

# Finding Meaning in Late Adulthood: A Qualitative Study on Subjective Well-Being among Childless Elderly

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**Keywords:** *subjective well-being, elderly, childless.*

**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to describe subjective well-being in older adults without children using a phenomenological qualitative approach. The study participants consisted of two women aged 68 and 71 years who were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic methods. The results showed that subjective well-being in elderly people without children was reflected in six cognitive themes, namely life satisfaction, spirituality, social relationships, productive activities, physical and mental health, and material sufficiency, as well as two affective themes, namely positive affect and negative affect. The elderly define happiness through harmonious relationships with their spouses, fostering children, spiritual activities, and involvement in social and productive activities. Positive affect, such as gratitude and happiness, is more dominant than negative affect, such as anxiety and loneliness, which are managed through social support and meaningful activities. These findings emphasize the importance of social support, spirituality, and meaningful activities in improving the quality of life of older adults without children.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Infertility affects one in six people, or 17.5% of adults worldwide, making it a serious global health issue (WHO, 2023). In Asia, particularly in developing countries such as China, Brazil, and Indonesia, there has been a decline in the birth rate ( ) with an average of 2.2 children per woman in 2021 (The Conversation, 2023). BPS noted that fertility in Indonesia in 2020 showed a decline from 5.61 to 2.18 children per woman (BPS, 2023). This decline in fertility rates has coincided with an increase in life expectancy, which has ultimately changed the demographic structure of the population towards aging. This phenomenon has

resulted in many individuals not having children, meaning they must live without children in their old age (detikcom, 2022)

Old age is the final stage of adulthood, beginning at age 65 and marked by numerous physical, cognitive, and psychosocial changes in an individual's life (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2009). The increase in the number of elderly people in Indonesia can be seen from the number of elderly people reaching 23.66 million in 2017 and is predicted to increase to 33.69 million in 2025 (Indonesian Ministry of Health, 2017). Related to this data, it is known that when individuals reach old age, they usually choose to live with family,

children, or spouses. However, in 2019, it was recorded that around 9.38% of elderly people in Indonesia lived alone without companions (Central Statistics Agency, 2019). The phenomenon of elderly individuals or couples living alone due to the absence of descendants often triggers feelings of loneliness, fear, and sadness, leading to psychological impacts and dissatisfaction with life. (Kompasiana, 2021)

Older adults who live alone often experience negative emotions such as loneliness and sadness. Factors such as social support, purpose in life, and the ability to find meaning in life can reduce these negative emotions (Isnani, 2023). Social support plays a key role in improving *subjective well-being* in older adults, particularly through strengthening interpersonal relationships. Older adults with extensive social networks have higher levels of life satisfaction, even without the presence of children in the family (Becker et al., 2019). Conversely, older adults with limited social networks are more vulnerable to emotional stress, such as loneliness and anxiety, especially those who experience infertility (Teerawichitchainan et al., 2024).

Emotional support from a partner or social group plays an important role in improving *the subjective well-being of* older adults who do not have children (Tolkamp & Pollmann-Schult, 2024). Societal stigma surrounding infertility often causes older couples without children to feel depressed. However, they strive to strengthen their relationship with their partner through shared activities that help them find meaning in life beyond their role as parents (Patel, 2021). Other studies show that older adults experience a range of emotions, such as happiness, life satisfaction, loneliness, and anxiety. These emotions are influenced by hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives, as well as

cultural and social factors, which collectively shape their subjective well-being (Blanco-Molina et al., 2019).

Subjective well-being is an individual's assessment of life that encompasses their overall life experience (Diener et al., 2009). Subjective well-being describes the extent to which a person feels satisfied with their life and assesses various important aspects, such as health, work, and social relationships (Diener et al., 1999). There are two factors that influence subjective well-being, namely external factors which include aspects of life such as marriage, culture, and income. And internal factors that include self-esteem, optimism, self-control, religiosity, meaningfulness of life, and positive relationships with others (Compton et al., 2005). In addition, the factors that influence subjective well-being can vary depending on the time and life experiences of the individual (Qiang, 2005).

