

The Role of Optimism as the Mediator between Family and Mental Wellbeing among Secondary School Students in East Java

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Abstract: The study of wellbeing has become a favorite topic in scientific disciplines. A dominant force was driving focus on the association with physical and mental health and its role in economic and social issues. The purpose of study is to test the optimism as the mediator variable between family and mental wellbeing among students. Subjects were 758 secondary school students in East Java, Indonesia (406 boys and 352 girls). Data obtained through the Brief Family Relationship Scale, Life Orientation Test-Revised, Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale. Data were analyzed by mediated regression analysis. The results showed that family functioning is a predictor of both optimism and wellbeing. The role of family functioning is decreasing even close to zero when regressing with wellbeing is done by including optimism. Thus, it was concluded that optimism is a mediator variable from the relationship of family functioning with well-being on students.

1 INTRODUCTION

The understanding that everyone can benefit from an increase in mental well-being is known while acknowledging that many people live with mental problems. So, an understanding of the factors affected for well-being is needed to be studied. In recent years, the topic of well-being has become a popular topic in cross-disciplinary research. The dominant force that directs this broad focus is the well-being association with physical and mental health and its role in socio-economic and economic development issues (Boehm, Peterson, Kivimaki, & Kubzansky, 2011; Bartels, Cacioppo, van Beijsterveldt, & Boomsma, 2013). The other research found that well-being predicts longevity among healthy populations (Steptoe et al., 2008).

The Studies of well-being are critical because a high level of well-being is associated with outstanding benefits including improved health, happiness, meaningfulness in life, increased longevity, career success, increased quality of social relations, and improved cognitive function (Kirkcaldy, 2015). Furthermore, well-being in students may be related to factors that are not as relevant to adults. Thus, research on the causes of

well-being in children is very important, and the correlation of well-being and its components can change throughout life.

Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, (2005) said that three aspects could be proposed to explain variations in the level of well-being: genetic set points, living conditions, and intentional activities. These categories explain various factors that influence well-being including personality types, the environment, and skills and hobbies. This research focuses on two factors affected to wellbeing; there are living environment factor (family functioning) and personality trait factors (optimism).

Many research's about wellbeing have done. One of the studies highlighted the importance of social relationships, that is to say, positive relationships with family members are influences on student wellbeing. Some studies have found that lack of balance in the family affects levels with depression and poor mental health on a child (Haar, 2014). The similar result on a family member on wellbeing found by Krauss, Seltzer, & Jacobson, (2005) and (Bitsika and Sharpley, 2004).

Besides factors of family functioning, optimism is also examined as one variable that affects well-being. The research showed that optimism also related to students wellbeing (Ruthig et al., 2007).

Optimism is defined as someone's hope that everyone will experience a positive experience (Bressler, Bressler and Bressler, 2010). This opinion, according to Harpaz-Itay and Kaniel (2012), that optimism is a positive reflection of favorable approach to understanding the behavior of human.

Some research reported that optimism was correlated to wellbeing. The research found that students who in the first semester got high marks on their optimism showed higher welfare and less psychological stress three months later. They show that the effect of optimism on well-being is not only direct but also indirect with adaptive coping methods. (Krypel and Henderson-King, 2010). This study aims to examine the relationship between a family with wellbeing, both directly and indirectly through optimism.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The term of mental wellbeing is often used, in both policy and academic literature, interchangeably with the term of positive mental health. Historically, the understanding of well-being has been a very long and lively debate, primarily focusing on two views: hedonic and eudemonic (Tennant et al., 2007). Ryan and Deci (2001) described the distinction. Hedonic well-being is primarily focused on the next states of pleasure and happiness and eudemonic on the actualization of human potential. Keyes (2013) explains that the hedonic tradition that focuses on human concern by maximizing the duration of positive or pleasant feelings while minimizing the duration of negative or unpleasant feelings. Eudemonics is a tradition of eudemonia that focuses on human care by developing new abilities and capacities to become fully functional people and citizens.

According to the World Health Organization (2004), the concept of wellbeing is a dynamic and multidimensional concept. It means wellbeing is a concept that continues to experience change over time and also as a concept can be understood from various dimensions. Liddle & Carter (2015) said that the latest holistic view of well-being includes many dimensions. This is seen as a combination of subjective condition of relaxation, the presence of a positive mood and the absence of negative moods, and the existence of psychological conditions of personal growth, life satisfaction, social interactions with others, and personal relatedness with high-

quality relations (Wyn, Cuervo and Landstedt, 2014).

Many factors affected well-being, one of them is family. The research conducted by Krauss, Seltzer, & Jacobson, (2005) found that mothers' positive and negative experiences affected to their family members. Similar research conducted by Bitsika and Sharpley (2004) reports that two-thirds of parents of autistic children are clinically depressed. It can be concluded that family is an essential factor affected to student wellbeing.

