

Relationship Between Problem-Focused Coping and Social Support with Life Meaning in Female Sex Workers

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ABSTRACT

The profession of being a female sex worker carries various forms of risks that encompass physical, sexual, and social aspects. Engaging in this work over a long period is a process filled with courage, self-reflection, and complex dynamics of changing life perspectives. Nevertheless, many of them still have hopes and determination to improve their lives for the better. This study focuses on efforts to understand the relationship between problem-focused coping and social support with life meaningfulness among female sex workers. The research approach used is quantitative with a multiple correlation analysis model. From a total population of 232 people, 44 respondents were selected as the research sample. The research instruments included measures of problem-focused coping, social support, and life meaningfulness, which were analyzed using multiple correlation techniques. The results showed that the first hypothesis could not be tested because the data did not meet the normality assumption. Meanwhile, the second hypothesis indicated a negative relationship between problem-focused coping and life meaningfulness, whereas the third hypothesis found a positive relationship between social support and life meaningfulness. These findings suggest that the greater the social support received, the higher the level of life meaningfulness experienced by female sex workers.

Keywords: *Problem Focused Coping, social support, meaning in life, female sex workers.*

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INTRODUCTION

Prostitution is a social phenomenon that has long existed in various countries, including Indonesia. In the context of Indonesian culture, this practice is often considered contrary to moral values and religious teachings, causing its practitioners to frequently face social stigma and rejection (Kartono, 2005). Despite being considered taboo, prostitution continues to occur, both in hidden and concealed manners in several regions. According to data from the Directorate of Social Rehabilitation for Social Orphans and Victims of Human Trafficking in 2017, there were recorded 39,645 sex workers across 168 prostitution locations in Indonesia (Manalu, 2018). One of the regions that has attracted attention is the city of Kediri, East Java, which has several former localization areas and has become the focus of social studies (Sukmana, 2019).

The factors that drive someone to become a sex worker are complex and interconnected. Individual aspects may include experiences of trauma, low education, and economic pressure; relational aspects relate to social environmental influences and

family disharmony; while structural factors encompass permissive economic and cultural conditions (Rusyidi & Nurwati, 2019). Thus, prostitution cannot be viewed solely as a moral issue, but also as a reflection of broader socio-economic problems.

In addition to economic pressure, female sex workers (FSWs) also face other serious risks such as physical violence, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and social discrimination. Data from the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia (2019) indicate that this group has the highest STI transmission rate in Indonesia. In East Java, in 2023, 9,409 new HIV cases were recorded, highlighting the significant health threat to FSWs (Surya.co.id, 2023). Moreover, the physical and sexual violence they experience, whether from clients or the community, further worsens their psychological condition (Fattah, 2018; FHUI, 2016).

Previous research has highlighted the psychological and social conditions of WPS, including how they make sense of their lives amidst pressure. Purwaningtyastuti and Savitri (2016) found that most WPS considered their lives meaningful when they were able to fulfill their responsibilities to their families and economic needs. Meanwhile, Widyawan, Fazrin, and Widhyastuti (2021) revealed that despite facing stigma and illness, some WPS maintained a zest for life through hope and personal goals. However, these studies have not extensively examined how coping strategies and social support contribute to the meaningfulness of their lives.

Devi and Supriyadi (2016) showed that most WPS use mixed coping strategies, which are a combination of problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping, deemed effective in adapting to stress (Cohen, 2005). Social support also plays an important role in maintaining psychological well-being and enhancing mental resilience (Sarafino & Smith, 2002). In fact, Hailitik and Setianingrum (2019) found a positive relationship between family social support and psychological well-being in WPS.

Nevertheless, there still exists a significant research gap, namely the lack of studies that simultaneously examine the relationship between problem-focused coping and social support on the meaningfulness of life for WPS, particularly in Indonesia. In fact, both factors have the potential to help individuals find meaning and direction in life amid complex social and economic pressures.

The meaningfulness of life itself can be understood as something valuable, precious, and becoming the primary goal of an individual in living life. This concept reflects a person's ability to adapt to the environment and find positive value even in the midst of suffering. The application of problem-focused coping strategies allows individuals to face problems directly, while social support from family, friends, and the community plays an important role in strengthening psychological resilience and fostering a sense of being accepted and meaningful.

