

Research Article

The Relationship of Peer Social Support and Gratitude Towards the Meaningfulness of Life of People with HIV / AIDS (PLWHA)

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: of life is one of the critical variables in the lives of PLWHA. Social support and gratitude are among the factors that influence the meaning of life. This study aims to determine the relationship between peer social support and gratitude with the meaning of life in PLWHA. **Methods:** The respondents of this study were 44 people. Data were collected using a questionnaire that had been validated and tested for reliability. **Results:** The results of hypothesis testing showed a positive relationship between social support ($r_{xy} = 0.409$; $p = 0.007$; $p < 0.05$) and gratitude with meaning of life ($r_{xy} = 0.338$; $p = 0.029$; $p < 0.05$) in PLWHA. **Conclusion:** This indicates that the higher the social support and gratitude, the better the meaning of life of PLWHA.

Keywords: *Gratitude, Meaningfulness of Life, Peer Social Support, PLWHA*

Introduction

For some time, HIV/AIDS has been recognized as a global pandemic that significantly impacts public health, especially in developing countries like Indonesia. HIV invades and damages human white blood cells, resulting in a decline in the immune system. AIDS itself is a series of symptoms that result from the decline in the immune system due to HIV infection. Individuals become susceptible to various potentially deadly infections with a weakened immune system. To manage HIV, patients require Antiretroviral (ARV) treatment which serves to control the number of HIV viruses in the body and prevent the progression of HIV to AIDS. Meanwhile, for AIDS patients, ARV treatment is needed to fight opportunistic infections and various complications that may arise. [1]

The UNAIDS report states that the number of people living with HIV/AIDS in Indonesia continues to increase, negatively impacting physical and psychosocial health. People living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) say that the disease is often accompanied by social stigma and discrimination, which can reduce their quality of life and meaning. In the last five years, there has been a dramatic increase in HIV infections, with 33.3 million in 2010. [2] According to a report by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia in 2017, until December 2016, the total number of HIV cases recorded reached 232,323, while the total number of AIDS cases reported reached 86,780 individuals [1]

Today, HIV is considered a chronic, long-term condition that can affect the entire body and disrupt its normal functioning. People

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living with HIV (PLHIV) face not only physical challenges but also psychological challenges [3]. Stress, frustration, anxiety, anger, rejection, shame, and grief often arise when someone learns they are HIV positive. Although medication can control the amount of virus in the body, it cannot eliminate it, so the need for life-long treatment adds to the psychological burden [4]. Moreover, stigma and discrimination against PLHIV can worsen their interpersonal relationships and prevent them from disclosing their health status to their partners or family, damaging family ties [5]. This stigma and discrimination can also potentially disrupt their social and environmental relationships.

Referring to the above review, we can conclude that PLHIV face challenges in various aspects of their lives, including physical health, mental well-being, and social and environmental relationships. All of these have the potential to affect their quality of life. Studies have shown that HIV-infected individuals have a lower quality of life than most. [6].

In the research literature, the meaningfulness of life is a psychological construct that indicates the extent to which a person feels that their life has purpose and value. It has received attention, especially concerning chronic illnesses like HIV/AIDS. Studies have shown that the perceived meaningfulness of life is an essential psychological buffer when facing significant stressors such as an HIV/AIDS diagnosis. [7].

PLWHA are in dire need of social support, especially from peers. It is crucial to increase the meaningfulness of their lives. Peers who share similar experiences can often provide more empathy, understanding, and validation than other social network members. In addition, peers living with HIV/AIDS can share information and practical advice on coexisting with the condition. [7].

Gratitude, which refers to appreciating the positive aspects of life, has been recognized as an essential factor in adding meaning to life. In serious illnesses such as HIV/AIDS, an attitude of gratitude can play an essential role in helping individuals adjust to their condition. Gratitude can help a person see and assess their life

positively, support recovery from negative experiences, and improve their life assessment. A person's quality of life can be influenced by various factors such as age, education level, employment status, monthly income, home ownership, living with family, social support, spirituality, and stress management strategies [8]. In addition, positive attitudes such as gratitude and the ability to forgive also affect patients' quality of life with chronic diseases. It has been shown that gratitude has a positive correlation with the quality of life in patients with diseases such as arthritis, COPD, and diabetes [9], as well as in cancer patients, according to research by Souza and Kamble [10] Gratitude allows individuals to maintain a positive attitude in accepting all aspects of their lives, including undesirable circumstances such as illness.

