

## The Process of Finding Meaning of Life in Young Offender

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**Abstract.** Correctional Students can find meaning in life even though they have to be imprisoned. A person can change his life to be more meaningful through five stages, namely the stage of suffering, the stage of self-acceptance, the stage of finding the meaning of life, the stage of meaning realization, and the stage of a meaningful life. The purpose of this study was to describe the process of finding the meaning of adolescent life Lembaga Pembinaan Khusus Anak Klas I Kupang. This research is qualitative research with descriptive methods. Participants in this study were three people who were selected by purposive sampling method with the characteristics of having served a prison term of more than two years. The results showed that the three participants were at a meaningful life stage where all participants interpreted their lives in prison with gratitude for their experiences while in detention.

**Keywords:** *meaning of life, young offender*

**Abstrak.** Siswa Pemasyarakatan dapat menemukan makna hidup meskipun harus di dalam penjara. Seseorang dapat mengubah hidupnya menjadi lebih bermakna melalui lima tahap, yaitu tahap penderitaan, tahap penerimaan diri, tahap menemukan makna hidup, tahap realisasi makna, dan tahap kehidupan yang bermakna. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mendeskripsikan proses pencarian makna kehidupan remaja di Lembaga Pembinaan Khusus Anak Kelas I Kupang. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif. Partisipan dalam penelitian ini adalah tiga orang yang dipilih dengan metode purposive sampling dengan karakteristik pernah menjalani hukuman penjara lebih dari dua tahun. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ketiga partisipan berada pada tahap kehidupan yang bermakna dimana semua partisipan mengartikan kehidupan mereka di penjara dengan rasa syukur atas pengalaman mereka selama di tahanan.

**Kata kunci:** Makna hidup, Andikpas, LPKA

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### **Introduction**

Adolescence is known as a transitional period between childhood and adulthood which generally begins at the age of 12 or 13 years and ends in the late teens or early twenties (Papalia & Olds, 2001). Erikson (in Feist & Feist, 2014) sees the crisis between identity and identity confusion at its peak during the adolescence period. Adolescents can postpone responsibilities, drift aimlessly from one job to another, change partners, or have no clear ideology. Anna Freud (in Hurlock, 2002) says that many failures are often accompanied by tragic consequences, such as criminal behavior.

In 2017, the number of children who became prisoners throughout Indonesia reached 3,479 children. In Kupang, as of June 2018, there are 28 teenagers at Children Correctional Institution (CCI) Class I Kupang. In November 2018, there were 31 teenagers, then increased to 35 teenagers in January 2019. And in March 2019 there were 36 teenagers, then increased in June 2019 to 37 teenagers.

Astuti and Suhendi (2014) explain that young offenders are children who are in conflict with the law, children who are victims of crime, and children who are witnesses of criminal acts. These children are under 18 years of age.

Whitehead & Steptoe said that teenagers who are in CCI can experience stress because they feel they have lost their freedom and control over activities and daily routines in CCI (Muslihah, 2017). According to Priyatno (Arista, 2017), imprisonment not only deprives a person of freedom but also causes various negative consequences. One of the negative experiences from imprisonment is the degradation or reduction of human dignity. Not to mention that the criminal label attached to young offenders has a bad connotation and will affect the personality of teenagers (Dewi & Tobing, 2014). Lambert states that living with these negative labels will prevent young offenders from changing. Adolescents can engage in deviant behavior because of the labeling process in the form of nicknames and stamps so that they identify themselves according to these nicknames or stamps (Ayu & Khairulyadi, 2017).

The results of research conducted at CCI Class 1 in Kupang City by Benu, et al. (2019) show that teenagers in CCI experience problems such as inferiority, anxiety, difficulty sleeping, laziness, boredom, and also loneliness. The results of this study

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indicate that adolescents who are serving time in CCI experience symptoms of meaningless living life such as feeling that they do not have a purpose in life, feel life is meaningless, bored, and apathy. Failure to find and fulfill the meaning of life usually creates emptiness (Bastaman, 2007). Bastaman (1996) states that the meaning of life is things that are considered very important and valuable and provide special value for someone so that they are worthy of being a purpose in life (the purpose in life). The most basic desire of every human being is the desire to live a meaningful life. If this desire can be fulfilled then life will be felt useful, meaningful, and valuable, otherwise, life will feel meaningless.