Therefore, this study aims to answer three main questions: (1) whether there is a relationship between problem-focused coping and social support with the meaning of life in WPS; (2) whether problem-focused coping is related to the meaning of life; and (3) whether social support affects the meaning of life. The main objective is to determine the extent to which these two factors play a role in shaping the perception of life meaning in WPS.

Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the study of social and existential psychology by integrating stress coping theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and the

concept of meaning in life (Frankl, 1994; Bastaman, 2004) within the context of marginalized social groups such as prostitution. Practically, the results of this study can serve as a foundation for social institutions, the government, and counselors to develop psychosocial assistance programs that emphasize strengthening coping skills and social support. Thus, this study is expected to provide a tangible contribution to the rehabilitation and social reintegration processes for women sex workers in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study is classified as a non-experimental research using a quantitative approach and a correlational design. The selection of this design is adjusted to the research objective, which focuses on identifying the relationship between problem-focused coping and social support with the meaningfulness of life in female sex workers. The quantitative approach, as explained by Emzir (2009), is based on the post-positivistic paradigm, which emphasizes testing theory through objective variable measurement, the use of numerical data, and statistical analysis to examine cause-and-effect relationships between variables. Meanwhile, correlational research according to Arikunto (1998) aims to identify whether there is a significant relationship between two or more variables without directly treating the subjects. Thus, this design is considered relevant for addressing research questions that focus on the interrelationship of psychological variables in a specific social context.

The population in this study includes female sex workers (FSWs) operating in several former localization areas in Kediri Regency. Based on the collected data, there are 232 FSWs distributed across four major locations. The population here is defined as the entire object or subject that has certain characteristics and serves as the basis for drawing conclusions (Sugiyono, 2014). From this population, the researcher used a non-probability sampling technique with a purposive sampling method, which involves selecting samples based on specific criteria that align with the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2014). The criteria for respondents include: (1) female sex workers in the former localization areas of Kediri Regency, (2) aged 20–45 years, and (3) having at least one year of work experience as a sex worker. Based on these criteria, 41 respondents were obtained who met the requirements to be included as the research sample.

Data collection was carried out in two stages. The first stage used Google Forms online and successfully gathered data from 144 respondents. However, after the review process, identical and uniform entries were found, which were considered potentially affecting the validity of the data. This was likely due to technical factors such as simultaneous filling without supervision, or respondents' lack of attention to the process when completing it outside of their working hours. To address this situation, the researchers then collected additional data directly through interviews with eight new participants who met the criteria. After screening, 33 valid data sets were obtained from online responses and 8 from direct interviews, bringing the total data analyzed to 41 respondents.

The research instrument uses three psychological scales developed based on the theories and indicators of each variable. According to Azwar (2012), a psychological scale is a set of statements that represent behavioral aspects or indicators of a certain construct. In this study, the instrument consists of: a problem-focused coping scale to

measure an individual's strategies in dealing with stress; a social support scale to assess an individual's perception of emotional, informational, and instrumental assistance from their environment; and a meaning in life scale to evaluate the extent to which an individual perceives direction, purpose, and value in their life. These three scales are designed using a Likert model with five to seven response options representing the respondent's level of agreement with each statement.

Before the main analysis was conducted, the data were tested through classical assumption tests, including tests for normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity, to ensure the suitability of the data for regression analysis. Once all assumptions were met, the data were analyzed using multiple linear regression analysis with the assistance of IBM SPSS version 25 for Windows. This technique was used to examine the relationship between two independent variables (problem-focused coping and social support) and one dependent variable (meaning in life). This method was considered appropriate because it can observe both the simultaneous and partial effects of the two independent variables on the dependent variable.