Individuals with high *subjective well-being* tend to experience positive emotions and life satisfaction more often, such as happiness, pride, love, and feelings of great joy. Conversely, low *subjective well-being* is characterized by low levels of life satisfaction, minimal positive emotions, and dominant negative emotions such as anger and anxiety (Diener et al., 1999). *Subjective well-being* encompasses two main dimensions, namely the evaluative/cognitive dimension, which involves individuals' assessments of life satisfaction, meaning of life, social relationships, physical and mental health, and material sufficiency. And the affective dimension, which includes positive feelings such as happiness and love, as well as negative feelings such as anxiety and sadness (Diener et al., 2009).

*Subjective well-being* in infertile couples is influenced by anxiety and loneliness, even though these

couples are able to maintain their marital commitment. Attention, trust, and openness between couples can give meaning to the lives of couples who do not have children (Maliki, 2019). Family support also plays an important role in maintaining the well-being of infertile couples through a sense of acceptance and appreciation. However, cultural pressures and family expectations often add to negative feelings, especially for women experiencing childlessness. Therefore, the support of husbands is a crucial factor that can help individuals feel more calm and accepted (Aurelia et al., 2019).

Other studies show that couples without children often face emotional stress due to infertility. However, the husband's maturity, religious values, and good communication can strengthen their happiness in marriage. Support from extended family also provides a sense of satisfaction, especially when infertile couples decide to adopt a child. Adoption brings happiness and new meaning to marriage even though emotional pressure remains (Dewi et al., 2021). *The subjective well-being* of married couples is influenced by the fulfillment of psychological needs and the ability to adapt, including through a mutually supportive sense of humor between partners (Kulaber Demirci et al., 2020).

*Subjective well-being* is also associated with a broader social context. In early married couples, subjective well-being is influenced by social support, mental health, and problem-solving skills. Support from spouses, family, and friends has been shown to reduce stress and increase life satisfaction (Blanco-Molina et al., 2019). Meanwhile, unmarried adult women tend to have higher subjective well-being if they receive social support and positive affection (Selan et al., 2020). This confirms that social support and meaningful activities are important factors in improving *subjective well-being*.

In older adults, participation in physical activity has a significant impact, albeit relatively small, whereby adequate duration of activity can improve well-being through a sense of health and life satisfaction (Won et al., 2020). In addition, older adults who are able to accept their status and are socially active tend to be happier and more satisfied with life. Self-acceptance and positive social interactions support *subjective well-being* in this group (Fitriyani, 2019). Other studies also highlight that international students with good health and satisfaction with their community have higher *subjective well-being*, although discrimination has the potential to reduce happiness (Kim, 2024). Similarly, mothers with children suffering from thalassemia who are able to accept their children's condition and obtain social support show higher levels of subjective well-being (Pertiwi & Maryatmi, 2019).

In the elderly group, subjective well-being plays an important role in improving quality of life in old age. Elderly people with good subjective well-being tend to be happier, have positive social relationships, and are better able to face life's challenges (Karni, 2020). In addition, the well-being of older adults is influenced by social support and the fulfillment of basic needs, where strong social support and adequate food needs can increase subjective well-being, while limitations in these aspects can decrease it, especially for older adults who live alone (Ishikawa et al., 2019). However, most studies have focused on infertile couples, couples who married early, and unmarried adults, while research specifically highlighting the elderly without children remains limited. In fact, this group is vulnerable to various psychological and social challenges, where the absence of offspring can increase the risk of loneliness and reduce sources of support in old age. Based on this gap, the research problem of this study is how elderly

people without children interpret their lives in relation to subjective well-being. Therefore, this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and meaning of life among elderly people who do not have offspring.

