

Social Support, Quality of Life, and Death Anxiety among Soldiers in Papua

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Abstract

Background: Soldiers in conflict areas face heightened death anxiety due to physical challenges, armed conflict, and harsh conditions. Social support and quality of life are vital for their psychological well-being. **Objective:** To examine the role of quality of life as a mediator between social support and death anxiety among Indonesian National Armed Forces in Papua. **Method:** Correlational quantitative research involving 165 samples using the accidental sampling technique. Measurement using scales of death anxiety, social support, and quality of life. Path analysis was used to analyze the data. **Results:** The findings indicate a significant negative relationship between social support and death anxiety ($r = -0.421$, $p < 0.001$), as well as a significant positive relationship between social support and quality of life ($r = 0.536$, $p < 0.001$). There is a significant negative relationship between quality of life and death anxiety ($r = -0.478$, $p < 0.001$), which also acts as a mediator. **Conclusion:** Social support can improve the quality of life and reduce death anxiety among Indonesian National Armed Forces in Papua. This study suggests psychosocial interventions to improve soldiers' psychological well-being through enhancing social support and quality of life.

Keywords: Death anxiety; military personnel; Papua; quality of life; social support;.

Abstrak

Latar Belakang: Tugas prajurit di daerah konflik meningkatkan kecemasan terhadap kematian akibat tantangan fisik, konflik bersenjata, dan kondisi geografis yang sulit. Dukungan sosial serta kualitas hidup prajurit berperan penting dalam kesejahteraan psikologis mereka. **Tujuan:** Untuk menguji peran kualitas hidup sebagai mediator antara dukungan sosial dan kecemasan kematian pada prajurit TNI di Papua. **Metode:** Penelitian kuantitatif korelasional dengan melibatkan 165 sampel dipilih menggunakan teknik *accidental sampling*. Pengukuran dengan skala kecemasan terhadap kematian, dukungan sosial, dan kualitas hidup. Analisis jalur digunakan untuk menganalisis data. **Hasil:** Temuan menunjukkan hubungan negatif signifikan antara dukungan sosial dengan kecemasan kematian ($r = -0,421$, $p < 0,001$), serta hubungan positif signifikan antara dukungan sosial dengan kualitas hidup ($r = 0,536$, $p < 0,001$). Hubungan negatif signifikan antara kualitas hidup dengan kecemasan kematian ($r = -0,478$, $p < 0,001$), sekaligus berperan sebagai mediator. **Simpulan:** Dukungan sosial yang kuat dapat meningkatkan kualitas hidup dan mengurangi kecemasan terhadap kematian pada prajurit TNI di Papua. Penelitian ini menyarankan intervensi psikososial untuk meningkatkan kesejahteraan psikologis prajurit melalui penguatan dukungan sosial dan kualitas hidup.

Kata Kunci: Dukungan sosial; kualitas hidup; kecemasan kematian; Papua, prajurit militer.

Introduction

Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) soldiers face various challenges in carrying out their duties to maintain the sovereignty and security of the country, especially those assigned to conflict-prone areas such as Papua. Security threats, difficult geographical conditions, and being far from the family increase the risk of death and trigger death anxiety among soldiers (Musisi & Kinyanda, 2020). Death anxiety is an emotional state characterized by worry, fear, and unease related to death and dying, whether it be one's death or that of a loved one (Iverach et al., 2014). High levels of death anxiety can negatively affect soldiers' mental health and performance in carrying out their duties (Telecan et al., 2023). Given these challenges, it is crucial to understand how death anxiety manifests among TNI soldiers and the potential psychological consequences it may have on their well-being and operational performance.

The phenomenon of duty deaths among soldiers of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) is an important aspect that illustrates the inherent risks of the military profession in Indonesia. Based on data from the Data and Information Center of the Ministry of Defense (2023), the incidence of TNI soldiers falling on duty reaches an average of 15-20 cases per year, with significant variation depending on the intensity of military operations. The soldiers faced a high risk of death when carrying out these missions, with the majority of cases occurring in the context of border operations and conflict zone security. TNI soldiers who fall into duty represent a high form of sacrifice in carrying out their responsibilities for maintaining the country's sovereignty.

