


Capturing The Meaning of Life and Self-Love Among Transgender Women: Unveiling Their Experiences, Family Impacts, and Struggles

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<p>Submitted: 2023-08-23</p> <p>Revised: 2023-10-06</p> <p>Accepted: 2023-11-05</p> <p>Keywords: Adults; Meaning of Life; Transgender; Transgender Women</p> <p>Copyright holder: © Kusila, G. F., & Huwae, A. (2023)</p> <p>This article is under: </p> <p>How to cite: Kusila, G. F., & Huwae, A. (2023). Capturing The Meaning of Life and Self-Love Among Transgender Women: Unveiling Experiences, Family Impacts, and Struggles in Achieving a Meaningful Life. <i>Bulletin of Counseling and Psychotherapy</i>, 5(2). https://doi.org/10.51214/00202305616000</p> <p>Published by: Kuras Institute</p> <p>E-ISSN: 2656-1050</p>	<p>ABSTRACT: Transwoman is a term used to abbreviate transgender women, individuals who choose a gender different from their biological sex. Previous studies have uncovered instances of discrimination and challenges related to the gender identity and sexuality of trans women. This research aims to provide insight into the meaning of life for trans women in Palangkaraya. The participants were selected through snowball sampling, and data collection was carried out through observations and interviews. This study employs descriptive phenomenological data analysis to delve deeply into the life experiences of trans women. The research revealed a new theme, which includes the aspect of self-love as an integral part of the lives of trans women participants, influencing their pursuit of a meaningful life. In this research, it became evident that trans women in the city of Palangkaraya, Indonesia, undergo various challenging life processes in their quest to construct a meaningful life. Factors such as family, relatives, work, thought patterns, attitudes, and personality traits play a significant role in guiding trans women toward the attainment of genuine meaningfulness in life.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

The existence of a gender gap between women and men in Indonesia remains a pressing issue today. Gender roles, which function to identify an individual's gender in social interactions, continue to play a significant role in shaping society (Sulistiyowati, 2020). Transgender individuals often experience psychological dissatisfaction with the gender roles assigned to them, whether biologically or socially determined (Nurlitasari et al., 2019). These individuals make the choice to embrace a transgender identity based on the socialization they receive from their families and communities, leading them to depart from the default gender role associated with their birth sex and instead choose a new gender identity. The lives of transgender individuals involve a process of seeking answers to questions about their identity, such as 'Who are they?' and 'Who am I?' (Liamputtong et al., 2020).

The gender transition from male to female is often met with resistance from some parties. Individuals undergoing this transition frequently encounter discrimination, bullying, and may become victims of sexual or verbal abuse at the hands of heterosexual individuals. Tambunan (2021) provides data showing that 97% of cases of verbal abuse and 56% of cases of physical violence are perpetrated by heterosexual women, reflecting discrimination and homophobia directed at lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. Despite trans women adopting the appearance and attire of cisgender

women, they still encounter difficulties and confusion when using public facilities, primarily due to issues related to gender sensitivity (Origenes, 2022).

Transgender individuals often come to understand their experiences and life journeys by chance. In some cases, these individuals were previously unaware of the description of their gender, and they only later realized that there was 'something wrong' or different about their gender identity (Huttunen & Kortelainen, 2021). When a transgender person identifies a discrepancy between their true identity and the identity ascribed to them by others, it often leads to a process of re-identification and behavioral adjustments (Afrasiabi & Junbakhsh, 2019).

Afrasiabi & Junbakhsh (2019) also noted that transgender individuals face challenges when attempting to express their new identity to a broader audience. They often face criticism and isolation as a consequence of violating societal expectations surrounding gender identity choices. This problem often forces transgender individuals to reveal their identity secretly and gradually. The life journey of a transgender person, especially a trans woman, is fraught with difficulties in gaining societal acceptance, as they encounter various challenges. Despite these obstacles, trans women share the same expectations as the general population to openly express their identity through their behavior and roles.

According to the HIV/AIDS Information System Siha (2020) report, there has been an increase in the number of known waria or transwomen in Indonesia undergoing HIV/AIDS tests, totaling 14,287 individuals. Data from the AIDS Control Commission (KPA) in Central Kalimantan also reveals an increase in HIV/AIDS cases among trans women, rising from 2015 to a total of 117 cases. These HIV/AIDS statistics shed light on the transgender women population in Indonesia and Central Kalimantan. It's worth noting that there might be more trans women who are unaccounted for and remain unknown to many people.

Turban et al. (2021) suggest that there are both internal and external factors influencing individuals to become transgender. Internal factors are linked to the individual's internal struggle with gender identity, while external factors encompass familial pressure and an individual's life history (Turban et al., 2021). Meanwhile, transgender individuals often view gender identity not as destiny but as a decision made over time and through life experiences (Powell et al., 2016).

The life situation for transgender women, also referred to as transwomen or waria in some countries, is particularly challenging, especially in Indonesia. There is a pervasive fear among the Indonesian population towards LGBT individuals, including trans women (Debineva & Pelupessy, 2019). This fear has a significant impact on trans women, who frequently face harsh treatment and discrimination as a minority group. In 2018, the Community Legal Institute (LBHM) conducted research that confirmed 973 cases of violence related to sexual orientation, gender, and discrimination throughout 2017. Of these cases, 715 (73.86%) predominantly involved transgender victims. Differences in sexuality and gender continue to drive ongoing social change regarding sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender identity, with no exceptions (Debineva & Pelupessy, 2019).

The meaning of a trans woman's life can be connected to the life journey she aspires to pursue and fulfill. However, this journey is often intertwined with the prevalent phenomenon of violence faced by trans women. Assessing oneself positively, free from negative thoughts, while striving to achieve personal goals during one's life journey can be regarded as the true essence of life (Ma'ruf, 2019).