## 2 METHOD

### Participant

This study involved individuals with characteristics elderly people who do not have descendants. Participants were selected using the technique *purposive sampling* which aims to get individuals who have significant experiences related to the elderly who tend to feel that their subjective well-being in life is different due to the absence of offspring. As many as two women 68 and 71 year olds with the initials T and S from different social backgrounds were selected to share their experiences related to subjective well-being. Before the study began, participants were given an explanation of the research objectives and the steps that would be taken, and they expressed their willingness to participate in a way volunteer to participate.

### Design

This study employs a qualitative methodology using an approach phenomenology, which aims to explore and understand the experiences of participants in depth. This approach was chosen because it can provide clearer insights into the participants' experiences. Data was collected through direct observation and interviews conducted in a flexible but structured. In the interview, the researcher asked questions designed to open up

conversation and provide space for participants to share their stories and feelings openly free.

### Procedure

Participants in this study were selected through a survey approach directly by the researcher. Both participants were contacted personally and given information related to the research. The interview process was carried out after participants expressed their consent in writing. Written interviews were conducted in a location convenient for the participants, according to their preferences, to allow them to feel more relaxed in sharing their experiences. Each interview session took place approximately 40 to 55 minutes and recorded to ensure Data accuracy. Researchers ensure that each participant understands their rights during the research process.

### Instrument

In this study, the instrument used was a semi-structured interview which began with an initial interview session to collect data. The questions arranged for for obtain data regarding how *subjective well-being is described*, such as cognitive and affective dimensions as well as Revealing participants' backgrounds. Participants were asked to share their personal experiences regarding how subjective well-being impacted their own lives. They were also asked to describe how childlessness related to their subjective well-being.

### Analysis Techniques

The data was analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The analysis process began by reading the entire interview transcript to obtain a

general overview from the collected data. Next, the researcher carried out coding beginning with the participant's statement, then grouping these codes into main themes related to subjective well-being, such as satisfaction life, spirituality, relationships social, activities meaning, physical and mental health, sufficiency materials, as well as experience affective positive and negative. After that, the themes that emerged explored further to understand the meaning of the participants' experiences. In the final stage, the report is prepared by presenting quote direct from the interview which is then explained in a way narrative, thus providing a complete picture of subjective well-being in elderly people without children.

### 3 RESULT

#### Cognitive Dimension

The cognitive dimension refers to an individual's evaluation of their life satisfaction based on their own personal standards. In the context of marriage, having children is often an indicator of happiness, but not all individuals base their life satisfaction on this. Some couples who do not have children may feel a sense of loss at first, but over time they shift their attention to more meaningful themes. Similarly, when couples or individuals enter old age without children, they may assess their life satisfaction based on their experiences. In this regard, six main themes have been identified, namely life satisfaction, the importance of spirituality, loving social relationships, interesting activities, physical and mental health, and sufficient material resources to meet their needs

Tabel 1. Dimensions

NO	Dimensions	Theme	Subtheme
1	Cognitive Dimension	Life Satisfaction	Fostering , Accompanying husband
		The Importance of Spirituality	Dhikr and Sharing with Others, Following religious studies
		Love Social Relations	Follow Elderly Posyandu, Following PERIP Social Gathering
		Interesting Activities and Work	Nurse Toga plants, Caring for cow
		Decreased Physical and Mental Health	Using a stick for balance, Looking up he forgets easily
		Material Adequacy to Meet Needs	Relying on Adopted Child's Money, Relying on Husband's Pension Money
2	Emotional/ Affective Dimension	Positive Affect	Be Grateful , Feel Happy
		Negative Affects	Feeling sad and anxious, Feeling anxious and worried

#### Life Satisfaction

The lives of the elderly are intertwined with the meaning they give to their life experiences. Participants indicated that they felt satisfied with their lives even though they did not have children.