Gratitude is a relatively new concept in positive psychology and health research, and its role in HIV/AIDS remains to be explored. Most research on gratitude and health has focused on the general population or individuals with various health conditions. However, little has explored how peer social support and gratitude may influence the meaningfulness of life among PLWHA.

However, although meaningfulness of life, peer social support, and gratitude are all crucial concepts in HIV/AIDS, research exploring the relationship between these concepts is still minimal, particularly in Indonesia. In addition, gratitude is a relatively new concept in health research psychology, and its role in the context of HIV/AIDS remains to be further explored. Most research on gratitude and health has focused on the general population or individuals with various health conditions. However, few have explored how gratitude may influence the meaningfulness of life among individuals PLWHA.

Thus, this study aimed to investigate the relationship between peer social support and gratitude on the meaningfulness of life in a sample of individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Indonesia. The findings from this study can be used to help develop and optimize psychosocial interventions to improve the quality and meaningfulness of life of PLWHA.

Materials and Methods

The study employed a cross-sectional design. The specific location and timeframe of this study were not disclosed due to confidentiality concerns regarding PLWHA.

Subjects

The subjects involved in this study were individuals diagnosed with HIV/AIDS (People with HIV/AIDS), with a total population of 41 people consisting of 30 men and 11 women. The sampling technique was total sampling. Total sampling is a technique that uses all population members as research samples.

Data Collection

In this study, the data collection method used a scale as a tool. There are two types of scales used in this study, each of which has four alternative answers: strongly agree (SS) with a score of 4, agree (S) with a score of 3, disagree (TS) with a score of 2, and strongly disagree (STS) with a score of 1. The scales were used as measurement instruments in this study. The scales used are the social support scale, gratitude scale, and meaning of life scale.

The social support scale used in the study consists of 17 items, with 14 statements describing positive (favorable) aspects of social support and three statements describing negative (unfavorable) aspects of social support. The social support scale in this study was constructed based on four aspects that have been done by, namely, aspects of emotional support, appreciation support, instrumental support, and information support. The questionnaire has undergone a validity test with results between 0.651 - 0.888 and reliability of 0.919.

The gratitude scale used in this study consists of 28 items, with 12 favorable aspects and 16 unfavorable aspects. The three components used to measure gratitude include a sense of appreciation for other people or God and life, positive feelings towards the life one has, and the tendency to act as an expression and positive feelings and appreciation one has. The questionnaire has undergone validity testing. The range of results for this scale is 0.371 - 0.806, and the reliability is 0.775.

The meaningfulness of life scale measures how much a person feels a sense of meaning

and purpose. This scale aims to understand an individual's level of satisfaction and understanding of the meaning of their life and the extent to which they feel their life has meaning. This scale consists of 17 items, with 12 favorable and five unfavorable aspects. The meaning of life scale has three aspects: the meaning of life, freedom of will, and life satisfaction. The validity test has been carried out on this scale with results in the range of 0.375 - 0.872 and the reliability test results of 0.948.

Data Analysis

The statistical analysis used in this study is Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis. This method tests the linear relationship between two variables in research. In this context, Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis is used to analyze the relationship between the variables observed in the study and measure the extent to which the relationship is solid and significant. In interpreting the analysis results, the researcher will look at the value of Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient and the significance level. If the correlation coefficient is statistically significant, the researcher can conclude that there is a significant relationship between the two observed variables. In addition, researchers will also pay attention to the direction of the correlation coefficient to determine whether the relationship is positive or negative.

Ethical consideration

This investigation was conducted following the receipt of ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board. Participants were informed about the study, including the risks and potential benefits. Questionnaires were distributed after the completion of the informed consent form. During the process of data collection, respondents were given the choice to refuse or withdraw their participation.

Result and Discussion

Hypothesis analysis through the Product Moment correlation method showed significant results. Social support from peers showed a positive correlation to the meaning of life with a value of 0.409, indicating that the presence of social support from peers can increase

the meaning of life. In addition, the analysis also showed a significant relationship between gratitude and the meaning of life, with a correlation value of 0.338. This result indicates that a high level of gratitude can increase the meaning of life. Based on these results, the proposed hypothesis is proven and accepted, which means that social support from peers and gratitude significantly influence the meaningfulness of life.