Frankl (1992) stated that the meaning of a person's life can change and never cease evolving, accompanying the process of experiencing and taking a stance on unavoidable suffering. The process of discovering the meaning of life can arise from work experiences, personal encounters, and responses to life's challenges (Asfari, 2017; Chaidir & Tuapattinaja, 2018). In the case of trans women, they too undergo a journey to find meaning in their lives. Frankl (1992) identified three aspects of

the meaning of life: freedom of will, the desire to lead a meaningful life, and the quest for personal meaning.

Meaning in life is considered a valuable resource that assists individuals in coping with stress, uncertainty, anxiety, and trauma. It plays a pivotal role in helping both individuals and society respond to collective threats and challenges (Routledge & Fiorito, 2021). Transwomen, as members of society, share the same desire to uncover meaning in their lives, enabling them to contribute significantly to society while addressing the challenges they encounter. The experience of life's ups and downs, happiness, sadness, and hope can all contribute to creating meaning in an individual's life (King, 2014).

Based on a preliminary study conducted in January 2023, which aimed to explore a phenomenon, five participants were interviewed, each meeting the mature age criteria and willingly participating. The findings reveal a significant contradiction between their biological bodies and the gender roles they perceive. There's a strong desire to alter their bodies to align with their gender identity and fully embrace the female gender role. However, achieving this transformation remains challenging due to opposition from various quarters, resulting in inhumane treatment for their decisions. According to the perspectives of these informants, assuming a gender different from their biological one, as determined at birth, often leads to feelings of unhappiness and a lack of fulfillment. The search for meaning within the lives of trans women is expected to have a positive correlation with the existence of that meaning.

The life journey of every trans woman, from childhood to adulthood, involves numerous unexpected and intriguing events. Consequently, several factors come into play that influence the meaningfulness of a person's life. According to research by Jang & Yeu (2018), self-esteem and social support can be significant factors that affect an individual's sense of meaning in life. Additionally, the significance of religious life serves as a constant reminder of the nature and purpose of human existence, offering interpretations of life. The presence of social support and strong interpersonal relationships, as received by each individual, is likely to enhance the sense of meaning in a person's life and promote positive feelings (Hung & Li, 2022). These factors are by no means excluded as potential influencers of the meaningfulness of a trans woman's life.

The meaning of life for trans women in Palangkaraya City remains largely overlooked by the general public. Transwomen in Palangkaraya frequently endure discriminatory behavior, societal disdain, and are often regarded with contempt, despite their contributions to achievements and their assistance to many individuals. Previous research conducted by Womick et al. (2021) has indicated that a person's mood can predict the meaningfulness of their life. Consequently, the emotions experienced during a trans woman's life journey may serve as indicators of the meaning in her life in the future. Moreover, research by Szymanski & Mikorski (2016) suggests that lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals, including transgender individuals, can find meaning in their lives and overcome the internalization of negative comments directed toward them.

Hamzah & Murtiningsih (2021) discovered that up to the present day, LGBT individuals frequently encounter both explicit and subtle discrimination from religious individuals, friends, family members, and within work or school environments. Disturbingly, LGBT individuals often face arrest under charges related to their differing sexual orientation from society at large, and they endure harassment from certain police officers. In Palembang City, Regional Regulation No. 2 of 2004 concerning the eradication of prostitution categorizes LGBT groups as a form of criminalization and includes them in the context of prostitution (Papilaya, 2016). This represents a severe form of discrimination against individuals based on their sexual orientation.

Rationale of Study

Research by [Bakracheva \(2019\)](#) suggests that having a strong sense of meaning in life can lead to a profoundly positive life experience for trans women. Individuals who find meaning in every aspect of their life journeys tend to become more enthusiastic, adaptable to their surroundings, and guided by principles that help them work towards their life goals ([Mony et al., 2021](#)). (Furthermore, individuals with a high sense of meaning in life view their existence as rich with purpose, leading to greater happiness and overall well-being ([Routledge & FioRito, 2021](#)). Conversely, if an individual struggles to find or fulfill a sense of meaning in life, it often results in feelings of emptiness, boredom, a sense of purposelessness, and viewing life as devoid of meaning ([Bastaman, 2007](#)). A low sense of meaning in life can also hinder an individual's ability to cope with and accept negative experiences they encounter.

Objectives

Given the challenges faced by trans women in their current life journeys and the limited information available about the lives of trans women in Palangkaraya, it becomes imperative to conduct a study aimed at comprehending the essence of life for trans women in this region. Notably, field observations reveal an ongoing phenomenon of verbal, sexual, and physical violence directed at trans women, who are often marginalized as they navigate the process of accepting their new gender identity within society. As a result, researchers must delve into a comprehensive examination of the meaning of life for trans women in Palangkaraya, particularly considering their diverse and challenging life circumstances.

METHODS

Design

The research methodology employed in this study is qualitative with a descriptive phenomenological design. According to [Salim \(2012\)](#), qualitative research, or naturalistic research, utilizes a flexible, cyclical, and interactive approach to data collection. Qualitative research is employed to acquire in-depth data that carries significant meaning ([Sugiyono, 2013](#)). Basrowi and Suwandi ([Fadli, 2021](#)) asserted that qualitative research allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of participants' daily lives. Consequently, phenomenological design is adopted to investigate a phenomenon rooted in theory and expound upon it based on the findings and discussion ([Yusanto, 2019](#)). The primary objective of employing descriptive phenomenological qualitative research is to scrutinize in detail and depth the factors and aspects related to the portrayal of the meaning of life for trans women.

