

Gratitude and Prosocial Behavior in Happiness among Early Adulthood in Indonesian Context

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Corresponding author:	Abstract
*Muhamad Taufik Hermansyah taufikmuhamad545@gmail.com Article History Submitted : July 16th, 2025 Final Revised : October 27th, 2025 Accepted : October 29th, 2025	Background: Early adulthood is marked by various complex challenges that can influence happiness. In the Indonesian context, these include career decision-making, quarter-life crisis, and the desire to form meaningful romantic relationships. Objective: This study aims to examine the crucial roles of gratitude and prosocial behavior in predicting happiness among early adults aged 23–39. Method: A quantitative survey design was employed. Data were collected from 501 participants (n=501) using purposive sampling and analyzed through multiple regression and several additional analysis. Results: The findings indicate that both gratitude and prosocial behavior significantly contribute to happiness, with a combined effective contribution of 78.2%. Additional analysis revealed no significant gender differences in happiness. Conclusion: Gratitude and prosocial behavior jointly play a significant role in enhancing happiness during early adulthood. Suggestion: Future research should consider diverse respondent backgrounds such as socioeconomic status, age, and other contextual factors to further elucidate the determinants of happiness. Keywords: Culture; early adult; gratitude; happiness; prosocial.
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Abstrak

Latar Belakang: Fase dewasa awal memiliki beragam tantangan yang dapat mempengaruhi kebahagiaan. Jika melihat konteks di Indonesia, terdapat beberapa tantangan seperti penentuan karir, quarter life crisis dan keinginan menjalani hubungan romantis. **Tujuan:** Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui peran syukur dan prososial terhadap kebahagiaan pada dewasa awal dengan rentang usia tertentu (23-39). **Metode:** Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kuantitatif survey. Analisis data penelitian menggunakan regresi berganda, dengan jumlah responden berjumlah 501 (n=501) dan beberapa analisis tambahan. Pengambilan data dilakukan dengan teknik *purposive sampling*. **Hasil:** Hasil penelitian menunjukkan terdapat peran antara syukur dan prososial dan syukur terhadap kebahagiaan. Sumbangan efektif yang diberikan kedua variabel bebas sebesar 78,2%. Analisis tambahan menunjukkan tidak adanya perbedaan kebahagiaan antara laki-laki dan perempuan. **Simpulan:** Syukur dan prososial sama-sama memberikan peran terhadap kebahagiaan. **Saran:** Penelitian selanjutnya disarankan mempertimbangkan variasi latar belakang responden seperti ekonomi dan usia serta faktor-faktor variabel lain yang mempengaruhi kebahagiaan.

Kata Kunci: Budaya; dewasa awal; syukur; kebahagiaan; prososial.

Introduction

Happiness is defined as a subjective state comprising life satisfaction, positive affect, and the absence of negative affect, commonly conceptualized as subjective well-being (Kringelbach & Berridge, 2010; Seligman, 2002). In early adulthood, happiness becomes particularly relevant due to simultaneous developmental demands such as career establishment, relational commitment, and autonomy, which increase vulnerability to anxiety, depression, and quarter-life crisis (Santrock, 2013; Santri et al., 2025). Accordingly, identifying determinants of happiness in this life stage carries both theoretical and practical significance.

Within the Indonesian context, gratitude and prosocial behavior have consistently been identified as salient contributors to happiness. Gratitude, defined as the recognition and appreciation of positive experiences or benefits received, enhances subjective well-being through mechanisms such as increased optimism, strengthened social connectedness, and the reduction of negative affect (Dinanti & Mangundjaya, 2023; Hidayati, 2024; Kharbanda & Mohan, 2021; Sriaissah & Maryam, 2022; Wood et al., 2010). Prosocial behavior, referring to voluntary actions intended to benefit others, likewise promotes happiness by strengthening social bonds, fostering a sense of meaning, and eliciting positive emotions, particularly within collectivist societies such as Indonesia where social interdependence is culturally reinforced (Aknin et al., 2013; Marhayati, 2021; Scott, 2020).