This illustrates that satisfaction is not only determined by the presence of biological children, but can also be obtained through fostering children or a close relationship with a spouse. Happiness and life satisfaction for both participants stemmed from

how they interpreted their roles and relationships in life.

S found happiness in the experience of caring for her adopted child, while T felt satisfaction from her close and harmonious relationship with her husband. S finds happiness in life through the experience of raising foster children as if they were her own. Even though her foster children are not always at home, S feels satisfied because she has been able to care for and raise them to adulthood. This happiness comes from gratitude for successfully fulfilling the role of a parent, even though they are not her own children

"Alhamdulillah, I feel quite satisfied with the life I have lived. I was able to raise my adopted children as if they were my own, even though they are not always at home. I am still grateful for being able to take care of my adopted children until they grew up."

T finds happiness in life through her relationship with her husband. She feels that her harmonious relationship with her husband, from accompanying him during his working years to his retirement, gives her a sense of gratitude and happiness. For her, accompanying her husband is very meaningful and is the main source of her satisfaction in life.

"Well, how can I put it? When asked whether I am satisfied or not, I feel grateful because I am still alive with my husband, accompanying him until retirement, and now I am still with him."

### **The Importance of Spirituality**

Spirituality is one way for the elderly to find meaning in their lives. Both participants interpreted spirituality as the key to deepening their understanding and finding peace in life. S focused on worship and sharing with others, which she felt had a positive impact on both herself and others. Meanwhile, T emphasized the importance of religious studies to achieve peace of mind and deepen spirituality. This illustrates that a meaningful life for the elderly can be achieved through spiritual experiences that are in line with their personal values.

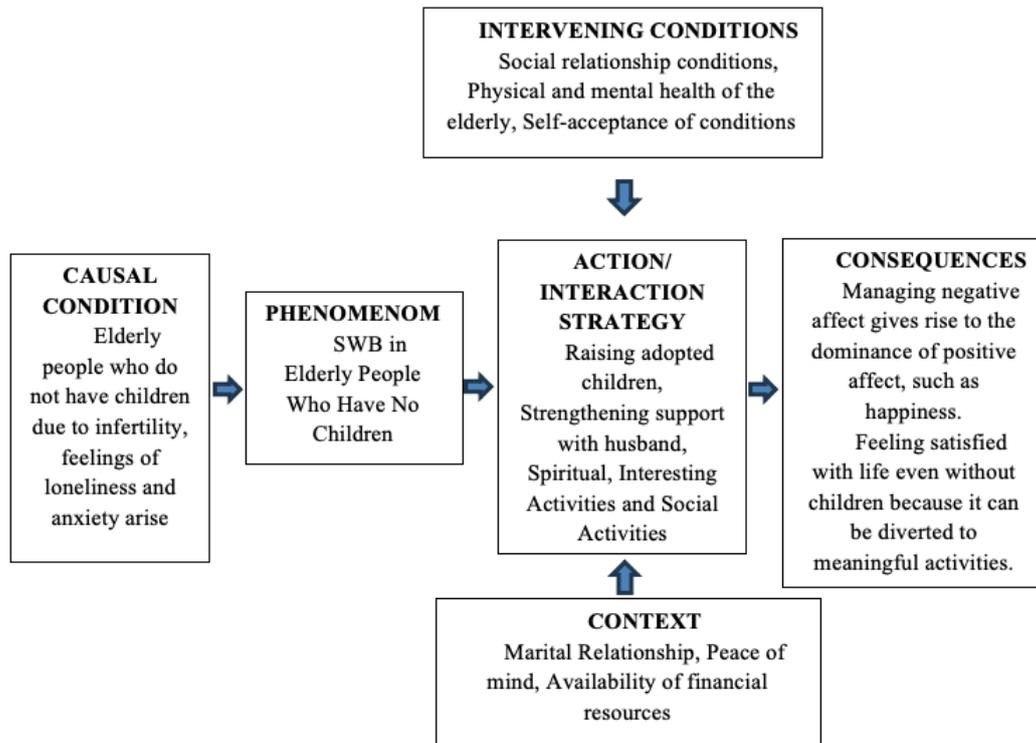
S finds meaning in life through prayer and sharing with others. These activities are considered a form of closeness to God and a way to benefit others. S feels that prayer helps maintain peace of mind, while sharing with others provides a sense of satisfaction because it helps others.