Physical threats that can cause death are stress triggers in modern military operations, and death-related anxiety among military personnel is a typical response to combat. Eyni et al. (2022) explained that soldiers exposed to war are likely to experience a fear of death, which intensifies because it is not only an anticipation of dangerous situations but also a direct experience. Ku et al., (2022) state that military operations are stressful events and one of the components that can trigger stress for assigned soldiers. The behavior of Indonesian National Army soldiers who show death anxiety, especially in Papua, is evident through requests to be reassigned to safer locations, as they feel threatened or uncomfortable with the conditions of the duty field (Negara et al., 2024). This often occurs because of the high intensity of armed conflict with separatist groups, as reported in the clashes between the TNI and the West Papua National Liberation Army (TPNPB). This conflict generates feelings of anxiety and psychological tension among soldiers and increases the risk of injury or death, especially after ambush and murder incidents (RNZ, 2023).

In their research, Tomer and Eliason (1996) explained that there are internal and external factors that can suppress death anxiety, including personality, life experiences, and cultural factors. Internal factors that can suppress death anxiety include religiosity (Florian & Kravetz, 1983), resilience (Rayatpisheh et al., 2023), perception of life (Kyota et al., 2023), psychological well-being (Yousefi Afrashteh et al., 2024), and quality of life (Hashim et al., 2022). External factors include social support (Morowatisharifabad et al., 2024), family cohesion (Mohammadi et al., 2023), cognitive emotion regulation strategies (Eyni et al., 2022), and perceived social support (Siltag et al., 2023). Morowatisharifabad et al. (2024) found a negative correlation between social support and death anxiety, indicating that individuals with high levels of social support tend to experience lower death anxiety. On the other hand, Hashim et al. (2022) revealed a significant relationship between quality of life and death anxiety, where individuals with a good quality of life tend to have lower levels of death anxiety. These findings underscore the importance of social support and quality of life as predictors of death anxiety.

Previous studies have examined the factors that influence the level of death anxiety in various populations, such as the elderly (Mohammadpour et al., 2018), patients with chronic illnesses (Vehling et al., 2017), and healthcare workers (Salari et al., 2020). However, research explicitly examining death anxiety in military personnel, particularly those stationed in conflict areas such as Papua, is still lacking. research exploring these soldiers. Soldiers stationed in conflict areas are directly exposed to the threat of death and are required to be ready to sacrifice their lives for their duty to the country. The psychological dynamics experienced by soldiers in this context are undoubtedly different from those of the general population, thus requiring a more in-depth study (Ramchand et al., 2015). Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by explicitly examining the role of quality of life as a mediator in the relationship between social support and death anxiety among TNI soldiers stationed in the conflict areas of Papua.

This study aimed to fill this gap in the literature by explicitly examining the role of quality of life as a mediator in the relationship between social support and death anxiety among TNI soldiers stationed in the conflict areas of Papua. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of more effective and targeted psychological interventions to help soldiers manage death anxiety, improve their psychological well-being, and maintain optimal performance in carrying out their national duties. In addition,

this research is also expected to enrich scientific studies in the fields of military psychology and mental health, as well as open up opportunities for further research that explores other factors that may influence soldiers' death anxiety. Thus, this research not only contributes to the development of science, but also has the potential to provide practical benefits for efforts to improve the quality of life and psychological well-being of soldiers as frontline guardians of the nation's sovereignty and security.

