

Subjective Well-Being Among Unemployed Early Adults: The Role of Optimism and Unemployment Duration Across Genders

Thomas Ari Wicaksono¹
Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia
Email: thomasariwicaksono@mail.ugm.ac.id

Margaretha Sih Setija Utami²
Soegijapranata Catholic University, Indonesia
Email: cicijh@unika.ac.id

Correspondence:

Thomas Ari Wicaksono
Gadjah Mada University
Email: thomasariwicaksono@mail.ugm.ac.id

Abstract

Kesejahteraan subjektif adalah aspek penting dalam kehidupan. Semakin tinggi tingkat kesejahteraan seseorang, maka semakin tinggi pula kualitas hidupnya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui hubungan antara lama menganggur, jenis kelamin, dan optimisme dengan subjective well-being pada dewasa awal yang menganggur. Hipotesis dari penelitian ini adalah: 1) Terdapat hubungan antara durasi menganggur dan optimisme dengan kesejahteraan subjektif; 2) Terdapat perbedaan kesejahteraan subjektif antara laki-laki dan perempuan dewasa awal yang menganggur. Subjek penelitian ini adalah orang dewasa awal yang sedang menganggur atau memulai usaha dan berdomisili di Jawa Tengah. Subjek yang terlibat dalam penelitian ini berjumlah 159 responden. Alat ukur yang digunakan adalah skala optimisme dan skala kesejahteraan subjektif yang dibuat oleh peneliti. Kedua alat ukur tersebut telah diuji validitas dan reliabilitasnya. Teknik analisis data yang digunakan adalah analisis regresi berganda dan uji-t. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan 1) ada hubungan antara durasi menganggur dan optimisme dengan kesejahteraan subjektif ($R = 0,737$, Adjusted R Square = $0,537$, $F: 92,477$, $p < 0,05$); 2). Tidak ada perbedaan yang signifikan dalam kesejahteraan subjektif antara laki-laki dan perempuan yang menganggur di usia dewasa awal ($t = 1,453$, $p > 0,05$)

Kata kunci: Optimisme, Kesejahteraan Subjektif, Dewasa Awal

Abstrak

Subjective well-being (SWB) is an essential aspect of life. The higher a person's well-being level, the higher their quality of life. This research aims to know the correlations between the duration of unemployment, gender, and optimism with the subjective well-being of unemployed early adults. The research hypotheses are: 1) There is a relationship between duration of unemployment and optimism and subjective well-being; 2) There are many differences in subjective well-being between male and female unemployed early adults. The subjects of this research are early adults who are unemployed or starting a business and currently reside in Central Java. The subjects involved in this research are 159 respondents. The measuring instruments used are an optimism scale and a subjective well-being scale created by researchers. Both measuring instruments have been tested for validity and reliability. The data analysis techniques are multiple regression analysis and t-test. The research results show 1) there is a correlation between the duration of unemployment and optimism with subjective well-being ($R = 0.737$, Adjusted R Square = 0.537 , $F: 92.477$, $p < 0.05$); 2). There is no significant difference in subjective well-being between males and females unemployed in early adulthood ($t = 1.453$, $p > 0.05$)

Key words: Optimism, Subjective Well-Being, Early Adulthood

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BACKGROUND

Unemployment is one of Indonesia's social problems. The open unemployment rate in Central Java was 5.75% in August 2022, or 1.08 million unemployed. Furthermore, Central Java is Indonesia's eleventh out of 38 provinces (BPS, 2022). This condition worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many companies changed their business systems during the pandemic by laying off employees and reducing job openings (Qardavi, 2020). This gap then gives rise to open unemployment, one of which is among early adults.

Early adulthood is a stage of development experienced by every individual. Santrock explains that early adulthood is a transition period every individual experiences from teenage to adult (Santrock, 2017). According to Hurlock (1980), there are several developmental tasks at this early adulthood stage: choosing a life partner, managing a household, accepting responsibilities as a citizen, and getting a job. Based on this explanation, this early adulthood phase is crucial for every individual. Therefore, unemployment in early adulthood can also result in several more serious psychological problems, one of which is subjective well-being.