"For Mbah, a meaningful life is being able to recite prayers and share with others."

T finds meaning in life by seeking peace of mind through religious study groups. He feels that attending these groups provides a deeper understanding of religion and strengthens his relationship with God. These activities also serve as a way to reflect and fill his life with meaningful spiritual values.

"A meaningful life is when the heart is at peace, Mbak. Usually, Mbah finds meaning through activities such as attending religious study sessions."

Picture 1. Interaction Model of Conditions, Strategies, and Outcomes of Subjective Well-Being in Elderly People Without Children



**Loving Social Relationships**

One source of happiness and motivation for seniors in living their lives is through social relationships. Interacting with peers and the community provides opportunities to share experiences and form meaningful relationships. Both participants indicated that social relationships play an important role in their happiness. S feels happy through long-standing social relationships, while T gains enthusiasm and gratitude from interacting in community activities. This shows that social relationships not only provide entertainment, but also strengthen meaningful bonds in old age.

S finds happiness in the PERIP social gatherings that bring her together with old friends. The social connections formed in the past, especially among friends who share similar backgrounds, make S feel closer and nostalgic. These gatherings are an important moment for maintaining relationships with peers.

"Grandma is happy when she can attend the PERIP social gathering, feeling like she is meeting friends of her own age, because back then, many of her friends' husbands in PERIP were from the same generation."

T feels that activities such as the Elderly Health Center and religious gatherings help overcome loneliness. These activities provide a space to meet neighbors, share stories, and give each other support. For her, social moments like this are very meaningful because they provide encouragement and gratitude for the relationships that have been formed.

"It's so nice when there are religious study sessions, Posyandu, or meeting neighbors. It helps Grandma forget the loneliness for a moment. Moments like that are important, Miss, because they boost morale. Usually, we can share stories and experiences, and that's what Grandma is most grateful for."

### **Interesting Activities**

Interesting activities play an important role in helping seniors maintain balance in their lives and give them a sense of purpose. Both participants view daily activities as a way to stay active and maintain their physical and mental well-being. S feels happy and useful by caring for toga plants, which have a positive impact on his health and finances. Meanwhile, T finds meaning in his busy schedule caring for cows as a way to stay occupied and maintain mental stability. This shows that productive and interesting activities can bring happiness and make the lives of older adults feel more meaningful.

S finds pleasure and a sense of usefulness in caring for and planting toga plants. This activity brings her happiness because the plants can be used for health purposes or sold if the harvest is abundant. For S, this activity is not only enjoyable but also a way to remain productive in her old age.

"Grandma really likes caring for and growing toga plants because it brings her joy and makes her feel useful, as they can be sold if there is a large harvest. Grandma also feels that this activity is beneficial for her health."

T finds meaning in his daily activities through the routine of caring for cows. Although he sometimes feels tired, T considers this activity a way to keep himself busy and avoid unnecessary thoughts. By taking care of cows, he feels he has a purpose and remains active every day.

"Caring for cows is a daily activity, Ma'am. Sometimes it feels tiring, but that's one way for Grandma to stay busy. Rather than sitting around, it's better to take care of the cows so my mind doesn't wander."

### **Physical and Mental Health**

This theme relates to how physical and mental health affect the quality of life of older adults in facing the challenges of aging. Participants interpret physical and mental health as important aspects of daily life, which support each other. Despite facing physical limitations or cognitive changes, they still strive to maintain their quality of life in ways that are tailored to their conditions. Both participants indicated that maintaining physical and mental health is a challenge in old age, but it can be overcome with various adaptive strategies. S uses a cane to move around safely, while T relies on her husband's support to overcome problems when she experiences forgetfulness. This reflects how acceptance of one's condition and adaptation, both individually and with the help of loved ones, can

improve the comfort and meaning of life for the elderly.