Participant

The participants used in this research were adults aged approximately between 25 and 45 years who identified as transgender women and willingly provided informed consent to be informants in this study. Participant selection was determined using the snowball sampling technique, which operates as a chain-like process, starting with one informant who is interviewed and then leading to another informant capable of meeting the specified criteria ([Lenaini, 2021](#)). The number of subjects in this research will continue to grow, much like a snowball rolling and accumulating participants as needed to ensure satisfactory data collection ([Sugiyono, 2013](#)). The characteristics of the participants in this research include being between the ages of 25 and 45, identifying as male, residing in Palangkaraya, and self-identifying as transgender women. The selection of the 25-45 age category for this research aligns with the study's primary focus, which aims to understand how trans women describe the meaning of life, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of Research Participants

Participant Initials	AM (Participant 1)	NN (Participant 2)	VN (Participant 3)
Age	41 years old	34 years old	44 years old
Job	Government employees	PSK (Commercial Sex Workers) and <i>wedding organizer</i>	PSK (Commercial Sex Worker) and works in a beauty parlour in Palangkaraya

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection technique to be employed for gathering information from participants involves observations and interviews. These interviews are investigative and exploratory, and the originality of the research hinges on the quality of both data and analysis (Hansen, 2020). The interviews are guided by Frankl (1992) theory, which encompasses various aspects and factors related to the meaning of life, as structured in the interview guide (Appendix). These aspects encompass freedom of will, the desire for a meaningful life, and the concept of meaning in life. To obtain more comprehensive and in-depth data, respondents will be probed further on these aspects and factors related to the meaning of life.

In this research, interviews will be conducted either face-to-face or via social media platforms such as *WhatsApp*, *Google Meet*, or *Zoom*, depending on the participants' circumstances and preferences. Additional instruments that will be used in this research include recording devices and writing tools to capture and document data and information provided by participants.

Data Analysis

This qualitative research utilizes interactive data analysis following the approach outlined by Miles (1994). This analysis is iteratively conducted until completeness is achieved and includes several steps, such as data reduction, data presentation, drawing conclusions, and validating the reduced and presented data

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Background on Being Transgender

There are specific factors and aspects that influence participants in choosing a gender identity different from their biological sex. Each participant undoubtedly has their own reasons and stories behind their decision to become a trans woman or transgender woman.

The first, second, and third participants shared similar reasons for their decision to transition into a trans woman. Each of them had an innate drive that fueled their desire to embrace their true selves as trans women. Since childhood, these participants had shown an interest in men and had begun to express a more dominant feminine side. In AM's case, they had felt their femininity since childhood. AM's parents also noticed their child's inclination towards femininity but continued to treat them as boys. From kindergarten to college, AM felt unable to fully express her true self due to societal expectations that required a more masculine appearance. Eventually, AM gained the courage to fully embrace her identity as a trans woman when she became independent and started working. Instead of directly telling her parents, AM communicated her identity through changes in her appearance, such as growing out her hair and adopting a more feminine style. Moreover, AM expressed her disinterest in marriage, even though she had been asked about it several times. She shared that her parents had an open-minded mindset and never pressured her about marriage. Becoming a trans woman was a choice that brought happiness to AM.

Since childhood, NN has felt inclined towards feminine behaviors, such as her love for cooking and doing dishes, typically associated with women. During her junior high school years, NN began to express her true gender identity discreetly outside her home, concealing her true self from her family while confiding in her friends about her transformation. This secrecy was necessary because NN had faced rejection from her mother due to her feminine behavior and appearance, which didn't align with her assigned biological sex as male.

Eventually, NN was able to undergo her transformation into a trans woman after gaining financial independence and leaving her home. Physically, she made changes such as growing out her hair and undergoing silicone breast injections to achieve a more feminine appearance. NN chose to become a trans woman to lead a fulfilling life and find happiness.

His attraction to men led VN to believe that he was more inclined towards a feminine identity. VN's story closely parallels that of NN; he too left his home and secretly dressed as a woman after running away. Unlike NN, VN's mother accepted his behavior and did not mind his feminine expression, but VN's father strongly opposed his feminine tendencies. VN fully embraced his identity as a trans woman after achieving financial independence. Additionally, he received support and guidance from fellow trans women who encouraged him to embrace his true self. For VN, becoming a trans woman was the best choice as it allowed him to be his authentic self.

Data Analysis Results

The findings in this research are analyzed in terms of how trans women achieve meaning in life, drawing from references by [Frankl \(1992\)](#) and further developed by [Bastaman \(2007\)](#).

Freedom of Will (The Freedom of Will)

AM (Participant 1)

AM began to openly express her attraction to men when she entered college. As time passed, she gained independence and the freedom to be herself, ultimately declaring herself as a woman.

"...Coincidentally, when I was in college, Auntie still wore a uniform. So, Auntie chose to wear her uniform because, at that time, she was registered as a student. It said that she was a student, so men were still wearing, um, what do men wear? I think so... but that's when it all began. I started to express myself, dress the way I wanted, and free myself. I came to accept that, indeed, I've been attracted to boys since I was little, and it's perfectly okay to be attracted to boys. Over time, as life progressed, I began to understand how we can ultimately break free from societal norms, people's opinions, family expectations, and all those things that want us to be a certain way when we want to be another way. They will always expect me to conform to a certain masculine ideal. But when you become independent and can live life on your own terms, you learn to accept yourself. That's when, as time goes by and as I get older, even in my work environment, I've started to assert that I am a girl, that I identify as a girl on the inside..."

The existence of self-awareness from within, without any intervention from external parties, is what underlies AM's decision to become a trans woman.

"...I found my own answers, not because others encouraged me or due to external influences. Since I was young, I've known that I have a feminine nature, that I genuinely like men. Before fully accepting all of that, there was

some internal conflict, but after embracing it all, I am confident in my strength, both inside and out...”

AM feels happier and more authentic as a trans woman, which reflects her self-acceptance of her new identity.

