

## A Study on the Happiness of Elderly Individuals Who Remain Employed

*Pelipus Aloo<sup>1</sup>, Shela C. Pello<sup>2</sup>, Mernon Yerlinda C. Mage<sup>3</sup>, Yeni Damayanti<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>1-4</sup> Psychology Department, University of Nusa Cendana

e-mail: <sup>1</sup>[pelipusaloo@gmail.com](mailto:pelipusaloo@gmail.com), <sup>2</sup>[shela.pello@staff.undana.ac.id](mailto:shela.pello@staff.undana.ac.id),

<sup>3</sup>[mernon.mage@staf.undana.ac.id](mailto:mernon.mage@staf.undana.ac.id), <sup>4</sup>[yeni.damayanti@staf.undana.ac.id](mailto:yeni.damayanti@staf.undana.ac.id)

**Abstract.** Living happily in old age is the dream of every elderly person. Happiness is a positive psychological state in which an individual experiences positive emotions such as life satisfaction and positive feelings. This research aims to describe the happiness of the elderly who are still working in Kupang City. It uses a qualitative phenomenological approach with five elderly participants selected through purposive sampling. Five main themes were identified: full engagement, building positive relationships, meaning in life, optimism, and resilience. Data analysis involved data reduction, data presentation, and verification as research results. The findings revealed that the elderly could achieve desired life happiness, including having sufficient income, being independent and persistent, finding life meaning, spending time with family, having optimism for the future, and being able to rise from failure, despite psychological and physical changes in old age.

**Keywords:** *Elderly, Happiness, Working*

**Abstrak.** Menjalani masa lansia dengan bahagia merupakan dambaan setiap lansia. Kebahagiaan sebagai keadaan psikologis yang positif dimana seseorang memiliki emosi positif berupa kepuasan hidup dan perasaan positif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan kebahagiaan pada lansia yang bekerja di Kota Kupang. Penelitian ini menggunakan penelitian kualitatif fenomenologi dan partisipan terdiri dari lima orang lansia yang dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling kemudian menghasilkan lima tema utama yaitu keterlibatan penuh, menjalin hubungan positif, makna hidup, optimis dan resiliensi. Data dianalisis menggunakan reduksi data, penyajian data dan kemudian data tersebut diverifikasi sebagai hasil penelitian. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian, para lansia mampu mencapai kebahagiaan hidup yang diinginkan seperti memiliki penghasilan yang tercukupkan, mandiri dan pantang menyerah, mampu mampu memaknai hidup, bisa menghabiskan waktu bersama keluarga, optimisme akan masa depan dan mampu bangkit dari kegagalan. Meskipun dimasa tua para partisipan sudah tidak memiliki kekuatan dengan adanya perubahan psikologis maupun fisik.

**Kata kunci:** *Remaja, Body Image, Harga Diri*

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## **Introduction**

Humans naturally experience aging, marked by a decline in the functioning of the body with various physical, mental, and social deteriorations, gradually preventing them from performing daily tasks (Fauziyah et al., 2020). According to Presidential Regulation No. 88 of 2021 on the National Aging Strategy, the elderly are defined as individuals aged 60 years and above.

Old age is the final stage of human development, involving adjustments to declining strength and health, reflecting on life, retirement, and adapting to new social roles (Pamungkas, 2017). The elderly are more vulnerable to adverse events affecting mental health, such as loss of loved ones, decreased income, and loss of life purpose. Other causes of poor quality of life include loneliness, boredom or stress, comorbid diseases, spouse death, living alone and away from children, and having to continue working at an advanced age to support their family (Noor et al., 2023). Most elderly in Indonesia continue to meet their economic needs independently through work, thereby being categorized as productive or potential elderly (Ministry of Health RI, 2019).

In Indonesia, old-age security, such as pensions, is limited to formal-sector workers, leaving informal-sector elderly without coverage despite their larger numbers (Alfandi, 2019). The Central Bureau of Statistics for East Nusa Tenggara Province (2023) projected that the elderly aged 60-64 in Kupang City numbered 12,425 people in 2022. According to Geriatri Lansia Sehat Bahagia (2023), based on BPS data, one reason the elderly continue working is economic incapacity. The province with the highest percentage of working elderly in 2022 was East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) at 66.53%.

Elderly people feel happy when they still have work, as it fulfills their needs and prevents them from burdening their children and family. According to Arumsari (2021), working not only supports household finances but also benefits family and society while maintaining physical activity. Without work, they lack the income to meet their daily needs. Happiness is achieved when basic needs are fulfilled, through different paths for each individual. Seligman (2005) described happiness as a positive psychological state where individuals have life satisfaction, positive thoughts, and feelings about their lives.