Besides, family functioning is also expected to increase students' optimism (Lopez and Magaña, 2018). This is based on the assumption that families function correctly teach their children to be able to solve problems effectively, be able to communicate directly, distribute appropriate roles, allowing them to take responsibility for their actions and connect optimally to the causes of negative and positive events. On the other hand, that higher family functions may lead to the development of optimism and reduce pessimism (Seda Sahin et al., 2010).

In this study, optimism is defined as affection characteristic of a personality trait. It means that optimism is optimism is an expectation that exists in individuals that everything will go towards goodness. Feelings of optimism bring the individual to the desired goal, namely the self and ability possessed. The attitude of optimism makes a person come out quickly from the problems faced because of the thought and feeling of having the ability. Also supported is the assumption that everyone has their own luck. According to Miller & Topping (1991), the dimension of personality affection refers to individual differences in the intensity of emotional reactions to daily events in his life. The other hand, optimism refers to the generalized expectancies that pertain more or less to the person's entire his life.

(Scheier, Carver and Bridges, 2001) explained that optimistic thinking is cognitive disposition to expect and anticipate the best results in life. As a cognitive disposition it will affect how individuals interpret the intentions and behavior of others in social relations. Optimistic individuals always wish the best in life by developing positive attitudes towards the future and accepting problems with more constructive adaptations. Fundamentally optimism is not only a statement that encourages oneself, but also how to think about the cause of an event.

The role of optimism in this research is as a mediator variable that can be an intermediary in the relationship between family and wellbeing. That is, the family will effectively influence the wellbeing of

students if the student has a high level of optimism. Therefore, the hypothesis proposed is that the family can be a predictor of high and wellbeing, both directly and indirectly through optimism.

3 METHOD

3.1 Participant

The participant consisted of 758 (406 boys, 352 girls) student enrolled in secondary school from 8 cities in East Java. Participants ranged in age from 13 years through 15 years (M= 14,18 SD=.74).

3.2 Measurement

3.2.1 Brief Family Relationship Scale

This scale is used to measure family functions. This measurement was adapted from the 27-item of the Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1994) which consisted of the Cohesion, Expressive, and Conflict subscales (9 items each). This sub-scale measures support in the family, freedom of expression in opinion, and bitter conflict in the family (Fok, Allen, Henry, & Team, (2014), after they rewrote items with the help of the focus group discussion, they tested and deleted items that were not functioning correctly, leaving the 8-item Cohesion subscale, the 4-item Expressiveness subscale, and the 7-item Conflict subscale, amounting to 19 items.

3.2.2 Life Orientation Test-Revised

This scale was used to measure dispositional optimism developed by Scheier et al. (1994). Dispositional optimism is measured using three positive and three negative items, such as 'In times of uncertainty, I usually expect the best' or 'If something is wrong for me, it will happen.' Four filler items were added to hide the purpose of the assessment. The response format used is a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 to 5. The reliability and validity of LOT-R has been determined as satisfactory (Cronbach's alpha =0.83).

3.2.3 Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale

This scale is used to measure mental well-being by asking participants how often they feel optimistic about the future; feel useful; feel relaxed; handle

problems well; think clearly; feeling close to others; able to decide for yourself about things for the past two weeks (Stewart-Brown and Janmohamed, 2008). Responses ranged from 1 to 5 on a 5-point Likert scale.

4 RESULT

In our study, (a) correlations between the study variables were investigated; (b) optimism was tested as the mediators for relationships between family function and wellbeing. Descriptive statistics and correlations for the measured variables are presented in Table 1, wellbeing, family, and optimism was correlated as expected with one another.

Table 1: Inter correlations and descriptive statistic

		1	2	3	M	SD
1	Mental Wellbeing	-	.240**	.135**	54,87	8,79
2	Family Functioning		-	.165**	60,48	9,49
3	Optimism			-	23,69	4,09

All correlations are significant at the .001 level

The researchers conducted a mediator analysis to independently assess whether optimism mediated the relationship between family and well-being. Consistent with recommendations from Baron and Kenny (1986) several conditions are needed to show mediation. First, the family must be related to mediator variables and mediator variables: well-being. Second, mediation variables (optimism), must be significantly related to well-being. Finally, the strength of the relationship between family and well-being must be reduced; mediator variables are also included in the model. However, there was evidence for the mediating roles of optimism in the relationship between family and wellbeing. Thus, there are three regression equation models to be analyzed, namely;

1. Model 1: Predictor (family functioning) correlated with the criterion (well-being).
2. Model 2: Predictor (family functioning) correlated with the criterion (optimism).
3. Model 3: Predictor (optimism) correlated with the criterion (mental well-being).