According to Sugiyono (2008), data analysis is a systematic process of organizing, processing, and interpreting data to answer research questions and test predetermined hypotheses. Therefore, the use of correlation and multiple linear regression in this study is intended to determine the direction and strength of relationships between variables, both positive and negative, as well as to establish the significance of these relationships (Hadi, 2000). Thus, this analysis is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the role of problem-focused coping and social support in the meaningfulness of life among female sex workers in Kediri Regency.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

RESEARCH RESULT

This study aims to analyze the relationship between problem-focused coping and social support with the meaning of life in female sex workers (FSWs). The number of participants involved was 41 respondents, with the research conducted from August 20, 2024, to January 7, 2025. Data were collected using three main instruments, namely the problem-focused coping scale, the social support scale, and the meaning of life scale. All data obtained were analyzed using multiple linear regression methods through the IBM SPSS version 25 for Windows program.

Based on the results of testing the first hypothesis, which assumes a relationship between coping strategies and social support with the meaningfulness of life in female sex workers, it was found that the hypothesis could not be tested. This is due to the data not meeting the normality test requirements, so the basic assumptions of linear regression analysis are not satisfied. Therefore, the testing of the first hypothesis cannot proceed to the further stage of regression analysis.

Furthermore, the results of the second hypothesis test showed a t value of -0.178 with a significance value (p) = 0.266 ($p > 0.05$). Based on the statistical testing criteria, these results indicate that there is no significant relationship between problem-focused coping and the meaning of life in female sex workers. In other words, the second hypothesis, which stated that there is a positive relationship between these two variables, is not statistically supported.

Table 1. Results of the Second Hypothesis Test

Variable	Correlation Coefficient (t)	Significance (p)
Problem-focused coping and the meaningfulness of life	-0,178	0,266

Source: SPSS Version 25 IMB for Windows Program Output Statistics

The results of the third hypothesis test showed a t-value of 0.307 with a significance value (p) of 0.051 ($p > 0.05$). Based on these findings, it can be concluded that there is no significant relationship between social support and the meaning of life in female sex workers. Thus, the third hypothesis, which stated that there is a positive relationship between the two variables, is not empirically supported.

Table 2. Results of the Third Hypothesis Test

Variable	Correlation coefficient (t)	Significance (p)
Social support and meaningfulness of life	0,307	0,051

Source: SPSS Version 25 IMB for Windows Program Output Statistics

Overall, the results of this study indicate that regression analysis on the first hypothesis could not be conducted because the data did not meet the assumption of normality. Furthermore, both problem-focused coping and social support variables were found to have no significant relationship with the meaning in life. Thus, of the three proposed hypotheses, none showed a statistically significant relationship, indicating that these factors are not necessarily the main determinants in shaping the meaning in life for female sex workers.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that there is no significant relationship between problem-focused coping and the sense of meaning in life among female sex workers. Based on the statistical test results, a t-value of -0.178 was obtained with a significance of 0.266 ($p > 0.05$). These results suggest that an individual's ability to use problem-focused coping strategies does not have a direct impact on their perceived sense of life meaning. In other words, even if respondents attempt to face problems logically and with solutions, it does not necessarily enhance their sense of life meaning.

In line with these results, the analysis of the social support variable also showed no significant relationship with the meaningfulness of life, with a t-value of 0.307 and $p = 0.051$ ($p > 0.05$). This means that the level of life meaning experienced by female sex workers is not necessarily influenced by the amount of social support they receive. Although theoretically social support is often considered to play a role in maintaining psychological well-being, in this context it has not yet been able to provide a significant positive impact. This is possibly because the form of support received does not match

their emotional needs, or because the support comes from an environment that also experiences similar social stigma.

These results are consistent with the research of Yuliana, Anna, and Roswiyani (2018), who found that coping strategies are not significantly related to the meaning of life. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explained that the effectiveness of coping is influenced by various internal factors such as physical condition, positive beliefs, social skills, and problem-solving abilities. Therefore, the application of problem-focused coping does not always have a direct impact on enhancing the meaning of life. These findings are also in line with the research of Tuasikal and Retnowati (2018), which showed that coping strategies do not always have a significant effect on an individual's psychological condition. However, these results differ from the study by Barus, Mandang, Kumaat, and Febrianto (2024), which found a significant relationship between problem-focused coping and homesickness among migrant students. This difference is suspected to arise from differences in subject characteristics, where female sex workers face more complex social and emotional pressures compared to students.