Due to low levels of education, most elderly people have no choice but to work to support their families financially (Veenhoven in Muflikh, 2019). Initial interviews showed that participants felt dissatisfied relying on their husband's pension and searching for additional income through their own work. Continuing to work allowed them to prosper and enjoy old age independently.

This phenomenon indicates that the elderly want to remain productive. Despite physical and mental changes, they continue working due to economic pressures and self-actualization motives to achieve inner satisfaction. Therefore, this research focuses on "An Overview of Happiness Among Elderly People Who Are Still Working in Kupang City," aiming to determine whether working elderly people are happy or not.

### **Method**

This qualitative research used a phenomenological approach to provide an in-depth description of elderly happiness while working (Moleong, 2016). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, with participants selected using purposive sampling based on specific objectives (Moleong, 2016). Participant characteristics included:

- a) Elderly individuals willing to participate as informants
- b) Male or female elderly aged 60 to 74 years

- c) Elderly individuals capable of communicating well
- d) Elderly individuals who are still actively working, whether in the formal or informal sector
- e) Elderly individuals residing in Kupang City

Data analysis followed phenomenological study analysis (Budiyanti, 2022), involving data reduction, presentation, and conclusion/verification (Miles & Huberman, 2014). Data validity was tested through member checking to ensure data accuracy (Moleong, 2016).

Table 1.

*Participant Demographics*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Education Level</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
PT	63 Years	Female	Junior High School	Protestant Christian	Farmer
BS	71 Years	Female	Junior High School	Protestant Christian	Trader
ES	65 Years	Female	Senior High School	Protestant Christian	Trader
LM	60 Years	Female	Elementary School (SD)	Protestant Christian	Tailor
DA	73 Years	Male	Junior High School	Catholic Christian	Trader

The criteria for selecting participants were based on their ability to provide relevant data or information to address the research objectives. Initially, 10 participants were included; however, data suitability was determined by the adequacy of their responses. Consequently, only five participants were deemed eligible for inclusion in the data.

## **Results**

The researcher's interview data were subsequently analysed using a phenomenological approach, which aims to capture the meanings consciously experienced by participants. The researcher identified five main themes: full engagement, establishing positive relationships, meaning in life, optimism, and

resilience. The researcher then analysed these themes and sub-themes derived from the interview data. During the analysis process, participants were assigned the following codes: PT (P1), BS (P2), ES (P3), LM (P4), and DA (P5). The following is an overview of the analysis results:

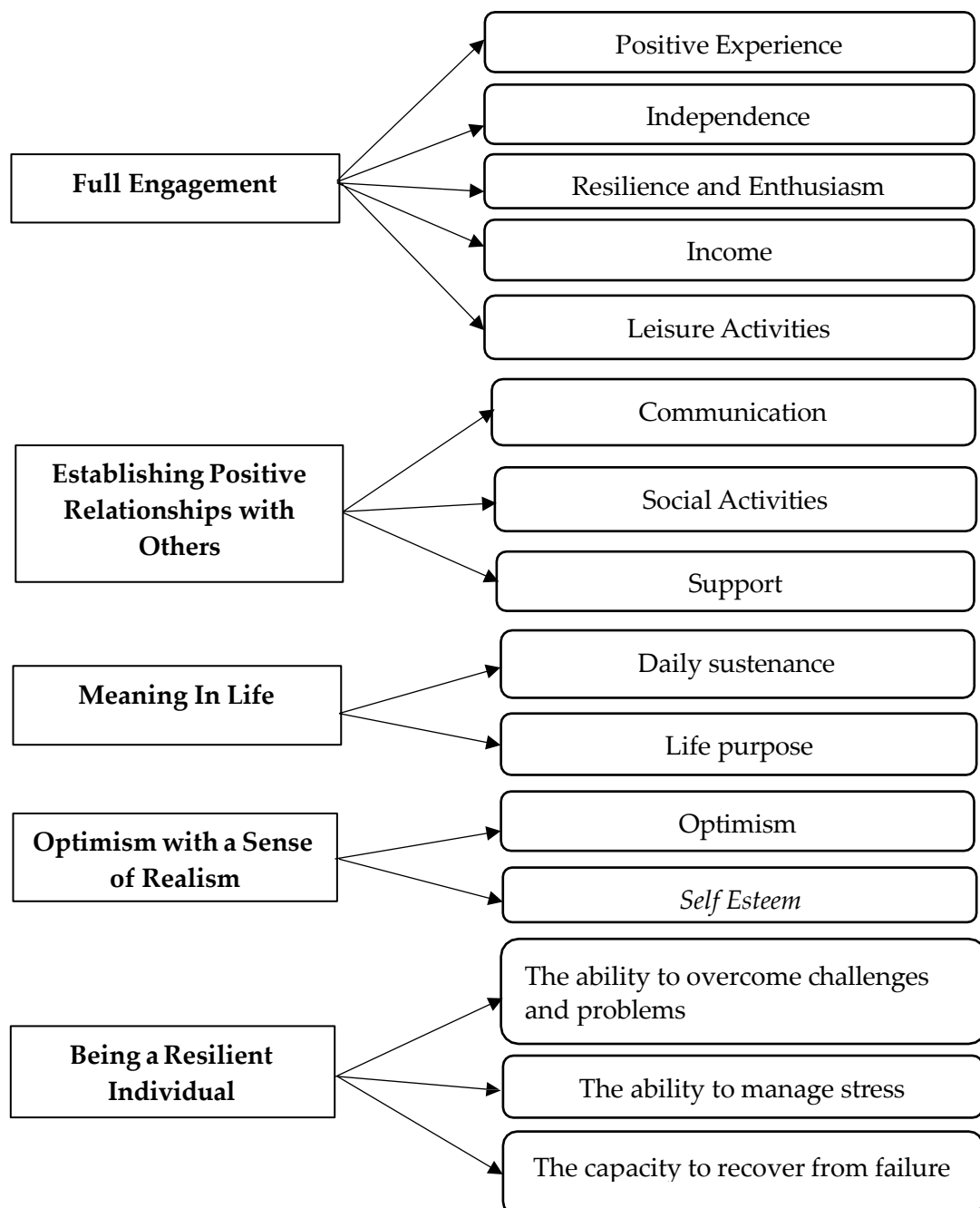


Figure 2. Analysis Results

**Description of the Figure :**

Theme	:	<input type="text"/>
Sub theme	:	<input type="text"/>

### **Discussion**

The researcher identified five thematic categories: full engagement, positive relationships with others, life meaning, optimism yet realism, and resilience. The following is a further explanation of the findings in relation to theories and previous studies.

The first theme is Full Engagement. Full engagement in work means involving oneself entirely, both mind and soul, in the work being undertaken. Not only focus on career but also on other activities such as hobbies and family activities, which are essential for everyone, especially the elderly (Sari & Nuryoto, 2022). Full engagement in meaningful, enjoyable daily activities leads to positive experiences at work. Based on the results of the study, participants continued to work in old age with enthusiasm and pride in their jobs, whether as tailors, traders or farmers.

This aligns with Rahma (2016), who explains that the elderly can choose, maximise, and compensate for their lack of experience by making choices based on the abilities they still have in old age, thereby making life feel more meaningful and happy. The elderly can be economically independent and support their needs and future dreams (Sinambela & Asriwandari, 2024). Interviewed participants showed they did not depend on others, including their children. They felt responsible for themselves, remained initiative-taking, and confident in performing their work despite advanced age. This aligns with Ryff (2014), who found that elderly people with high autonomy can make decisions independently.

Patience is an important psychological adaptation for the elderly in coping with life pressures (Fitriani & Wibowo, 2020). Participants showed patience and spirit in their work despite challenges such as theft, economic hardship, and customer disappointment. This is consistent with Sulandari et al. (2009), who state that productive elderly people who work remain healthy and happy, sharing their experiences with diligence, patience, and enthusiasm. Participants had varied incomes, depending on job type and sales volume, ranging from Rp20,000 to Rp500,000–Rp1,000,000 per month, which made them grateful and satisfied. Elderly people work to support household finances; if they do not work, they have no money and cannot meet their needs (Astuti, 2023).

Participants also engaged in hobbies such as gardening, sewing, cooking, and fishing, as well as group exercise, which provided them with additional happiness and maintained social connectedness. According to Sagita (2017), the elderly can communicate and gain new experiences through hobbies, thereby improving physical health and reducing stress, helping them remain happy when returning to work.