S realizes the importance of maintaining physical health by using a cane as a walking aid. She considers the use of a cane as a way to maintain balance and prevent the risk of falling. This shows her efforts to remain independent despite physical limitations.

"Alhamdulillah, my body is still healthy, even though I have to use a cane to walk. I'm afraid of falling, so I need a cane for balance."

T interprets mental health by recognizing cognitive changes, such as becoming forgetful. Although she feels tired and sometimes confused when looking for items she has misplaced, she receives support from her husband, who often helps her remember things. This shows adaptation through social support.

"Yes, sometimes my body feels sore, Ma'am. I also start to forget things more often. Sometimes I forget where I put things, but my husband always remembers when I start to get confused."

#### **Sufficiency of Materials to Meet Needs**

Basically, individuals with material sufficiency feel more at ease in living their lives in old age. Material sufficiency helps meet basic needs such as food, shelter, and health care. Both participants indicated that material sufficiency is important to ensure a comfortable life in old age. By

relying on support from family or their husband's income, they feel that their basic needs are well met. S relies on her adopted child to meet her needs, while T relies on her husband's pension and additional income from her garden. This shows that the role of family and a stable source of income are key to providing gratitude and financial well-being for the elderly.

S feels that her needs are met thanks to financial support from her adopted child. She relies on money sent regularly by her adopted child to meet daily needs such as food and clothing. This support provides a sense of security and ensures that her basic needs are met.

"Grandma never experienced any major shortages because her daily needs, such as food and clothing, were sufficient. Grandma usually depended on the money given by her adopted children, who regularly sent her transfers."

T interprets material sufficiency through her husband's pension, which is considered sufficient to meet daily needs. Additionally, extra income from the garden, though not much, also helps cover daily expenses. She is grateful for the financial situation that supports her life.

"Alhamdulillah, my husband's pension is still sufficient, Mbak. Sometimes the garden also adds to our income, although not much."

#### **Affective Dimension**

The affective dimension describes the emotional feelings experienced by individuals, which are greatly influenced by their life experiences and surrounding environmental conditions. For older adults who do not have children, these feelings can manifest as positive and negative affect related to their daily lives. Positive affect leads to feelings of happiness, peace, and gratitude for what they have, while negative affect often manifests as anxiety, loneliness, or feelings of worry about the future. These two dimensions of emotion play an important role in the quality of life of the elderly and how they adjust to the limitations of age. Therefore, it is important to understand how these feelings affect their emotional well-being, especially when there are no descendants who can provide direct support.

### **Positive Affect**

Positive affect includes positive emotions such as gratitude and happiness, which have a significant impact on the quality of life of older adults. Both participants interpreted positive affect as an important element in facing life's challenges with more optimism and calmness. S felt happiness from social interactions and spiritual activities that provided inner peace, while T found happiness from her husband's support and acceptance of her life circumstances. This happiness also often arises from simple things that give meaning to their daily lives. This shows that positive affect helps the elderly maintain emotional balance and give more meaning to their lives.

S finds positive affect through gratitude for moments of togetherness with others. She feels happy when gathering with neighbors or when her adopted child comes to visit. In addition, reciting prayers brings peace to her heart, making her feel calm and grateful for the kindness she encounters every day.

“Praise be to God, Grandma currently feels happy. This feeling usually arises when she gathers with neighbors or when her adopted child comes to visit. Grandma also feels deeply grateful every day when she witnesses the kindness of others and experiences inner peace after reciting prayers”

T interprets positive emotions by accepting the circumstances of her life. She feels happy because she has a husband who always supports her, even though they don't have children. Gratitude is the key for her to find happiness in any situation she faces.