Researchers conducted to assess that optimism as a mediator for the relationship between family and wellbeing on the student. The result showed that the β weight when the family was regressed alone on wellbeing was $\beta= .240$, $p<.010$. The optimism was regressed on the family was $\beta= .099$, $p<.010$.

Nevertheless, the β weight dropped from $\beta = .240$ to $\beta = .099$ when optimism was added into the equation. It means, optimism mediated for family and wellbeing on the student.

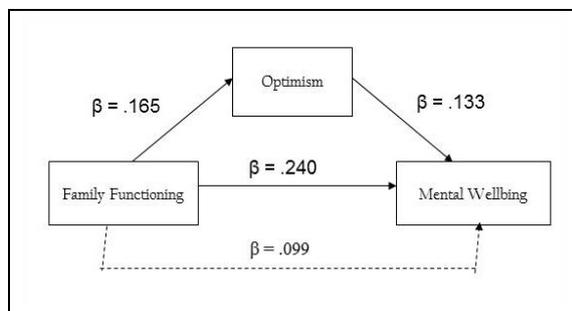


Figure 1: The result of indirect effect analysis

5 DISCUSSION

This study shows that family functioning directly affects wellbeing on students. This result is in line with the research conducted by Stacciarini et al. (2015) who found that family conditions were able to protect or damage wellbeing in Latin immigrants. Other studies have shown that family characteristics affect wellbeing in children with autism (Salomone et al., 2018). Another study was conducted by Thomas, Liu, & Umberson, (2017) who found a very close relationship between family conditions and wellbeing in children.

The effective functioning of the family is characterized by cohesiveness in the family, freedom to express emotions and be free from conflict among family members (Rudolf, H., 1990). Family conditions above can provide opportunities for children to develop cognitive and psychological functions optimally, they can establish positive relationships with people around and control the environment in which they live. In other words, whether or not the wellbeing condition of an individual is achieved is highly dependent on the condition of the family where he lives. Conversely, individuals who are in properly families, they tend to experience cognitive, emotional and behavioral problems.

The associations between optimism and wellbeing have been found in several studies. (Wrosch and Scheier, 2003) found that optimism was related to low depression, deep negative emotions, and life satisfaction. The other research found that optimism was negatively associated with negative affect and

positively associated with positive affect (Wrosch and Scheier, 2003)

The results also found that optimism mediated in the relationship between family functioning and well-being in children. Several studies have found that optimism can be an intermediary variable in the relationship between spirituality and depression (Cheadle and Schetter, 2018), the relationship between experiences of violence in children with distress (Brodhagen and Wise, 2008), and the relationship of the number of students in classes with academic emphasis (Wu, 2013).

The results show that optimism mediates relationships between families with wellbeing. This result is in line with the research of Korkeila et al., (2004) who found that optimism mediates the relationship between parent-child and child hardiness, in other words, family conditions effectively affect wellbeing if there is an increase in optimism aspects of children. Other studies have found that optimism mediates on the relationship between meaningfulness in life and wellbeing (Ho, Cheung and Cheung, 2010). It means that meaningfulness in life is more effective in increasing wellbeing if through increased optimism.

Many theories can be used to explain wellbeing on students. Among the theories are a self-determinant theory (Ryan, 1995), focuses on volitional or self-determined behavior and the social and cultural conditions that promote it. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) focuses on the relationship between well-being in the context of the family. A dynamic equilibrium model or Set point theory of wellbeing (Headey and Wearing, 1989) focus on how people can overcome the changes that occur and how their level of well-being is affected in their lives. Hendry and Kloep's (2002) Lifelong development models also explore and explain the interactions that occur between challenges in life and personal resources.

According to Graham (2006), attachment theory aims to explain the attachment process and attachment behavior. The Attachment process is biological in the form of a person's tendency to feel comfortable and protected, while attachment behavior is a behavior that is produced by a person to gain closeness to identify individuals who are considered more able to overcome the world and provide the necessary comfort and protection.

The explanation from the attachment theory is: attachment to his family can cause an individual who has a high level of wellbeing, therefore, to develop well-being in students must begin by creating a family condition that works well, namely

the mutual support between family, giving freedom to expression, and reducing the tendency for conflict between family members.

Teenagers between the ages of 13 until 15 are still very dependent on their parents emotionally, cognitively and financially. They still live together with their parents, so they still feel attached to their parents. The results of this study imply that parents have a beneficial and strategic role in developing youthful optimism, which in turn can improve their well-being.

6 CONCLUSION

The family function is an important variable to study for developing optimism and wellbeing on the student. Optimism is a mediator variable from the relationship of family functioning with well-being on students. It means that the family will play a more active role in increasing wellbeing if the individual has a high level of optimism.

The Suggestions that can be proposed for parents in interacting with adolescents is that they should play a role as parents well because this role can become a means for teens to develop their optimism and wellbeing in carrying out their lives.

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