their respective jobs. ML and SS subjects go through a career selection process before finally having mastery in each of their current fields. ML's subject has been involved in several sports until now, he is in paracycling, while SS has several professions outside of sports, so far he has also excelled in paracycling.

#### **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study uses qualitative methods to describe the happiness of early adults with physical disabilities. Subject WN is 35 years old with physical disability due to an illness he suffered when he was 18 years old. The subject of SN is 27 years old with physical disability due to an accident that occurred when he was 11 years old. The subject of ML is 35 years old with a physical disability that has been present since birth. 27-year-old SS subject has a physical disability since birth. With their physical disabilities, the four subjects still have happiness in their lives, judging from their understanding of the meaning of happiness for themselves and the five indicators of happiness they have.

With the above results, the researcher can conclude that there is happiness in the lives of the subjects. Even though they have disabilities, either by accident or from birth, they are able to find happiness in other aspects of life. The meaning of their happiness is seen from the five indicators of happiness they have, namely the presence of positive emotions, activities they enjoy, relationships with support, direction and purpose in life, and feeling of mastery and achievement. The five indicators are achieved through a process, especially for people with physical disabilities, it is the process of accepting the conditions they have. By understanding the process of the four subjects in achieving the five indicators of happiness, researchers get an idea of the meaning of happiness from people with physical disabilities.

Further research is advised to dig deeper into the possibility of other variables, such as resilience that affects the happiness of people with physical disabilities. This is based on research findings that show the ability to achieve all five indicators.

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