Subjective well-being is an individual's evaluation of their lives (Diener et al., 2018). Those with high subjective well-being will feel satisfied with their lives and experience more positive than adverse effects. Tov & Diener (2013), describe subjective well-being as how individuals evaluate themselves and their life experiences.

Regarding unemployment status, Karjuniwati (2019) explained that unemployment happens because of psychological problems such as restlessness, anxiety, and even emotionality. Besides that, subjective well-being also influences how a person adapts and interacts with the surrounding environment (Compton et al., 2020).

Examples of events resulting from lower subjective well-being among the unemployed include higher rates of depression and suicide among the unemployed. In 2020, the suicide rate in Indonesia increased by 33.7% during the COVID-19 pandemic, most of which occurred among the unemployed (Sianturi & Zulaeha, 2022). The research shows that low subjective well-being among the unemployed has a severe impact on a person's mental health, especially during the current difficult times when the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting work.

Subjective well-being cannot be separated from several of its influencing factors. Several factors contribute to subjective well-being, especially in early adulthood, namely gender, age, social status, social support, spirituality, duration of unemployment, and optimism (Gedikli et al., 2023a; Harpan, 2021). Furthermore, Rosario & Abella, (2010) also stated that people with high optimism tend to get more perceived social support than pessimistic people.

In this study, gender, length of unemployment, and optimism were chosen as independent variables. Seligman (2011) explained that optimism is a holistic view, good vision, positive thinking, and straightforward giving meaning to oneself. Optimistic people can produce something better

than the past, are not afraid of failure, and try to get up and try again when they fail.

Seligman (2011) described an individual with an optimistic nature that will be seen in several aspects: Permanence is an individual who always shows a mature attitude towards life and sees that what happens to him is only temporary. Optimistic people tend to see the bad events they experience as temporary, so they do not give up trying to improve the situation. Pervasiveness refers to an explanatory style related to the dimensions of scope, which can be divided into specific and universal. With this pervasiveness, an individual can find the cause of the problems they are experiencing and have the focus to find a solution. For example, optimistic individuals who experience failure in one area are less likely to believe they are deficient in others. Personalization is an explanatory style related to the source of causes, divided into internal and external. Optimistic individuals will see that good things come from within themselves and bad things come from outside themselves. This condition causes optimistic individuals to refrain from blaming themselves as the source of mistakes. Based on the theory above, optimism has several aspects, such as permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization.

Ervasti & Venetoklis (2010) stated that unemployment significantly impacts men more than women. Moreover, this is possible because men have a social role as head of the family. In addition, Gedikli et al., (2023) stated that the duration of unemployment status also has an essential role in determining the level of subjective well-being. It was further explained that the higher the duration of a person's unemployment, the lower the level of their subjective well-being.

Based on the explanation above, researchers are interested in discovering more about the correlation between the duration of unemployment, gender, and optimism with subjective well-being, especially in unemployed young adults. This research is crucial because subjective well-being is essential for everyone, and unemployment, especially in early adulthood, can seriously impact developmental tasks. Therefore, the relationship between optimism, gender, and length of unemployment with subjective well-being in unemployed young adults is vital to examine in this research. The research hypotheses are: 1) There is a relationship between duration of unemployment and optimism and subjective well-being; 2) There are many differences in subjective well-being between male and female unemployed early adults.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is correlational and comparative quantitative research. The sampling technique is accidental sampling. The sample in this study was unemployed early adults who lived in Central Java. The age range of respondents was 18 - 40, and the length of unemployment ranged from 0 years to more than three years.

Optimism was measured using a scale compiled by researchers referring to Seligman's aspects of optimism, namely permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization. The

scale consists of 14 items ($\alpha=0.88$) using a Likert scale as a form of response with a value range of 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely). The lowest corrected item-total correlation value was 0.26, and the highest was 0.75.