“...What's clear is that, in the journey of self-discovery, people search for their identity. Well, this is it; this is me, my true identity. I am an auntie, and this is my genuine self. So, being a trans woman feels natural; there's no need to search any further...”

NN (Participant 2)

In grades 4 to 5 of elementary school, NN tended to enjoy activities typically associated with girls, and by the time she reached puberty in grade 6, her interest in boys surpassed that in girls.

“...From a young age, around the fourth to fifth grade of elementary school, I liked washing dishes and thoroughly enjoyed cooking.' 'Ohh, I remember it was in the sixth grade, the last six months right before graduating from elementary school, when I started finding boys more attractive compared to girls...”

At the age of 22, NN made changes to her appearance by growing her hair long and adopting a more feminine wardrobe. She also underwent silicone injections in her chest eight years ago to achieve a more feminine physical appearance.

“...Well, it's just physical changes, involving silicone rather than surgery. It has been around eight years since then.' 'Yes, I made these changes at 22; this is how I've changed. Before that, I had long hair and dressed like a girl, but I didn't have breasts...”

Based on her own desires and decisions, NN chose to transition into a trans woman with the aim of wanting to be useful for herself and others.

“...Yes, this is my decision, and I just want to be of use to others, essentially, I want to be of use to myself as well...”

NN also experienced a sense of freedom after embracing her identity as a trans woman. She underwent a transition in her appearance, previously maintaining an open appearance but later choosing to present herself as a woman in a more general sense.

“...It's about freedom, the freedom to be oneself. This has led to more mutual respect among trans women. Initially, I felt the need to appear sexy, but now I've chosen to present myself like an ordinary woman and act accordingly. So, it's not about pretense; it just comes naturally...”

VN (Participant 3)

With limited information available in the past, VN already felt different from as early as grade 4 in elementary school and began to show interest in boys. In grades 4 to 5 of elementary school, VN also started to realize that her gender tended to be female.

“...That started in the 4th or 5th grade of elementary school.' It's been 40 years since then, and it's different from then to now... Back then, there was minimal information. In terms of feeling these changes from a young age, nowadays, it's largely influenced by people coming together and social interactions. But for me personally, it began at a young age. Starting in the 4th grade, I started to take an interest in male friends...”

Initially, VN wore women's clothing but kept it hidden from others. It wasn't until one of her friends from Jakarta provided guidance and advice that VN gained the confidence to go out dressed as a woman.

“...But back then, we were still hiding it. At home, we felt like guys, but when we were with friends, they guided me and said, "You should do this, like this." So it wasn't until later that I started wearing women's clothing openly...”

VN believes that she has a calling and cannot deny her true identity as a woman. This inner conviction is what motivated VN to become a trans woman.

“...Our souls cannot deceive us; we are what we are. Not everyone may understand because of our appearance, but our souls are true to our identity, so we shouldn't be half-hearted...”

VN gradually accepted herself and tried to understand her parents' perspectives. By the time she was in the 2nd grade of junior high school, VN was already presenting herself as a girl, as she had distanced herself from her biological parents.

“...Yes, it was a slow process back then because my parents were apprehensive and tried to make me think about their concerns, fearing potential embarrassment. It wasn't until later, when I was in the 2nd grade of junior high school, that I left home and fully embraced my identity as a woman, as I was far away from my family...”

Furthermore, VN felt a sense of freedom after transitioning into a trans woman and was unfazed by what others said about her.

“...To be free, it's time to disregard the opinions of ignorant people who talk about anything. The important thing is not to harm others. So, it's more about the feeling of innate freedom...”

Desire for a Meaningful Life (The Will to Meaning)

AM (Participant 1)

AM believes that her life has gained meaning and significance after choosing to become a transgender woman. Having experienced her own journey in finding her identity, AM can now share her experiences with people who are going through similar struggles, becoming a wiser person in the process.

“...Certainly, there are people out there trying to discover their own identities, and I can relate to that because I went through a period of searching for my own identity. I can share my experiences with those who are going through similar challenges. During that time, I met people who felt lost in their lives, not just trans women, but anyone, whether they were men or women, facing various life challenges. As a trans woman, I can offer unique insights and support...”

By choosing to become a trans woman, AM is motivated to thrive and make herself happy, as well as be useful and beneficial to many people.

“...Since I've chosen this path as a trans woman, I am committed to staying true to my choice. What motivates me to live this life is the desire to be of use, to help others, and to bring happiness to as many people as possible, despite not being a woman myself. That's my motivation...”

NN (Participant 2)

NN interprets her life process as it is and makes her own efforts based on her abilities, which she can then share with her friends.

“...How do I interpret my life? Well, it's like this. This is who I am: a trans woman living life independently, finding happiness within myself, and occasionally sharing it with my friends. One thing I hold onto is my independence. I'm a trans woman, but I never rely on others, and I never ask for help. I can do things on my own... that's it...”

NN firmly believes that her life holds meaning and significance, even though she faces constant challenges. She finds purpose in being of help to others, despite her limitations.

“...Yes, that's it. I have a friend who works at a salon but can't seem to make his parents happy. Meanwhile, I continue to live my life, sometimes here today and gone tomorrow, but I can still give to my friends and even provide a little assistance to my mother. That's what makes me feel useful, even if I don't have much. When I have enough, I make those small contributions...”

NN motivates herself not to give up, to keep moving forward, and to ignore negative comments from people.

“...My motivation is to keep pushing forward, never to retreat, and to disregard negative comments, especially from those internet users with

harsh words. Listening to them can bring you down, especially on Facebook (FB)..."

VN (Participant 3)

In interpreting this life process, VN finds meaning by being grateful for what she has chosen and achieved so far.

"...To make sense of it, let's simply be grateful for everything. The meaning lies in gratitude because that's what we desire. So the meaning is gratitude, just like the word 'felt'... well, it's like a word that signifies wealth..."