This study aimed to determine the correlation between social support, quality of life, and death anxiety of soldiers in Papua. In this study, quality of life was believed to have a mediating role, so it is hoped that it can influence social support on the death anxiety of soldiers in Papua. The hypotheses proposed in this study are (1) there is a correlation between social support and death anxiety with quality of life among soldiers of the 503rd Infantry Battalion stationed in Papua, (2) there is a correlation between social support and death anxiety among soldiers of the 503rd Infantry Battalion stationed in Papua, and (3) there is a correlation between social support and quality of life among soldiers of the 503rd Infantry Battalion stationed in Papua. (4) There is a correlation between quality of life and death anxiety among soldiers of the 503rd Infantry Battalion stationed in Papua. Therefore, it is important to examine the factors that can help address death anxiety among TNI soldiers, especially those stationed in high-risk areas such as Papua, to maintain their psychological well-being and support the success of their mission to safeguard the sovereignty of the country.

Method

This study employs a correlational quantitative approach to examine the relationships between variables, specifically investigating the role of quality of life as a mediator in the relationship between social support and death anxiety among the Indonesian National Armed Forces stationed in Papua. Data analysis will involve several statistical tests to ensure the validity of the findings. Before conducting hypothesis testing, normality and linearity tests were performed to determine whether the data met the assumptions for parametric analysis.

If the data meet these assumptions, a parametric test such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) or Multiple Regression Analysis will be used to examine mediation effects. If these assumptions are not met, non-parametric alternatives, such as bootstrapping mediation analysis, are employed. This research adhered to ethical guidelines for data collection, ensuring informed consent from participants, confidentiality of responses, and approval from relevant ethical review boards. Participants will be fully informed about the study's purpose, and their participation will be voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any time.

Sample

In this research, the population used consisted of all soldiers of Yonif 503 stationed in Papua, totaling 300 personnel. The selection of the Yonif 503 soldiers as the population is based on the consideration that Yonif 503 is a strategic battalion often involved in security operations in Papua. The sample was taken from the population using the accidental sampling technique, where individuals who were coincidentally encountered by the researcher and met the criteria were included as samples. The sample size was determined using the Isaac and Michael tables with a 5% margin of error, resulting in 165 soldiers.

Data Measurement

The Death Anxiety Scale (DAS) was used to measure the anxiety towards death of soldiers of the 503rd Infantry Battalion stationed in Papua (Templer, 1970). This scale has 15 items divided into five domains: general anxiety about death, fear of experiencing pain, various thoughts about death, rapid passage of time, and fear of the future. An example of a statement in this scale is "I am very much afraid to die," with the response categories rated on a five-point Likert scale. The results of the statistical analysis conducted by the researchers based on soldiers of the 503rd Infantry Battalion stationed in Papua show that all items in this scale are valid ($r > 0.30$) and reliable ($\alpha = 0.884$).

The Social Support Scale formulated by Sarafino and Smith (2011) measures the social support received by TNI soldiers stationed in Papua using valid items and modifying several items. This scale has 16 items divided into four domains: emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, and companionship support. An example of a statement in this scale is "I receive attention from colleagues" with the response categories rated on a five-point Likert scale. The results of the statistical analysis conducted by the researchers based on soldiers of the 503rd Infantry Battalion stationed in Papua show that all items in this scale are valid ($r > 0.30$) and reliable ($\alpha = 0.891$).

The quality of life scale formulated by the WHOQOL Group (1996) measures the quality of life of soldiers in the Infantry Battalion 503 stationed in Papua. This scale has 26 items divided into four domains:

physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and environment. An example of a statement in this scale is "how would you rate your quality of life?" with the response categories rated on a five-point Likert scale. The results of the statistical analysis conducted by the researchers based on soldiers of the 503rd Infantry Battalion stationed in Papua indicate that all items in this scale are valid ($r > 0.30$) and reliable ($\alpha = 0.941$).

Data Analysis

The data obtained in this study were analyzed using Jeffrey's Amazing Statistics Program (JASP). The SEM add-on menu in JASP was used for hypothesis testing. The mediation analysis used in this study was path analysis. This study was analyzed with a 95% confidence interval (CI) and 1000 bootstraps.