The second theme is Positive Relationships. Happiness can be achieved by building positive social relationships, which allows elderly people to feel accepted (Aiken, 2015). Participants established positive relationships across three main areas: communication, involvement in social activities, and social support. They demonstrated healthy, positive communication patterns by being friendly and respectful, open in sharing stories, apologising when they were wrong, and engaging actively with family, neighbours, fellow elderly, and customers. Such communication builds emotional closeness and acceptance in their social environment. Fitriyadewi & Suarya (2016) found that social interaction among the elderly prevents depression, as it reduces isolation and creates a sense of usefulness.

Involvement in social activities strengthens togetherness and a sense of life meaning. These activities include: (1) mutual cooperation and community service;

(2) religious celebrations and community worship; (3) social services for widows and orphans; and (4) family activities such as savings groups (arisan) and attending grandchildren's school meetings. These activities gave participants a sense of contribution and a feeling of being needed. Sagita (2017) also explained that elderly people benefit not only from meeting their own needs but also from social interactions and active community participation, supporting their happiness.

The third theme is Meaning in Life. Meaning in life is when a person finds meaning in each life experience and has clear life goals (Wijayanti & Damawiyah, 2020). Participants felt happiness through simple, wholehearted daily activities. Their daily meaning included feeling happy when experiencing and sharing with others, helping others, gathering together, and receiving recognition and praise, suggesting that successful older adults feel that life is meaningful.

Participants had different life goals but shared common objectives of seeking happiness, meeting daily needs, helping and making their families happy, being unaffected by others' opinions, and being grateful. Their goals included educating their children through graduation, earning a daily income, making their children happy, and fulfilling family responsibilities regardless of others' views. Ahadiyanto (2021) also found that the elderly need to find meaning and purpose in life to be happy, which can be achieved through work that gives them a sense of importance and worth.

The fourth theme is optimism. Participants were optimistic about their future. Their optimism included future hopes and self-esteem. They hoped to save for old age, improve family life, and renovate their homes to make them more comfortable. Their optimism was not excessive but realistic, based on their current conditions, leading to positive dreams and hopes. Pali (2016) stated that self-belief or optimism about the future, life satisfaction, and positive self-evaluation give them good control over their future.



However, realising these beliefs requires concrete action in line with their abilities. Participants also believed they remained useful to family and society. Their self-esteem is related to feeling useful, the ability to work, helping others, and self-acceptance, which are important foundations for happiness and life meaning. Nurmayunita (2021) emphasised that self-esteem reflects appreciation, recognition, acceptance, and others' valuation of the elderly.

The fifth theme is being Resilient. Factors influencing participant resilience include overcoming challenges or problems, managing stress, and rising from failure. Participants faced problems such as counterfeit money fraud, forgetting to return change to customers, conflicts with children, and customer complaints about price or quality. However, they used strategies such as calm thinking, yielding, prioritizing good relationships, and seeking solutions to increase profits and avoid losses. Ani & Nurjannah (2023) found that happiness does not depend on experiencing pleasant events but on having a resilient personality, the ability to rise from unpleasant events.

Emotion-focused coping strategies dominated as participants managed their emotional responses to stress (Adnan & Amelia, 2021). They were highly motivated to keep trying and achieve better results in daily life. Coping methods included positive thinking, spiritual practices for inner peace, effective time management, and enjoyable activities such as watering plants. Participants demonstrated they could recover from setbacks, even taking loans from cooperatives or banks to start new businesses. Tough, faith in God, and family responsibility motivated them to keep striving. Ani & Nurjannah (2023) also stated that happiness depends not on the number of pleasant events but on resilience, the ability to rise from even the most bitter events.

## **Conclusion**

The findings show that working elderly remain financially independent and do not depend on others. Their patience and enthusiasm keep them productive and feeling useful. They earned income from work and hobbies that provided satisfaction, maintained positive relationships through healthy communication, social activities, and family support. Their activities showed gratitude, responsibility, and perseverance, laying the foundation for facing old age positively and with hope. They solved problems rationally and managed stress with positive strategies. Despite difficulties, their fighting spirit enabled them to endure and remain responsible to their families.

New findings include that the elderly prioritise physical abilities over cognitive ones, risking physical decline like knee pain and vision problems, and that they wish to rest and enjoy life after achieving their goals.

#### *Suggestions*

The elderly are expected to enthusiastically engage in meaningful daily activities, such as building positive relationships with others, exercising, praying, and spending time with family, all of which contribute to a sense of fulfillment in life. Elderly families are advised to support seniors by offering emotional support, assisting with daily activities, and fostering positive relationships with others. Social communities are suggested to support seniors by providing facilities and services that assist them in their daily activities and promoting social activities that help them build positive relationships with others.

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