"Yes, in Grandma's life, she sometimes feels happy, because what else can she do? All circumstances must be appreciated, right? She doesn't have children, but her husband is always there, which also makes her happy."

### **Managing Negative Affects**

Negative affect refers to emotions such as sadness, anxiety, and worry that are commonly experienced by older adults in response to various life stresses. Both participants interpreted these emotions as the result of difficult situations, such as loss, loneliness, or uncertainty about the future. S was more affected by loneliness due to the absence of

loved ones, while T felt burdened by thoughts about her physical condition and future needs. Although these emotions are often felt as a burden, they try to accept them in various ways that suit their circumstances. Emotional and social support are important factors in helping older adults manage these feelings and maintain their well-being.

S often feels sad due to the infrequent interactions with her busy adopted children and the loss of her husband. This sadness is exacerbated by the loneliness that arises from the lack of presence of loved ones in her daily life. The constant thoughts of her adopted children further intensify this loneliness.

"Grandma sometimes feels sad because her adopted child rarely comes home and her husband has passed away. Grandma often thinks about her busy adopted child, and that makes her feel lonely."

T often feels sudden anxiety, especially at night. She worries about the future, particularly about who will take care of her and her husband as they grow older. The distance from her siblings adds to her anxiety, and these burdensome thoughts often come unexpectedly, leaving her confused about what to do.

"When those thoughts go everywhere and feel heavy, especially at night. Sometimes I'm anxious because I'm afraid no one will take care of us later. Especially since Grandma and Grandpa are getting older and our siblings are far away. Grandma's thoughts often come suddenly, making her confused about what to do."

## 4 DISCUSSION

In this study, subjective well-being is described in older adults without children by referring to two main dimensions, namely cognitive and affective. The cognitive dimension relates to how individuals evaluate their life satisfaction, while the affective dimension includes positive and negative emotional experiences experienced daily (Diener, 1999). This study identifies six main themes in the cognitive dimension that influence the subjective well-being of elderly people without children. These include life satisfaction, the importance of spirituality, social relationships, interesting activities, physical and mental health, and material sufficiency. Meanwhile, the affective dimension identifies two themes, namely positive affect and negative affect.

Life satisfaction among older adults can be achieved not only through the presence of biological children, but also through the meaning they derive from interpersonal relationships. In this study, participants experienced happiness through raising adopted children and harmonious relationships with their spouses. This is supported by Dewi's (2021) research, which shows that childless couples can still find happiness through adoption, extended family support, and good communication. Adopting a child gives new meaning to their marriage, despite the emotional stress caused by infertility. These findings reinforce that meaningful relationships can compensate for biological limitations in achieving life satisfaction.

Subjective well-being can be achieved through spirituality, which can provide peace and a deeper meaning of life for the elderly. Participants in this study found happiness through worship and

religious activities such as recitation of the Quran, which increased their peace of mind. Research by Arung & Aditya (2021) shows that spirituality plays an important role in improving an individual's subjective well-being. Elderly people with high spirituality tend to have better levels of happiness and life satisfaction. This reinforces that spiritual experiences contribute significantly to improving the quality of life of the elderly.

Social relationships are one of the main sources of happiness for older adults. Participants feel happiness through interactions with their community and peers, which strengthens their emotional bonds. Christoph Becker (2019) reveals that social networks are closely related to subjective well-being in older adults, surpassing the influence of marital status or the presence of children. Good quality social relationships provide the emotional support older adults need to overcome loneliness. Social support has been proven to be key in improving their quality of life, especially for those who do not have children.

In addition, engaging in productive activities such as gardening or caring for livestock also gives participants a sense of physical activity and purpose in their lives. Even in their old age, they feel active and useful to themselves and others. Won's (2020) research supports these findings, showing that participation in physical activities, even small ones, has a significant impact on the well-being of the elderly. Productive activities can increase feelings of satisfaction, health, and purpose in life. This shows that involvement in activities can improve the quality of life of the elderly.