Result

The results of the normality test indicated that the data for all three variables, social support, quality of life, and death anxiety, were normally distributed. The p-values obtained from the normality test for each variable exceeded the significance threshold of 0.05, suggesting that the null hypothesis, which assumes a normal distribution, cannot be rejected. Specifically, the p-values for social support, quality of life is 0.052, and death anxiety were 0.056, 0.052, and 0.050, respectively, all of which confirm the assumption of normality. These findings indicate that parametric statistical analyses can be appropriately applied to further examine the relationships among the study variables. Table 1 shows the demographic profiles of the participants involved in this study. Based on the distribution of marital status data, it was observed that out of 165 participants, 112 were married at the time of data collection. Describing demographic characteristics provides context, enhances generalizability, and ensures transparency. It helps assess sample representativeness, identifies potential influences on key variables, and facilitates comparisons with other studies. By systematically presenting demographic data, this study ensures a comprehensive interpretation of its findings.

Tabel 1. Correlation between Demographic Variables and Main Research Variables

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Range age	< 21 years	2	1,2
	21 – 30 years	73	42,9
	31 – 40 years	70	41,2
	41 – 50 years	25	14,7
Marital Status	Married	112	65,9
	Not married	58	34,1
Work period	1 – 10 years	79	46,4
	11 – 20 years	64	37,7
	21 – 30 years	27	15,9

Based on the data analysis results, it was found that the majority of respondents in this study showed a low level of death anxiety, with an average score of around 37.5 ($SD = 4.44$). Although there was variation, most respondents showed a level of addiction close to the average score. The level of social support fell into the high category, with an average score of approximately 67 ($SD = 6.63$), indicating significant variation in social support responses among the respondents. Meanwhile, the average score for quality of life is around 110.7 ($SD = 11.87$), which indicates that overall, the respondents show a relatively good quality of life. However, significant variation in quality of life was also observed among the respondents. These findings provide an initial overview of the characteristics of the research sample, which are crucial for understanding the relationships between the observed variables. The descriptive data are presented in Table 2.

Tabel 2. Descriptives Statistic

Variable	N	Missing	Mean	Median	SD	Min	Max
Death Anxiety	165	0	37.5	37	4.44	26	52
Social Support	165	0	67	67	6.63	53	86
Quality of Life	165	0	110.7	109	11.87	64	134

Table 3 shows the results of the mediation test to examine whether quality of life mediates the relationship between social support and death anxiety. The research results show that on path a, social support significantly predicts quality of life (estimate 0.625; $p=0.001$). On path b, quality of life significantly predicted death anxiety (estimate -0.137; $p=0.001$). The direct effect of social support on death anxiety was also significant on path c' (estimate -0.442; $p=0.001$), yielding a higher result than its total effect (estimate -0.527;

$p=0.001$). The research results also indicated a significant indirect effect of quality of life on the relationship between social support and death anxiety (estimate -0.086 ; $p=0.001$). This indicates that quality of life partially mediates the relationship between social support and death anxiety.

Tabel 3. Calculation Results with Path Analysis

Variable	Estimate	Z-Value	P	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
a	0.625	4.780	< .001	0.381	0.911
b	-0.137	-8.615	< .001	-0.172	-0.101
c'	-0.442	-15.482	< .001	-0.498	-0.386
Total effect	-0.527	-16.382	< .001	-0.591	-0.466
Indirect effect	-0.086	-4.180	< .001	-0.139	-0.052

Note: a = SS QoL; b = QoL DA; c' = SS DA

Path analysis is a tool for graphically depicting the structure of causal relationships between independent, mediating (intervening), and dependent variables. For the presentation of causal relationships, path diagrams use single-headed arrows to indicate a direct influence between independent or mediating variables and dependent variables. The path analysis test results regarding the variables of social support and quality of life on the variable of death anxiety can be explained as follows:

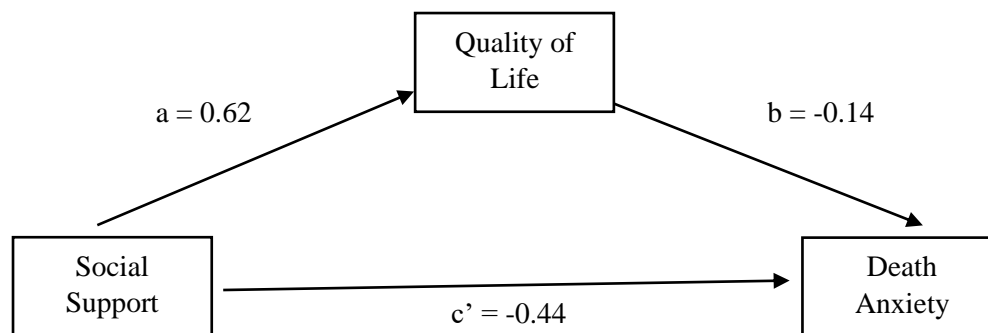


Figure 1. Model of Path Analysis

Based on the results of the path analysis test using the JASP application with the output shown in the image above, it is known that social support has a significant effect on soldiers' death anxiety. The path analysis results indicate that social support has both a direct and indirect effect on death anxiety, mediated by quality of life. The direct effect of social support on death anxiety is represented by $c' = -0.44$, indicating that higher social support is associated with lower death anxiety.

In the indirect pathway, social support positively influenced quality of life ($a = 0.62$), suggesting that individuals with higher social support tended to experience a better quality of life. Subsequently, quality of life had a negative association with death anxiety ($b = -0.14$), meaning that an improved quality of life contributed to lower levels of death anxiety.

The negative coefficients in paths b and c' suggest that as social support increases, death anxiety decreases, both directly and indirectly, through improved quality of life. These findings highlight the importance of social support in mitigating psychological distress among soldiers, emphasizing its role in enhancing quality of life and reducing death anxiety in high-risk environments.

Discussion

TNI soldiers in Papua carry out their duties to maintain security and protect residents from the threat of the KKB in conflict-prone areas. Rugged terrain, the risk of sudden attacks, and isolation from the family trigger psychological pressure that can lead to profound anxiety about death (death anxiety). This affects the mental health and performance of soldiers. To prevent these negative impacts, it is important to enhance social support from military institutions and families and provide adequate psychological services to improve soldiers' quality of life.

Social support, which consists of emotional, informational, and instrumental support from family, coworkers, and other groups, can enhance an individual's quality of life. This support provides a sense of being valued, helps cope with stress, offers advice and knowledge for decision-making, and reduces the burden (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Individuals with high social support tend to have a better quality of life owing to their

improved psychological and social well-being. Christanti et al. (2024) conducted a study on students and found that family, friends, and significant others' social support affected their quality of life, with family support having the most significant impact (56.1%). Okfrima et al. (2021) also found a significant positive correlation between social support, especially the emotional support dimension, and quality of life.

Individuals with a good quality of life tend to have a more positive outlook on life, which in turn can reduce death anxiety. This can happen because individuals with a good quality of life are better able to cope with stress and existential uncertainties, such as death anxiety. This study is supported by research conducted by Jaber et al. (2022) on 226 patients with kidney failure, which showed that quality of life has a negative and significant effect on death anxiety, with a correlation coefficient of -0.179 and a significance level of 0.001. This indicates a negative and significant relationship between quality of life and death anxiety. In support of the findings of Ghiasi et al. (2021), individuals with better perceptions of their quality of life tended to experience lower death anxiety.

Other research findings have indicated that social support can reduce death anxiety in individuals. Social support can be explained through several aspects: emotional, informational, and instrumental (Ebrahimi et al., 2018). Emotional support provides a sense of safety and acceptance, which helps individuals manage their stress and anxiety. Informational support provides advice and knowledge that helps individuals understand and cope with difficult situations. In contrast, instrumental support consists of practical assistance, such as resources and physical help, that can alleviate the burdens faced by individuals.