Discussion

The results indicated a positive correlation between social support and the meaning of life for PLWHA. This means that the greater the social support provided to PLWHA, the higher the meaningfulness of their lives. Conversely, if the social support received is reduced, it will usually reduce the meaningfulness of life in PLWHA. Therefore, social support is essential in improving the quality and meaningfulness of life for PLWHA.

This study showed that peer social support perceived by PLWHA disorders significantly correlates with their meaning of life. Previous study found various factors influencing a person's meaning of life, including social support as an external factor from the surrounding environment. One of the factors of support Specific interactions provided by the environment (other individuals) can help a person and improve their meaning of life. Other studies have also said that social support is one element that affects achieving a person's meaning in life [11,12]. According to the results of a recent analysis, it was found that social support was a highly significant factor in determining the quality of life of the study subjects, with the largest Odd Ratio (OR = 22.413) and significance level ($p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$) [13]. These results are in line with Wani's (2021) research, which also observed a significant impact of social support on quality of life ($p=0.001 < \alpha=0.05$). Similar research also illustrated a significant positive relationship between social support and quality of life ($p=0.000 < \alpha=0.05$). This means that the greater the social support provided to PLWHA, the better their quality of life. This finding is also supported by other

studies that showed the effect of social support on quality of life [13–16].

PLWHA usually face more challenges than just the attack of HIV on their immune system. According to Tam et al., [17], they often face stigma and discrimination. Society often associates them with free sexual behavior, immoral women/men, and wrong associations. As a result of this stigma, they are often shunned and ostracized, even though this significantly affects their psychological well-being. In many cases, as revealed by Safitri et al. [18], this makes them decide to keep their health status a secret from those closest to them, negatively affecting their quality of life. Therefore, social support becomes an essential factor. Wani [15] asserted that when individuals with HIV/AIDS lack social support, their quality of life will decrease, moreover around 73.33% of respondents thought about suicide when their social support was low.

Social support from various sources, such as family, friends, and others, is essential for individuals, especially when facing problems. This is especially true for PLWHA who are part of a foundation where they get much support from their surroundings. This support becomes a source of strength for them to strengthen themselves and give their lives a deeper meaning. Previous research explained that social support, including acceptance from family and peers, can prevent the risk of sexual behavior and drug use in PLWHA. Social support from the environment can motivate and encourage individuals to rise from difficult and unpleasant conditions and help them see things positively. This will lead to positive expectations that can energize them to overcome the situation. Social support functions as a form of acceptance from the environment in which they live, which can create feelings of being cared for, helped, and loved. This is why PLHIV in this study seems very enthusiastic and active in activities at the foundation. With the ability of PLWHA to perform certain activities, they feel capable and valuable, creating positive feelings towards themselves and their environment. Therefore, high social support indicates a better quality of life for PLWHA [19,20].

This study also showed a relationship between gratitude and the meaning of life for people with HIV/AIDS. This means that the greater the gratitude, the higher the meaningfulness of life for PLWHA. Although the strength of the correlation is low, this study shows a significant relationship between these two essential aspects of psychological well-being. A study by Toussaint et al. [21] revealed a positive relationship between gratitude and quality of life. This gratitude is one of the principles in positive psychology to improve the quality of life of fibromyalgia patients.

Furthermore, Cahyandari, Nashori, and Sulistyarini [22] found that training on how to be grateful can improve the quality of life of COPD patients. This gratitude is part of spirituality or religiosity. Research by Superkertia, Astuti, and Lestari [23] found other evidence supporting this view. They observed a positive relationship between gratitude and spirituality among people with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA). They found that PLWHAs with a high level of spirituality tend to have a better quality of life.

This study has several limitations. the sample is still with a small amount of making so that it may not represent a large population. This study also did not use questionnaires directly but used an online survey so that further research is needed that uses a larger number of samples and uses data collection methods that are more representative of the entire population by offline to avoid data errors.

Conclusion

The hypothesis proposed by the researcher regarding the relationship between peer social support and gratitude for the meaning of life in PLWHA can be accepted. This shows that PLWHA who have good peer social support accompanied by gratitude have a relationship with an increase in the meaning of life. Social support and gratitude can be a way for PLWHA to increase the meaningfulness of their lives in dealing with the physical, psychological, social, and environmental consequences of their illness.

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