VN believes that her life holds significance and meaning, even though she faces constant challenges. She can demonstrate this through her ability to help her family and send her nephew to school until he graduates, despite having faced insults from her family in the past.

"...Oh yes, by assisting my family in this way. As I mentioned, I've supported all 8 of my nephews, and they have all graduated. This is what makes me value my life, knowing that my life is also valuable to my family. Initially, I faced insults from my own family, but as our economic situation improved, we gained respect..."

VN received reinforcement and motivation from fellow trans women, which served as her motivation to persevere.

"...Motivation is strengthened by friends who, being trans women themselves, provide support and motivation. We share our experiences and encourage each other. So, we derive most of our motivation from friends..."

The Meaning of Life

AM (Participant 1)

Helping many people is a focal point in AM's life. The most valuable and significant experience in AM's life is the ability to bring happiness to numerous individuals.

"...Hey, being able to do good for many people, bringing happiness to them, and providing assistance to many people is the essence of my life. When you choose to become a trans woman, you might think that the biggest challenge is the prospect of living alone in the future because you aren't married and lack a partner. Despite that, you must find the strength to persevere, self-motivate, and embrace life as a trans woman. It's also crucial to be of service to numerous individuals and bring happiness to many. In my view, life wouldn't hold much meaning if we couldn't share it with others..."

The unique value that AM aims to achieve in life is to demonstrate that not all trans women are marginalized by society. She wants to prove that trans women can contribute to society just like anyone else and are capable of sharing their thoughts and experiences.

"...Yes, not all trans women are, as some people label them, societal outcasts, strange, abnormal, or sick. Instead, trans women can engage in professional

work just like both men and women in society. Moreover, they can provide assistance to others. This aspect is essential in demonstrating that there are trans women who excel in these ways..."

NN (Participant 2)

Adhering to the religion that one believes in is a special value for NN, helping them pursue their desired life goals. A valuable experience that NN remembers is the realization that God is in control of life. Therefore, whatever happens is each individual's personal business and responsibility.

"...Our people are still good, and there's no need to be strange, even though we may be different, and just one person adhering to the same religion is sufficient..."

VN (Participant 3)

According to VN, a valuable and meaningful experience is helping their family in their situation as a trans woman. Having experienced exile does not diminish VN's worth to their family.

"...If it's valuable, I think it's like helping our parents, so it's valuable for me to be able to assist my parents in situations like this and that. Even though in the past, it felt like we were at odds with our parents, now, because I believe I'm valuable, things are different. Our financial situation is improving, so I've made myself valuable to my family. Family comes first, not others. That's what I consider valuable in life, helping your family like that..."

The special value that VN has achieved is helping their parents. So they live and accept their life, survive, and cherish their friendships.

"...Yes, the value of life that I've achieved is that I've been able to assist my family. If you don't feel like it because of the choices I've made, then, well, just accept it all. The goal is survival and forming strong friendships here..."

The factors found in Frankl's (1992) theory include positive thinking patterns, attitude patterns, positive self-concept, and personality, which influence the meaningfulness of an individual's life. Bastaman (2007) redeveloped the factors of life's meaningfulness from Frankl's theory into three parts: creative values, appreciation values, and behavioral values."

Positive Thinking Patterns

AM (Participant 1)

One of the things that makes SS enthusiastic about life is the support given by his friends and siblings. In AM's mind, he applies positive thoughts by ignoring the negative things that exist and does not want to regret that he has fallen because of people's mistreatment of him. Also, AM wants to make himself happy and accept himself.

"...Eeeee, just be yourself, ignore whatever negative things there are, and come like that, ridicule or what people say. By ignoring, in essence, my principle is, why would I become a person who is down and in the end regrets it. I'm like that; it won't make you happy. The point is, just accept yourself..."

AM also believes it is necessary to think positively in every situation. Thinking positively helps AM feel happiness and gratitude.

“...Of course, it's a shame because if we're always negative inside, then you won't be happy. That's the point. Whatever it is, honey, just be positive. The point again is that when we talk about life, it can be useful and help many people. If we always think negatively about people, we won't be able to do anything good. If you are negative toward other people, you will not be happy, you will not be able to be grateful and accepting. And I always look at everything from the positive side, which can bring me to my current job like this...”

NN (Participant 2)

In dealing with small to large problems, NN chooses to be patient.

“...Be patient until you are angry; stay patient; the key is to be patient first because patience has sweet results, you know. Sometimes small problems can become big problems if we can't be patient; that's the key to extraordinary patience. O Allah, Robbi, give us unlimited patience...”

NN believes in staying positive in any condition. Apart from that, NN stated to remain patient, grateful, enjoy life, and control emotions.

“...Oh, you have to stay positive, you still have to be patient. There's no problem that can't be solved, and we also have emotions that we can control. One can just be satisfied and grateful for our good fortune today. Alhamdulillah, thank God. Just enjoy it. If you don't do that, having a lot of money in your wallet won't make any sense, and it won't make you happy...”

VN (Participant 3)

In order to be calm and think positively, VN chooses to be patient, think maturely, and not fight when faced with problems.

“...One tip is to be patient; the second is, like saying, look at the problem first. If the problem is really big, it's better if we don't have to fight it, just let it go, as long as it doesn't bother our bodies like that. But, as they say, if the problem is so big that, whether we want it or not, we also have to fight to defend ourselves. Those are all the tips: stay patient and think maturely. Don't use harsh language because it leads to getting emotional and impatient, getting provoked by such words...”

VN also states that it is necessary to think positively in any circumstances. By thinking positively, VN believes it will also have a positive impact on people who see it.

“...Yes, it's necessary; it's like dealing with problems. If we don't think positively, it will definitely decrease on its own. If we think negatively about people, it will harm us. If we have positive thoughts about people, it's like saying we don't know whether that person is good or not, but it also calms us

down, and we also avoid developing a negative attitude when we think negatively about people...”