Subjective well-being was measured through a scale compiled by researchers. This scale refers to aspects of subjective well-being, according to Diener et al. (2018), namely positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction. This scale comprises 15 items ($\alpha=0.90$) and uses a Likert scale model as a response form. The lowest corrected item-total correlation value was 0.22, and the highest was 0.69.

Researchers used Google Forms to collect data and provided several screening questions to filter respondents who matched the criteria. This research used multiple regression analysis as the data analysis technique.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The subjects involved in this research were 159 people from various Central Java cities. Demographic data from the respondents involved can be seen in Table 3.1. From the demographic data, it can be concluded that the characteristics of the subjects in this study were female

(53.5%) with a long duration of unemployment of 0-1 year (72.3%).

Tabel 1 Demographic Data

Classification	Information	Amount	Percentage
Gender	Man	74	46.5%
	Woman	85	53.5%
Duration of Unemployment	0-1 year	115	72.3%
	1-3 years	36	22.6%
	>3 years	8	5%

Hypothesis testing

Researchers tested hypotheses using multiple regression analysis to see the relationship between duration of unemployment, gender, and optimism on subjective well-being.

The regression analysis results of two predictors (optimism and duration of unemployment) with the dependent variable subjective well-being show a significant relationship between length of unemployment and optimism with subjective well-being. This can be seen $R= 0.737$, Adjusted R Square = 0.537, $F: 92.477, p < 0.05$.

Tabel 2 Model Fit Measure

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Overall Model Test			
				F	df1	df2	p
1	0.736	0.542	0.539	185.6	1	157	<.001
2	0.737	0.542	0.537	92.5	2	156	<.001
3	0.740	0.548	0.539	62.6	3	155	<.001

Based on the partial correlation test, it is known that the correlation between optimism and subjective well-being in unemployment is 0.733 with a significance level < 0.05 ($r=0.733; p < 0.05$). Meanwhile, the partial correlation between the duration of unemployment and subjective well-being is 0.040, and the significance level is > 0.05 ($r=0.040, p > 0.05$). From these results, optimism has a more significant contribution to subjective well-being than unemployment duration. Meanwhile, researchers found no differences between men and women regarding the subjective well-being of unemployed early adults ($t=1.453, p > 0.05$).

Tabel 3 Independent Sample T-Test

		Statistic	df	P
Total Kesejahteraan Subjektif	Student's t	1.45	157	0.148

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the hypothesis test above, it is known that among duration of unemployment, gender, and optimism, only optimism influences the subjective well-being level of early adult unemployment, while the factors of length of unemployment and gender do not. This finding is similar to previous studies regarding optimism and subjective well-being in different populations.

In their research, Garvin & Putri (2021) found a relationship between optimism and subjective well-being.

Their study, which focuses on the employee population who work from home, finds several factors contributing to this correlation. It is stated that workers who have optimism tend to be better at managing stress so that they can increase their level of subjective well-being. Sari & Maryatmi (2018) found in their research that there is a positive relationship between optimism and subjective well-being. This research focuses on class XI students at Marsudirini High School, Bekasi. However, this study could have explained further regarding the discussion of the results. Oriol et al. (2020) also found a relationship between optimism and subjective well-being in their research. This finding happens because optimism gives someone a positive view of what they are facing. Optimism plays a role in improving their subjective well-being, one aspect of which is pleasant affect.

Disruptive people often experience stress, uncertainty, and low self-esteem (Moussa & Ali, 2022). However, optimistic individuals tend to have a favorable view of the future and believe they can overcome the challenges they face. This belief provides a sense of control and high expectations, increasing overall life satisfaction. Optimism helps unemployed people see unemployment as a temporary transition period during which they can develop themselves, seek new opportunities, and plan for a better future (Bortolotti, 2018).