Individuals with a high level of social support tend to feel more capable of coping with life uncertainties, which in turn can reduce death anxiety. This research is supported by the results of a study conducted by Haq and Mariyati (2024) on 100 elderly individuals at Lipinsos Keputih Surabaya, which showed a significant negative relationship between social support and death anxiety with a correlation coefficient of -0.421 ($p < 0.001$) at a significance level of 0.001. This indicates a significant negative relationship between social support and death anxiety. Consistent with the findings of Kisomi et al. (2024), social support was associated with a reduced risk of death, indicating that patients who felt socially supported tended to experience lower levels of death anxiety.

Although this study makes significant contributions, several limitations need to be considered. First, this study used a cross-sectional design; therefore, the causal relationship between the variables studied cannot be determined with certainty. Future longitudinal research can better understand the dynamics of the relationship between social support, quality of life, and death anxiety over time. Second, this study only focused on TNI soldiers stationed in Nduga, Papua, so the generalization of the findings to other military contexts or the general population may be limited. Further research with a more diverse and representative sample would enhance the external validity of these findings. Further research is recommended to replicate this study with a larger sample size and to use other variables for examination. Despite some limitations, this study adds a new framework for the exposure to social support, quality of life, and death anxiety.

Based on the findings of this study, to reduce death anxiety among TNI soldiers in conflict areas, targeted interventions should focus on strengthening social support and improving quality of life. Effective strategies include peer support programs to enhance camaraderie, accessible psychological counseling using evidence-based therapies such as CBT, and quality of life improvements through better living conditions, medical facilities, and family support. These interventions align with research on reducing psychological distress among military personnel. Implementing these measures can enhance soldiers' resilience, mental health, and overall mission effectiveness.

Conclusion

Based on the research results and discussions presented, it can be concluded that there is a significant correlation between social support and quality of life with death anxiety among the soldiers of Yonif 503, stationed in Papua. The results showed that social support has a negative impact on death anxiety, both directly and indirectly, through the improvement of quality of life. The higher the social support received by soldiers, the lower their level of death anxiety. In addition, social support also positively impacts quality of life, with soldiers with strong social support tending to have better quality of life. In turn, a high quality of life contributes to reducing soldiers' death anxiety. These findings align with the research objectives, which aim to uncover the role of social support and quality of life in the dynamics of death anxiety among soldiers in conflict-prone areas. The results of this study expand the understanding of factors that can mitigate the psychological impact of high-risk military duties and provide an empirical basis for developing interventions focused on enhancing social support and quality of life to maintain the psychological well-being of soldiers. Thus, the four hypotheses of this study are accepted.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be provided. From a practical standpoint, military institutions are advised to develop programs to enhance social support for soldiers, especially those stationed in conflict-prone areas such as Papua. The program may include activities that strengthen social bonds among soldiers, provision of easily accessible psychological counseling services, and efforts to improve soldiers' quality of life, such as providing adequate health facilities and a balance between work and rest time. Theoretically, the results of this research contribute to the development of insights into the fields of military psychology and mental health, particularly regarding the role of social support and quality of life in mitigating death anxiety among soldiers. Further research is expected to explore other factors that may play a role, such as coping strategies or spiritual well-being, and involve a broader and more diverse sample. A longitudinal research design can also be considered to understand the changes in the psychological dynamics of soldiers over time. The dissemination of research results through scientific publications and presentations that are easily understood by various audiences is expected to expand the impact and practical applications of the obtained findings.

The findings of this study indicate that social support is negatively correlated with death anxiety among soldiers, both directly and indirectly, through improvements in their quality of life. This negative correlation suggests that, as social support increases, death anxiety levels decrease. Soldiers who receive strong social support from peers, superiors, and family members are more likely to experience lower levels of distress related to death. Additionally, social support contributes to an enhanced quality of life, which further mitigates death anxiety. These results highlight the crucial role of social support in protecting against psychological distress in high-risk military environments. Understanding this relationship can inform the development of targeted interventions aimed at strengthening social support systems and improving soldiers' overall well-being, ultimately enhancing resilience in conflict-prone areas.

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