Despite these findings, several gaps remain in the literature. First, few studies have simultaneously examined the predictive roles of gratitude and prosocial behavior on happiness among individuals in early adulthood. Second, prior research often neglects contextual factors, including ethnic background, gender differences, and financial support to family, which may moderate happiness. Third, although cultural norms such as gotong royong are acknowledged, their influence on the relationship between prosocial behavior and happiness has not been empirically tested. Addressing these gaps provides an opportunity to advance the understanding of happiness determinants within the Indonesian context.

The present study aims to examine the predictive roles of gratitude and prosocial behavior on happiness among individuals in early adulthood in Indonesia. It specifically investigates whether higher levels of gratitude and prosocial behavior are associated with greater happiness, while considering differences across ethnicity, gender, and familial financial support. The study hypothesizes that both gratitude and prosocial behavior are significant predictors of happiness in this population.

Method

This study employed a quantitative methodology. Quantitative research involves measurement procedures and statistical analysis to examine trends, attitudes, and opinions within a representative sample of the population (Azwar, 2018). A survey approach was used to collect data through standardized scales, enabling the researchers to describe tendencies, attitudes, and opinions from a selected sample (Creswell, 2013). Data were collected online using standardized scales to measure gratitude, prosocial behavior, and happiness. Gratitude was measured using The Gratitude Scale, a unidimensional scale with reliability $\alpha = 0,932$. Responses were rated on a likert-type scale, 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree. Prosocial behavior was measured using the The Prosocialness Scale for Adults (PFA), a unidimensional scale with reliability $\alpha = 0,841$, rated on a likert-type scale, 1 = never to 5 = always. Happiness was assessed using the the PERMA-Profiler Scale, with reliability $\alpha = 0,733$ rated on a likert-type scale, 0 = never to 10 = always.

The survey was administered online via google forms, and the link to the survey was shared through social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Tiktok, and Facebook to reach potential participants. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation. Participation was voluntary, and respondents could withdraw at any time without penalty.

Sample or Population

Respondents in this study included individuals who met the criteria, namely between the ages of 23 and 39 years, with various marital statuses, including unmarried, married, or widowed/widowed status also considered whether respondents provided financial support to their families. The demographic characteristics of the research subjects reflected Indonesia's ethnic diversity, including Javanese, Sundanese, Balinese, Minangkabau, Batak, Bugis, and others, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings. A total of 501 respondents participated in the study, consisting of 270 male and 231 female participants. Data collection employed purposive sampling, a technique that selects samples based on specific criteria aligned with the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2020).

Data Measurement

This study collected data through an online questionnaire. This approach was chosen to facilitate access for participants from various regions across Indonesia. The researchers distributed the questionnaire digitally via social media platforms and communication tools such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok. This strategy allowed participants to complete the questionnaire with flexibility in terms of time and location. Participant recruitment was conducted by distributing research invitations containing information about the study's inclusion criteria, research objectives, and procedures for completing the questionnaire. Prior to filling out the questionnaire, participants were provided with a clear and detailed explanation of the research, including its benefits, the importance of their contribution, and assurances regarding data confidentiality. Participants were required to provide consent through an online informed consent form before proceeding to the questionnaire section.

Happiness was measured using the PERMA Profiler Elfida et al., (2021) which consists of 15 items rated on a scale from 0 to 10. The instrument assesses five dimensions: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Gratitude was assessed using the Gratitude Scale developed by Listiyandini et al., (2015) consisting of 30 items rated on a 6-point scale (1–6). This scale measures three dimensions: sense of appreciation, positive feelings toward one's life, and behavioral tendency. Prosocial behavior was measured using the Prosocialness for Adults (PSA) scale adapted by Sefianmi et al., (2023), which includes 16 items rated on a 5-point scale (1–5). The PSA scale covers four dimensions: sharing, helping, care taking, and feel empathy.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26. Initially, internal consistency reliability was assessed by examining Cronbach's alpha values. Subsequently, assumption tests were performed, including tests of normality, linearity, and multicollinearity. After verifying the assumptions, hypothesis testing was carried out using multiple regression analysis. An additional analysis was conducted using an Independent Samples t-test.