Factors Attitude Patterns

AM (Participant 1)

In responding to feelings of disappointment, AM chooses to fix the things that disappointed him. When AM feels happy, he expresses it by sharing that happiness with other people. AM can also show disappointment and happiness through his body gestures.

“...Hey, if I'm happy, I share it as much as possible. I show it by sharing that happiness. For example, if I get money, I'll invite you to eat together. For example, if I'm disappointed, yes, personally, I don't really talk about it to many people. But if it's in the world of work, especially when I'm disappointed by something, my response to it is that I will fix what made me disappointed...”

NN (Participant 2)

NN believes that people who look at her sideways do so because they don't know her. NN's way of responding to this is by trying to understand and not blaming the person for their thoughts towards the participant.

“...My view is that they're not evil and they're not strange, they just don't know us. Yes, in principle, if we know each other, if we don't know, we don't love it. They can't be blamed either, it's just that those who are so impudent already know that but still do it, well that's what's really impudent...”

VN (Participant 3)

In responding to problems, VN chooses not to pay attention to other people's negative words and diverts them to other activities.

“...Yes, I do it like ah, I don't care, I'd better take care of the cats or not, whatever important work can be useful, that's what it's called to get rid of that feeling of disappointment...”

When he feels disappointed, VN chooses to be alone, and when he feels happy, VN will choose to gather with his friends.

“...If I really feel disappointed, it's better to be alone if I'm alone, but if I want to be happy sometimes or feel happy I hang out with friends like that. What's it like to tell each other if it's like this, like this, but if you're dealing with sadness, for example, you're just sad, but you're begging...”

Positive Self Concept

AM (Participant 1)

From the self-concept that AM wants to build, most of it can be applied in his life. Also, AM is able to tolerate negative things and ignore them, so that he remains positive.

“...So far, that's it, according to my aunt and my aunt is happy. Aunty no longer tolerates negativity, the toxic ones no longer pay attention to Aunty, and basically, Aunty ignores them. Try to always be positive and in the end, I am good...”

AM's inspiration for building a positive self-concept is his own life experience, along with the principles he believes in.

“...Hmmm... my inspiration is actually from my own experience...”

AM shares a positive self-concept regarding transwomen, namely not to discriminate and that basically all humans are the same.

“...Hmmm, the point is that we are not bad people, trans women are not bad people, trans women are not strange alien creatures, and they are not anything, they are not trash and they are not whatever. we are all human...”

NN (Participant 2)

The positive self-concept that NN wants to build in her life is loving herself first.

“...The concept is just to love yourself, love yourself first and then you can make other people happy...”

In implementing the desired positive self-concept, NN is still in the process of achieving it, accompanied by sharing what NN has with others.

“...Yes, it's still in that process, it's still like that, but I'm happy if I give, even if it's not much, then say thank you for helping, I'm happy that I feel useful...”

VN (Participant 3)

VN feels that he no longer has a self-concept to build and just wants to live his life according to the existing flow. Apart from that, according to VN, some self-concepts can be applied, and some cannot be applied.

“...The concept, there is no concept, actually, so just follow the flow. The problem is that we transwomen are not like women and men, if we are women we have families and children, what if we are children? So the concept is inconsequential, it's like if there is a concept, it's not 100 percent understood...”

Personality

AM (Participant 1)

During her time as a trans woman, AM did not feel that there was a change in her personality, and AM presented herself as she was to everyone.

“...Nothing, it's the same thing. I'm still living as an aunt who is just what you see, so what you get. Sella won't see a different aunty because aunty feels that her setup is like this, so there's no real change in personality...”

AM also feels that her personality is positive and has an impact on everyone.

“...It's positive, that's why in the work environment and in any environment, friendship always has to be able to make people happy, of course, that's how it is...”

NN (Participant 2)

The personality changes that NN feels are on the positive side, although they are still in the process of perfecting them.

“...Yes, just be positive, even if it's not one hundred percent positive, yes, we're not perfect. Where are we, transwomen? All transwomen are bad and none of them are good...”

VN (Participant 3)

VN experienced many changes after becoming a trans woman, both in terms of personality and appearance, which were more like a woman.

“...The changes are like saying there are no more men's clothes at home, to be honest, everything about underwear has changed. So there are no longer any men's clothes in the house; all the women's clothes have replaced them. So from all the tools, all the women's makeup is the feeling, so everything just flows there...”

Not only that, VN feels that her personality changes are towards a more positive side.

“...To be positive, yes, if it's like the word, why do we do it negatively? Positive is like saying oh that's good for me like that...”

Creative Values

AM (Participant 1)

AM does not create physical objects as works, but instead, AM creates his own work through actions that can be remembered by anyone he has helped.

“...My work is... I want to be remembered one day as a good aunt who can help many people, and if it's physical work, for example, Auntie produces an inscription, but all kinds of things don't exist like that... Auntie wants her work to do good for many people, and the result is that it is remembered in their hearts...”

By working in the form of helping others, it helps AM appreciate his life process.

“...Of course, yes, that's why if we talk about work now, because it is related to work, Auntie's work is considered to be seen and recognized and inscribed in the form of work, so yes, that's how it will be seen from there. That's from the work side, and on the other side, I want to be remembered in the hearts of the people I love and the people I help...”

NN (Participant 2)

Work experiences that involve using NN's skills, such as decorating and makeup according to people's preferences, make NN feel that her life is meaningful and happy.

“...With my skills in makeup and decorating things that people like, I can make myself useful and helpful. Moreover, they say that I'm good at it, which makes me feel important and happy, even though I'm a trans woman...”

By creating and utilizing these skills, NN believes that this helps her to appreciate the process of life.