Productive and engaging activities can provide physical activity that is beneficial to the physical and mental health of older adults, making

physical and mental health important elements in the lives of older adults. Of course, older adults have limitations in terms of physical and mental health, but they are able to adapt by using mobility aids or relying on their spouses to help them remember things when they forget. Kim's (2024) research found that good health status directly affects subjective well-being. Social support and the ability to adapt to physical conditions have also been proven to improve the comfort of the elderly's lives. This shows that attention to physical and mental health is key to maintaining the subjective well-being of the elderly.

In terms of physical and mental health, material sufficiency is an important factor in providing a sense of security and comfort in the lives of older adults. Financial support from adopted children or a spouse's pension makes them feel that their basic needs, such as food and shelter, are well met. Ishikawa's (2019) research confirms that the subjective well-being of the elderly is closely related to food accessibility, social support, and financial security. Elderly people who are able to meet their basic needs tend to have better well-being. This reinforces that material sufficiency is an important foundation in maintaining the quality of life of the elderly in their later years.

In the emotional dimension, positive emotions such as gratitude and happiness dominate the emotional lives of elderly people who do not have children. They feel happy with simple activities such as gathering with neighbors or engaging in spiritual activities. Research by Blanco & Molina (2019) shows that positive emotions play an important role in improving subjective wellbeing in the elderly. Participants who have strong positive emotions tend to be better able to cope with stress and feel more

satisfied with their lives. This shows that positive emotions have a significant impact on the quality of life of the elderly.

Although most of the participants' emotions were positive, they also experienced negative emotions such as anxiety and sadness. To cope with this, they sought ways to remain active in meaningful activities and build supportive social relationships. Maliki (2019) explains that social support plays an important role in helping older adults cope with negative emotions. The presence of loved ones who provide attention and empathy can alleviate the anxiety and loneliness they feel. This kind of support has also been proven to improve the quality of life of older adults, especially those who live without children or descendants.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on elderly individuals without children, a group that has rarely been highlighted in previous research. Unlike many studies that emphasize infertile couples, early-married couples, or unmarried adults, this study shows that elderly people without children can still build meaningful lives and achieve subjective well-being through alternative pathways such as fostering children, engaging in spiritual practices, and participating in social and productive activities. The findings also highlight that positive affect and strong social support can compensate for the absence of children as the primary source of support. This provides a new contribution by showing that childless elderly individuals in the Indonesian cultural context are not merely vulnerable, but are also capable of developing adaptive strategies based on spirituality, social relationships, and meaningful activities to maintain their psychological well-being.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that subjective well-being in older adults without children is shaped by several key themes, namely: life satisfaction, the importance of spirituality, loving social relationships, engaging activities, physical and mental health, material sufficiency to meet needs, and positive and negative emotions. The elderly experience life satisfaction through fostering children, harmonious relationships with their spouses, and productive activities such as gardening or participating in community activities. Spirituality is an important aspect that provides inner peace and meaning in life. In the affective dimension, elderly people with positive emotions, such as gratitude and happiness, show a better ability to face life's challenges. Meanwhile, negative emotions, such as anxiety and loneliness, often arise due to physical limitations and uncertainty about the future. However, these negative emotions can be managed through social support and meaningful activities.

This study has limitations in terms of the relatively small number of participants, so the results cannot be generalized more broadly. Further research is recommended to involve a larger number of participants with diverse social, economic, and cultural backgrounds in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of subjective well-being in older adults without offspring. In addition, the use of a mixed-method approach can be an alternative to strengthen qualitative findings with quantitative data support. Future research also needs to examine in more depth the role of spirituality and social support as determinants of subjective well-being, while also

examining their implications for the development of psychological interventions and relevant social policies in the context of Indonesian society.

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