Result

The demographic distribution of the research data is quite diverse in terms of respondents' ethnicity. The sample consisted of respondents from multiple ethnic backgrounds, with Javanese participants comprising nearly half of the total sample (45.1%). Balinese and Sundanese respondents represented the next largest groups, accounting for 16.8% and 16.2%, respectively. Other ethnic categories such as Dayak, Madurese, Bugis, Batak, and Betawi were present in smaller but notable proportions, while Minangkabau, Banjarese, and other minorities appeared in limited frequencies. Overall, the data reflect a culturally diverse respondent pool, enabling the study to capture variability that may stem from differences in sociocultural contexts.

Table 1. Ethnic Distribution

Ethnic	Frequency	Percentage
Javanese	226	45,1%
Balinese	84	16,8%
Sundanese	81	16,2%
Dayak	24	4,8%
Madurese	20	4%
Bugis	18	3,6%
Batak	16	3,2%
Betawi	16	3,2%
Minangkabau	7	0,6%
Banjarese	3	1,4%
Other	6	1,2%
Total	501	100%

The vast majority of respondents were unmarried (78.4%), whereas married participants constituted approximately one-fifth of the sample (20.4%). Only a very small proportion reported being widowed or divorced (1.2%). The substantial dominance of unmarried individuals indicates that the sample predominantly reflects experiences within early adulthood prior to marital transition, which may have implications for the interpretation of happiness-related variables in this developmental stage.

Table 2. Marital Status

Status	Frequency	Percentage
Unmarried	393	78,4%
Married	102	20,4%
Widowed/Divorced	6	1,2%
Total	501	100%

The vast majority of respondents (93.2%) reported providing financial assistance to their families, while only 6.8% did not. This pattern indicates a prevalent fulfillment of familial obligations among emerging adults, which may be interpreted as a behavioral expression of prosocial responsibility within collectivistic cultural norms. The high rate of financial contribution suggests that participants are actively engaged in economic support.

Table 3. Financial Support to Family

	Frequency	Percentage
Provide Financial Support	467	93,2%
Do Not Provide Financial Support	34	6,8%
Total	501	100%

The distribution across categories indicates that most respondents demonstrated moderate to high levels across all three variables. Specifically, only 31.5% exhibited low happiness, whereas 44.7% fell in the high happiness category. For prosocial behavior, 56.3% were classified as high and merely 9% as low. Similarly, gratitude levels were predominantly medium to high, with only 7% categorized as low. These findings suggest that the sample generally reflects favorable levels of positive psychological functioning, which may serve as a basis for further interpretation of predictive relationships explored in subsequent analyses.

Table 4. Categorization of Variables

Variable	Category	Score Range	N	Presentase
Happiness	Low	$X < 60$	158	31.5 %
	Medium	$60 \leq X < 105$	119	23.8 %
	High	$105 \leq X$	224	44.7 %
	Total		501	100%
Pro Social	Low	$X < 37,3$	45	9.0 %
	Medium	$37.3 \leq X < 58.7$	174	34.7 %
	High	$58.7 \leq X$	282	56.3 %
	Total		501	100%
Gratitude	Low	$X < 80$	35	7.0 %
	Medium	$80 \leq X < 130$	239	47.7 %
	High	$130 \leq X$	227	45.3 %
	Total		501	100%

The assumption tests conducted in this study yielded results that met the required criteria. Reliability testing showed $p > 0.05$, indicating that all variables demonstrated good internal consistency. The linearity test revealed $p < 0.05$, suggesting that the data met the assumption of linearity. For multicollinearity, the results showed tolerance values greater than 0.10 and VIF values less than 10, indicating no significant multicollinearity issues among the predictor variables.