“...Of course... because I'm like this, I have a habit of never wanting to get in trouble. I'm a trans woman who started from scratch, learning everything from YouTube, and now I can do more than the average girl...”

VN (Participant 3)

The experience of working in a salon made VN feel that his life was meaningful and fulfilling. This is because VN finds satisfaction when he receives praise from customers who are pleased with the results of his work.

“...When you have formal work experience in a salon, and when you work on someone, it feels very meaningful and valuable. Getting praise and gratitude from them is an incomparable joy. It's not about the finances or payments; it's simply the happiness of knowing that someone appreciates our work, and that's wonderful...”

VN also feels that he has not created any work to commemorate something in his life.

“...There's nothing...”

Appreciation Values (Experimental Values)

AM (Participant 1)

AM holds the value of truth as a life guideline, believing that doing good will result in receiving good in return.

“...The value of truth that I hold is to do good, and you will receive good...”

According to AM, it is important to have a sense of morality within oneself to make life meaningful. AM also emphasizes that he doesn't conform to negative societal stigmas about him. Instead, he aims to be useful, not embarrass his family, and avoid causing harm to others.

“...Yes, indeed, there's one thing that's clear: if I do something wrong, I have to face society's stigma. Even if society deems it wrong, I follow what I believe is right. I apply this to myself so I can be of help, avoid embarrassing my family, and refrain from causing harm to others. That's the principle I live by...”

NN (Participant 2)

NN upholds the values of truth, particularly in the form of courtesy and respect, as guiding principles in life.

“...These values, which encompass good manners, respect for both the elderly and the young, serve as guidelines for both the present and the future...”

Furthermore, NN believes that good morality is essential in life, as it is the key to gaining acceptance from others.

“...We must possess good morals, as they are the key to being accepted by others. Regardless of being trans women, maintaining good morals is essential. Without good morals, being a trans woman can exacerbate negative perceptions, so it's crucial to have good morals...”

VN (Participant 3)

Religion is a fundamental value that VN adheres to as a guiding principle in life.

“...Religion, essentially, is the foundation of everything. It serves as a moral compass, reminding us to be cautious and abstain from certain actions. In essence, religion is the cornerstone that fortifies our principles...”

Moreover, VN believes he has integrated morality into his life. At present, VN aspires to enhance his quality in order not to be underestimated.

“...That's correct. Given the current climate with an abundance of rumors and various other factors, it's vital to bolster our standing. If we can enhance our abilities, it'll not only improve our quality but also prevent any belittlement or disparagement...”

Behavioral Values (Attitudinal Values)

AM (Participant 1)

In response to negative judgments from people around AM, the participant chose to prove that they were not what others thought, and that they were even capable of achieving the same or more than other people.

“...Yes, it was to demonstrate that I am not what they assume I am... For example, if people assume that I can make an airplane, then I am also expected to be able to make an airplane, so I just show that I can do it and I can do it as well...”

NN (Participant 2)

In response to the negative judgments from people around her, NN chose to let it go and not respond to those people's negative judgments. NN hopes that one day people will be able to understand trans women themselves.

“...Yes, let them be, let them with their judgments. Hopefully, one day they will understand and know what it's like to be a trans woman... that's just how it is...”

VN (Participant 3)

Getting inspiration from his friend, VN remembered this to strengthen himself to face the worst circumstances and situations. And in responding to negative assessments from other people, VN chose to ignore them.

“...Yes, that's it, so we have inspiration so that we don't get down, so we just follow what our friends have said, which is what inspired me. So that's what strengthens, and that's also like what you said, don't be weak, he said... let people say this and that, just let it go, the important thing is that it doesn't hurt you, he said... well, that's what he said strengthens everything...”

Discussion

Based on the results of the data analysis, both differences and similarities were identified in the perception of the meaning of life among the trans-women participants in Palangkaraya. These participants have their unique ways of finding meaning in their lives through their identity as trans-women. It was observed that they have a sense of free will and the ability to make choices. The decision-making process is characterized by the presence of challenges and multiple alternative options that individuals need to consider (Kurniasari, 2012). Achieving this sense of freedom is a difficult and time-consuming journey. From a young age, the transgender participants already felt distinct from their peers and experienced attraction to the same sex. Their choice to become trans-women was entirely based on their own desires, without any external coercion. These participants became aware of their differences from the general population, which prompted them to initiate changes in their lives. Individuals with a heightened sense of self-awareness tend to make deliberate decisions and take conscious actions in various situations (Awaliyah & Arruum Listiyandini, 2018). This self-awareness played a crucial role in guiding the participants to embrace their identity as trans-women.

The decision to transition into a trans woman naturally elicits both support and opposition. Different families have varying perspectives on a family member's decision to become a trans woman. This study reveals that participants received diverse reactions from their families regarding their choice to transition. This aligns with prior research conducted by Adhandayani et al. (2015), which describes the process of coming out as transgender to one's family and social environment as fraught with conflict until the verbal and non-verbal transition is complete. Despite differing responses and viewpoints from family members and others, these participants were unwavering in their commitment to living as trans women. They also demonstrated that they could take responsibility for their life choices and accept the consequences of these choices on their families and others.

Additionally, this research highlights the motivation and determination of trans women to bring happiness to themselves, their families, and others. This motivation serves as a driving force that propels individuals to pursue and achieve meaningful goals (Lutfi & Winata, 2020). Moreover, trans women place a special value on being of service and benefit to their families and others. This value serves as a life goal that they strive to achieve and fulfill. As a result, throughout their life journey, these transgender participants have embraced the aspects of free will, a desire for a meaningful life, and the search for the meaning of life to attain a sense of fulfillment in life.

The meaningfulness of life can be influenced by various factors, and these factors may differ from one individual to another, including for trans women. Trans women may find that various factors play a role in shaping the meaningfulness of their lives, and these factors can vary among individuals.