Meanwhile, the results regarding the insignificant social support align with the view of Sarason et al. (1990), who stated that the influence of social support on the meaning of life depends on the quality of interactions and the perception of acceptance by the individual concerned. However, these results are not consistent with the research of Siddik, Oclaudya, Ramiza, and Nashori (2018) as well as Arissafitri (2022), which found a significant relationship between social support and the meaning of life. This difference in results is likely due to the social characteristics of female sex workers, who tend to receive support from an environment with similar conditions and stigmas, making such support less constructive in enhancing the meaning of life.

This study has several limitations. First, the research data did not meet the normality assumption, so regression analysis for the first hypothesis could not be conducted, limiting the researchers' ability to interpret the relationships between variables. Second, the number of respondents, only 41 people, makes the study results less representative and difficult to generalize. Third, the data collection method through direct scale reading has the potential to create social bias, as respondents may not answer completely honestly due to the stigma associated with their profession.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that coping strategies and social support are not the primary factors determining the meaning of life for female sex workers. This suggests that emotional, spiritual aspects, as well as self-acceptance, likely play a greater role in shaping their sense of life meaning. Therefore, future research is recommended to use a larger sample size, employ a mixed-methods approach, and include variables such as emotion-focused coping, spirituality, and self-acceptance in order to gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding.

From a practical standpoint, the results of this study can serve as a reference for social institutions, counselors, and psychologists in designing intervention programs that emphasize strengthening the emotional and existential aspects of female sex workers. An approach based on empathy, self-esteem enhancement, and the development of supportive social networks is believed to help them form a positive self-perception and rediscover a more complete and dignified sense of life.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that female sex workers face a range of complex challenges that affect their physical, psychological, and social well-being. Strong social stigma, violence, and limited access to healthcare services make this group highly vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as HIV/AIDS, as well as mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Despite being in high-pressure conditions, some of them still strive to find meaning in life through forming meaningful relationships, setting life goals, and applying self-adjustment strategies in dealing with various issues. Based on the coping theory proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), these efforts can be categorized into two forms: problem-focused coping, which is oriented towards directly solving problems, and emotion-focused coping, which focuses on managing emotions. In addition, social support also plays an important role in providing a sense of acceptance, strengthening psychological resilience, and enhancing emotional well-being. These findings are in line with the research of Sanders (2004) and Dalla (2006), which state that support from the environment or peer community can reduce feelings of loneliness and help improve the mental well-being of female sex workers.

The correlation analysis results in this study show that no significant relationship was found between problem-focused coping and the meaning of life, with a t-value of -0.178 and $p = 0.266$ ($p > 0.05$). This means that female sex workers' ability to directly face and solve problems does not necessarily correlate with the extent to which they find meaning in their lives. Similarly, the variable of social support, with a t-value of 0.307 and $p = 0.051$ ($p > 0.05$), also does not show a significant effect on the meaning of life. Thus, a high level of social support does not necessarily have a positive impact on enhancing the meaningfulness of life. Other factors such as spirituality, self-acceptance, and emotional stability are suspected to have a greater contribution in shaping the perception of life's meaning amidst the social pressures they experience.

Based on these results, there are several recommendations that can serve as guidelines for the development of research or practical applications in the field. For future research, it is recommended to expand the number of participants by involving other professional groups, in order to obtain comparisons regarding coping strategies and the meaning of life in more diverse social contexts. Future studies can also use a qualitative approach to explore the subjective experiences and life meanings of female sex workers in greater depth. If the quantitative approach is still maintained, then the number of items in the instrument should be adjusted to avoid causing respondent fatigue, and the data collection process can be conducted directly, such as through interviews or reading the questions by the researcher, given that some respondents may have difficulty completing a self-administered questionnaire.

In terms of practical application, these findings can serve as a foundation for social institutions, psychologists, and counselors to design support programs that focus more on emotional and existential aspects. An empathy-based approach that fosters self-confidence, self-acceptance, and strengthens healthy social relationships is considered more effective than interventions that only concentrate on problem-solving skills. Furthermore, collaboration among social institutions, mental health professionals, and local communities is highly needed to create a more supportive environment,

enabling female sex workers to positively and empoweredly rebuild the meaning of their lives.

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