Even though they have various problems, young offenders in CCI still have the right to decide their own life. Bastaman (1996) states that humans are free to determine their attitudes from various conditions, including when they experience suffering. According to Frankl (2017) if life really has meaning, then there must be meaning in suffering because suffering is an inseparable part of human life.

A person needs to go through a process to achieve meaning in life. Bastaman (1996) explained that there are several stages to achieve the meaning of life, namely (1) the stage of suffering which consists of tragic events and meaningless appreciation, (2) the stage of self-acceptance which consists of self-understanding and changing attitudes, (3) the stage of finding meaning life which consists of finding meaning and determining the purpose of life, (4) the realization stage of meaning consisting of self-attachment, directed activities, and fulfillment of the meaning of life, (5) a meaningful life stage consisting of meaningful appreciation and happiness.

Adolescents who can achieve meaningful life will have several characteristics as explained by Bastaman (1996), namely youth in LPKA can live life with enthusiasm. They have clear goals for both the short and long term, have purposeful activities, and are able to feel the progress they are making. Youth in LPKA can go through day after day discovering new experiences and being able to adapt themselves to their environment. They can realize that the meaning of life can be sought even in unpleasant circumstances and they are able to endure this fact. They are able to value

life and set personal goals, able to love and receive the love of others and realize that love is one of the things that makes life beautiful.

### **Metode**

This research is qualitative research with a descriptive method. Research at Lembaga Pembinaan Khusus Anak Kelas 1 Kupang City, East Nusa Tenggara. The data collection technique in the research was carried out by in-depth interviews. The data validity test used was source triangulation. The participants in this study were three people with the pseudonym Erman, Yoga, and Carlos. Participants were selected by purposive sampling method with characteristics aged 17 to 21 years, had served a prison term of more than 2 years, and a minimum high school education level.

### **Result and Discussion**

Frankl explained that the search for meaning in life is one of the human characteristics. The meaning of life can be found both in pleasant and difficult circumstances (Corey, 2005). Furthermore, Bastaman (2007) explains that meaningful life is a style of life that is full of activities, appreciation, and meaningful experiences, which if they are fulfilled will lead to happy feelings in one's life.

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The first stage in achieving meaning in life is the stage of the tragic event. Based on the results of interviews with Erman, Yoga, and Carlos, it was found that Erman's tragic experience was different from Yoga and Carlos's. Erman's tragic experience is

being in prison due to immoral problems, while Yoga and Carlos have a tragic experience, namely the separation of their parents.

These events then caused the three participants to experience meaningless life. Bastaman (1996) states that the main symptoms of living life without meaning are feeling like having no purpose in life, feeling that life is meaningless, boredom, and apathy. After the separation of his parents, Yoga showed symptoms such as wanting to commit suicide to get into a legal case, while Carlos showed symptoms such as apathy towards his family, almost using drugs, and being involved in legal cases. Meanwhile, participant Erman experienced a meaningless life while at CCI. During their time in CCI, the three participants showed signs of meaningless appreciation, namely boredom, pessimism, stress, and loneliness. This is also in accordance with the research of Benu, et al. (2019) where the psychological conditions of adolescents serving time in CCI show boredom and loneliness.

The next stage that is experienced is the stage of self-acceptance. In meaningless living conditions with certain tragic events experienced, self-awareness can arise in a person. Bastaman (1996) explains self-awareness, which is an increased awareness of the current poor condition of the self and a strong desire to make changes to a better condition. Bastaman also explains that this arising of self-awareness is driven by various causes. For example, because of self-reflection, consulting with experts, getting views from someone, the results of prayer or worship, learning from the experiences of others, or experiencing certain dramatic events.