Researchers see that in this study, the unemployment duration category is dominated by the 0-1 year category. This

condition allows for the finding that the length of unemployment does not have a positive correlation in this study. This finding is in line with Gedikli et al. (2023), who state that long periods of unemployment impact subjective well-being. It was further noted that the longer the duration of someone's unemployment, the more significant the impact on their subjective well-being. The temporary nature of short-duration unemployment has been shown to engender in individuals a perception of their situation as a transient phase rather than a permanent state (Lawes et al., 2023). Lawes et al. (2023) found that individuals experiencing short-term unemployment often adapt more quickly and experience less long-term impact on their well-being compared to those facing prolonged unemployment.

This research found no difference in subjective well-being between male and female participants. This finding is supported by Ugur's finding that states that individuals, regardless of gender, tend to adapt to adverse life events such as unemployment. This adaptation can lead to a decrease in the perceived impact of unemployment on well-being over time (Ugur, 2023). The findings suggest that while there may be differences in coping mechanisms between genders, the overall effect of unemployment on subjective well-being remains consistent across both groups.

Coping strategies have been demonstrated to play a crucial role in shaping the subjective well-being of unemployed individuals (Russo et al., 2021). Research has shown that both men and women adopt similar coping mechanisms, such as seeking social support or personal development, leading to comparable well-being outcomes (Russo et al., 2021). This aligns with shifting gender roles, where men and women experience unemployment in increasingly similar ways (Aguiar et al., 2021). However, longitudinal studies suggest that prolonged unemployment exerts a uniformly negative impact on life satisfaction, thereby underscoring the notion that duration is a more critical factor than gender in determining subjective well-being (Gedikli et al., 2023).

Most participants in this research are in the medium category of subjective well-being. This means that individuals with medium subjective well-being may exhibit characteristics such as resilience in the face of challenges, the ability to regulate emotions, and a general sense of contentment with their lives (Melsandi et al., 2023). However, they may also encounter periods of dissatisfaction or emotional distress, indicating that while they are not in a state of crisis, there is room for improvement in their overall well-being.

Researchers also found that an optimistic attitude made a compelling contribution of 54% to the level of subjective well-being of respondents. This finding shows that optimistic attitudes have a significant influence in explaining variations in individual subjective well-being in the context of early adulthood unemployment. These findings emphasize the importance of an optimistic attitude to increase an individual's subjective well-being. In contrast, people with a higher optimistic attitude tend to have a higher level of subjective well-being.

Researchers looked at several factors that contributed to the results of this research. First, gender. In this study, female respondents comprised a relatively large portion, namely 53.5%, and the rest were men. Ervasti & Venetoklis (2010) explain that unemployment significantly impacts men more than women. This finding can not support the results of this research, which found no significant difference in subjective well-being between male and female participants.

Second, the duration of unemployment. In this study, the majority of the participants are in the 0-1 year of unemployment. The large number of respondents in the zero to one-year category is likely to contribute to the high results of respondents in the medium to high category on the optimism variable. This result is in line with the findings of Gedikli et al. (2023) that the longer an individual is unemployed, the lower their level of optimism, which may result in a lower level of subjective well-being for the individual.

Thus, several limitations should be noted in this research, including the fact that respondents who participated in this research were dominated by respondents who had been unemployed or starting up a new business for zero to one year. In future research, it would be better to involve an equal portion in each category to compare unemployment duration equally.

CONCLUSION

In this study, it was found that there is a positive relationship between optimism and subjective well-being in unemployed early adults. High levels of optimism are related to high levels of subjective well-being, while low levels of optimism are related to low levels of subjective well-being. Young adults need to maintain optimism to maintain subjective well-being when experiencing unemployment. Practicing optimism through journaling or other means can help maintain subjective well-being.

Some improvements are needed for future research. First, it is essential to consider the number of demographic variables, such as an equal number of participants in each category of duration of unemployment and gender. Second, increasing the number of participants would give better results. Finally, it is crucial to consider the cultural aspect in future research.

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