One significant factor that influences the meaningfulness of life for trans women is their positive thinking pattern. Positive thinking is particularly valuable in helping trans women deal with conflicts and challenges. It empowers them to confront problems, both big and small, that they encounter while living as trans women. Positive thinking fosters self-confidence and facilitates the effective execution of daily activities. The participants in this study emphasized the importance of maintaining a positive outlook in all situations, as it not only has a positive impact on themselves but also influences how others perceive them. Moreover, positive thinking equips trans women with the ability to self-regulate and exercise control over their emotions.

Furthermore, participants in this study adopted an attitude pattern that involved responding to the negativity and prejudices of others by proving that they defied the stereotypes and by not paying undue attention to negative comments. This attitude pattern significantly contributes to their pursuit of meaningfulness in life.

In this context, it is worth noting that individuals who adopt a positive attitude tend to interpret their problems as temporary, controllable, and specific to particular situations, as articulated by Seligman ([Adriansyah et al., 2015](#)). By countering societal stereotypes and adopting a resilient attitude, trans women work toward achieving greater meaningfulness in their lives.

In this research, it was found that the positive self-concept and personality factors were not always applied by trans-woman participants to achieve meaningfulness in life. [Suryaningsi et al. \(2023\)](#) state that not everyone has the same influence on an individual regarding self-concept. It was found that being a trans woman did not change the participant's personality. The participants' changes to becoming transwomen were dominated by physical appearance and behavior. Meanwhile, certain participants have a self-concept that they want to build and achieve. However, there are those who feel that they no longer have a self-concept that they want to build or achieve in their life and just want to live their existing life without harming anyone. This diversity shows that each individual has other factors influencing their achievement of meaningfulness in life.

Each trans woman participant creates her own work to find the meaning of life and be able to appreciate it. The work created is not always in the form of objects. In this study, participants created work in the form of services that could be enjoyed and appreciated by other people. Participants create works by doing good to everyone, with the aim of doing good as a work that can be remembered by other people. This research is in line with previous research by ([Priatama et al., 2019](#)), which found that through efforts, activities, or art events, the aim is to find meaning. Moreover, work experience in a certain place is a factor that makes the lives of transgender participants meaningful and significant.

Transwoman participants have a belief in and appreciation for values such as truth, morality, faith, and religion as guides to life. This demonstrates that transwoman participants hold internal values to achieve meaningfulness in life. In this research, moral values are believed by participants to enhance the quality of life. Additionally, the factor of behavioral values was found to influence participants in achieving meaningfulness in life. Transwoman participants demonstrate determination, patience, and courage in facing problems. The results of this research provide new insights from trans women participants: when facing negative treatment from other people, there is no need to respond with violence or other negative actions. Instead, trans woman participants have learned to try to understand other people's situations and to ignore negative remarks made by others.

In addition to the aspects and factors discussed in the previous explanation, this research found another diversity related to the aspect of self-love as a part of the lives of transwoman participants

in their quest for a meaningful life. They demonstrate self-respect, self-acceptance, self-perseverance, self-control, and self-responsibility as elements of self-love, as indicated by Xue, (Xue et al., 2021). Moreover, the participants exhibit perseverance in working toward their goals, as well as effective self-control in managing their emotions and behaviors in the community. These three transwoman participants have also displayed the ability to take responsibility for themselves and even for others. In line with research by Syamsidar & Astrid (2019), some transgender individuals have demonstrated an understanding of the consequences of their choices. Considering these aspects and factors, the transgender participants have found meaning in their lives and have accepted their fate and the challenges they face. This process has provided an image or portrait of the meaning of life for transwomen in Palangkaraya.

Implications

The implications of this research reveal that transwomen tend to prioritize self-focus and refrain from retaliating with harmful actions. The application of factors influencing transwomen's quest for meaningful lives varies and is not uniform. Nevertheless, factors such as family, relatives, work, thought patterns, attitudes, and personality play essential roles in guiding transwomen toward living a meaningful life and attaining genuine meaningfulness. Throughout their life journey, transwomen can incorporate elements such as freedom of choice, the aspiration for a meaningful life, and the essence of life to attain meaningfulness. Furthermore, acceptance, self-respect, and diligent effort represent crucial interventions for transwomen to lead happier and more meaningful lives.

Suggestion for Future Research

Based on the findings of this research, it is evident that there are several limitations that should be addressed in future studies. To further our understanding of the life experiences of trans women and how they find meaning in their lives, future research should consider expanding the participant pool to encompass a more diverse and extensive range of individuals. This will enable a more profound and comprehensive exploration of the subject. Additionally, conducting more in-depth investigations into the concept of self-love among trans women would provide valuable insights into this important aspect of their lives, contributing to a richer understanding of their experiences and challenges.

CONCLUSION

Based on the studies conducted in this research, it can be concluded that trans women in the city of Palangkaraya have diverse life journeys when it comes to achieving meaningfulness in their lives. The path they tread is far from easy, as they grapple with discrimination, rejection, one-sided perspectives on trans women, and various challenges related to their gender identity. In the face of these difficulties, trans women have developed their own coping strategies to navigate negative situations and experiences. Alongside these challenges, they also receive positive support from various sources, which serves as an inspiration for them to persevere and work towards their life goals. Becoming a trans woman was a deeply personal choice, made without any external coercion, often driven by the realization of their distinctiveness from childhood and their dominant feminine identity. Therefore, the meaningfulness of trans women's lives in Palangkaraya is reflected in the discovery process and the various influencing factors. While there are both commonalities and differences in how trans women find meaning in their lives, this diversity also underscores the significance of self-love in their journey toward achieving meaningfulness in life.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to express gratitude to all those who have supported and contributed to the creation of this article.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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