Participant Erman experienced self-awareness when remembering his parents while in a detention cell. Erman then read the Bible and found a scripture that strengthened him. Through self-reflection, Erman also realized that he was easily tempted by friends' invitations. Likewise with Carlos, who through self-reflection became aware that his presence in CCI was because of himself and not because of his parents. Carlos also realized that if he was far from God there would be many obstacles and trials. When you follow God, there must be obstacles, but God will strengthen you. This is in line with Erman's changing attitude where he becomes more diligent in reading the Bible after being in CCI and when he is reluctant (lazy) to do something

Erman chooses to read the Bible. Meanwhile, Carlos started going to church and doing ministry again after he was at CCI. Previously Carlos had not been to church since his parents divorced. Corey (2013) states that humans have the ability to realize themselves, a unique and real ability that enables humans to think and decide. In contrast to Yoga, which gets self-insight from a person's perspective in the form of motivation given by his girlfriend, so that Yoga shows a change in attitude in the form of successfully completing high school education and being willing to be active in the church. In addition, through the Bible, Yoga self-insight will emerge that will know what is good and what is bad.

The next stage is the discovery of meaning and purpose in life. Bastaman (2007) states that the meaning of life can be found in life itself, no matter how bad life is. Furthermore, Bastaman explained that in life, there are three areas of activity that potentially contain values that enable a person to find meaning in life. These three values are Creative Values, Experiential Values, and Attitudinal Values.

Bastaman (2007) explains that Creative Values is a value related to work activities, works, creates and carries out duties and obligations as well as possible with full responsibility. Based on the results of the interview, it was found that Erman worked with the team to cook. Erman has also been involved in Jampas (Jamboree Pemasarakatan Anak Sejahtera) in Jakarta representing his friends from Kupang. In addition, Erman can also make accessories to have a photography certificate. Meanwhile, Carlos, with his hobby in music, has created 6 songs. The same thing was also said by another significant other that Carlos is good at music and is often trusted to play music during important events at CCI. In contrast to Yoga, which uses Bible verses as emotional control while serving as a blockhead. Another significant other also said that Yoga was highly trusted by CCI officers to mentor his friends in CCI.

The next value is Experimental Values. Bastaman (2007) states that this value is related to the belief and appreciation of the values of truth, virtue, beauty, faith, religion, and love. According to Frankl (Koeswara, 1992), individuals can find meaning in their lives through the realization of living values. Believing in the verses of the Bible is one of the activities related to the value of appreciation (Bastaman, 1996). Erman and

Carlos both believed in Bible verses which later became their source of strength in serving their sentences. Carlos learned that God is good, God brought him to LPKA to change him for the better. Meanwhile, Yoga believes that God started working in his life after being elected as the head of the block.

The last values are Attitude Values, namely determining the right attitude in dealing with suffering and tragic experiences (Bastaman, 1996). Erman tries to get rid of his feelings of guilt and hurt with what he has learned while in LPKA, besides that Erman doesn't want to show his sadness and chooses to look cheerful. Usually, Erman jokes by giving funny stories to his other friends until they laugh. This is also in accordance with the statement from the significant other which says that Erman shows a mature and clever attitude in entertaining. Erman was liked by his friends and officers who were in CCI.

Meanwhile, according to Yoga, CCI is not what other people think. For him, CCI is the first step for successful children. Bastaman (2007) explains that accepting with full grit and courage all forms of suffering are attitude values. On the other hand, Carlos chose to remain strong and passionate about life after realizing that the decisions made by his parents were the best. Carlos also chose to forget the bad and start the good. According to Frankl (Koeswara, 1992), the essence of a value in attitude lies in the way a person sincerely and surrenders himself to a situation that cannot be avoided. These values or meaningful things are then defined as the Purpose of Life. Erman, Yoga, and Carlos both want to make their parents and their families happy because they have disappointed them. Erman also wanted to share his experiences through testimony such as in prayer meetings.

After a person has succeeded in finding meaningful things, at a later stage a person will unconsciously commit himself to a predetermined goal (Self Commitment). Erman chose to pray that his friends would not be easily influenced by him. For Erman, his life must be submitted to God so that God will control everything. Erman has a principle that his life must be better. In the future, Erman wants to go to college while doing side jobs. Yoga commitment is prayer and work. Meanwhile, Carlos is committed to pursuing a hobby and serving at the church after he is free. Direct

Activities to Fulfill the Meaning of Life that can be carried out by the three participants can be in the form of developing talents, abilities, skills, and various other positive potentials that were previously neglected. Currently, Erman is preparing himself to enter university with the help of his mother and brother. Yoga also carries out targeted activities such as participating in many activities so that you don't think too much about the sentence, doing quiet time before going to bed and actively filling in church praises. This was also conveyed by the significant other that Yoga often fills in church praise and is gifted in singing. Meanwhile, Carlos, whose goal is to become a musician, is doing targeted activities in the form of learning musical instruments at LPKA. As stated by Corey (2013), everyone has an innate drive to become a person, that is, they have a tendency towards developing uniqueness, discovering personal identity, and struggling for the full realization of their potential.

The stages that have been passed will lead to changes in living conditions for the better and develop a Meaningful Life. Bastaman (1996) explains that those who live a meaningful life realize that the meaning of life can be found in life no matter how bad things are. Erman, Yoga, and Carlos are both grateful to be at CCI because they have learned new things as lessons. Erman assessed that being in CCI was like being in a school of life while Yoga felt like being recycled by God. In addition, Erman felt proud of himself because he could be held accountable for his previous actions. May explained that humans are creatures that can realize and are therefore responsible for their existence (Corey, 2013). Currently, Erman and Yoga are not happy because their parents are not happy. As stated by Bastaman (2007) that a child wants to be a filial and loved child, and to be the pride of his parents. While Carlos feels quite happy because he can study music at LPKA, he feels that his other happiness is still outside.

Based on the description above, it can be seen that the meaning of life found by the three participants through the sources of meaning in life (Creative value, Experiential value, Attitudinal value) is different. Bastaman (2007) explains that one of the characteristics of the meaning of life is unique, personal, and temporary. That is, what someone considers meaningful does not necessarily mean to others. What is considered important or meaningful today may not mean the same to that person at

another time. The meaning of life cannot be given by anyone but must be sought and found for themselves. Frankl (2017) says that what is important is not the meaning of life in general but the specific meaning of a person's life at a certain moment. Erman interprets his life with gratitude because after being in CCI he can play a musical instrument and feels proud because he can be held accountable for his actions. Yoga and Carlos also interpret their lives with gratitude. Yoga is grateful to be at CCI because outside there are more trials, crimes, hostilities. Meanwhile, Carlos is grateful for being able to change his attitude, to be able to learn many new things and to be closer to God.

### **Conclusion**

Based on research conducted on the process of finding the meaning of life of adolescents in Children Correctional Institution Class 1 Kupang, can be concluded (1) At the stage of the tragic event, it can be seen that the detention incident is a tragic experience for Erman. As for Yoga and Carlos, the separation of their parents was a tragic experience. During their training at CCI, the three participants experienced a meaningless life with symptoms of boredom, pessimism, stress, and loneliness.; (2) At the stage of self-acceptance, the three participants gain self-awareness through self-reflection and worship while being fostered. This made the three participants more resilient in serving their sentence; (3) At the stage of discovering the meaning of life, the three participants were able to find meaning in the value of appreciation in the form of faith in the Bible, the value of attitude in the form of courage and enthusiasm in facing punishment, and creative value in composing songs and seriousness at work; (4) At the stage of directed activities, namely in self-commitment, Erman and Yoga chose to continue pursuing their dreams by continuing their education to higher education, while Carlos wanted to develop his musical abilities by serving in the church; (5) At the meaningful life stage, the three participants are grateful to be at LPKA because they have received new things such as music training and changes in attitudes as learning.

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