Table 5. Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach's alpha
Happiness	0,981
Gratitude	0,966
Prosocial	0,942

Table 6. Linierity Test

Variable	F	p
Gratitude	27,136	0,00%
Prosocial	225,956	0,00%

Table 7. Multicollinierity Test

Variabel	Colinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Gratitude	0,834	1,198
Prosocial	0,834	1,198

The multiple regression analysis produced a statistically significant model ($p < .05$), indicating that gratitude and prosocial behavior serve as significant predictors of happiness. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .782$) shows that 78.2% of the variance in happiness can be explained by the combined influence of gratitude and prosocial behavior. This reflects a high explanatory power of the model. The remaining 21.8% of the variance in happiness is attributable to other variables not included in this study. Accordingly, the hypothesis of this study is accepted.

Table 8. Multiple Regression

R ²	F	p
0,782	892	0,00

An additional analysis was conducted in this study to examine gender differences in happiness using an independent samples t-test. The results showed $p > 0.05$, indicating no statistically significant difference in overall happiness between male and female participants. Furthermore, mean scores across the five dimensions of happiness accomplishment (ACC), engagement (ENG), positive emotion (POS), meaning (MEA), and relationship (REL) did not show meaningful differences between genders.

Table 9. Independent Sample T Test

Variabel	Group	N	ACC	ENG	POS	MEA	REL	p
Happiness	Male	270	17,31	17,52	17,85	17,72	18,10	0,347
	Female	231	18,13	18,14	18,22	18,52	18,60	

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the proposed hypothesis is supported. Gratitude and prosocial behavior jointly account for a substantial proportion of the variance in happiness ($R^2 = 0.782$), demonstrating that these two psychological dispositions serve as robust predictors. The remaining unexplained variance can reasonably be attributed to other psychological, social, and contextual determinants of happiness not examined in this model. The magnitude of explained variance suggests that gratitude and prosocial behavior represent key components in the structure of subjective well-being during early adulthood.

From a theoretical perspective, the results align with the broaden-and-build framework (Fredrickson, 2004), which posits that positive emotional states such as gratitude widen individuals' cognitive resources, increase empathic attunement, and consequently facilitate prosocial engagement. These relational exchanges, in turn, reinforce positive affect and foster well-being (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Algoe et al., 2008). In parallel, the self-determination theory argues that prosocial actions satisfy fundamental psychological needs particularly relatedness which sustains happiness through a sense of social connection and meaningful contribution (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

The study involved participants from diverse ethnic backgrounds commonly found in Indonesia, such as Javanese, Sundanese, Balinese, Dayak, and Madurese. Although not all Indonesian ethnic groups were represented, the sample includes major ethnicities. While comprehensive generalization remains limited, this study aims to provide a general understanding based on the existing ethnic representation in the data. This is particularly relevant given Indonesia's collectivist culture (Marhayati, 2021).

Most participants reported moderate to high levels of happiness, indicating a tendency toward relatively high well-being among Indonesians. One contributing factor is the cultural value of *gotong royong*

(Marhayati, 2021). The *gotong royong* culture reflects prosocial behavior, and since the majority of respondents in this study were categorized as having high prosocial tendencies, this is considered one of the key findings. In addition, most respondents also demonstrated moderate to high levels of gratitude. This provides further evidence that prosocial behaviors such as *gotong royong* and gratitude, manifested through appreciation of small things can play a role in happiness (Algoe et al., 2008).

The absence of gender differences in happiness suggests that affective well-being among early adulthood is not driven by gender-linked roles but is instead shaped by shared cultural norms emphasizing social harmony, interdependence, and collective responsibility (Matsumoto, 2018). In collectivist societies, emotional rewards are often derived not from individual achievements but from fulfilling social obligations and maintaining connectedness which may explain the uniformity across genders.

Another notable finding is that happiness levels remained comparable regardless of marital status, particularly among participants who reported providing financial support to their families. This supports previous evidence that prosocial actions rather than marital circumstances per se exert a stronger influence on well-being (Diener et al., 2018; Steger et al., 2006). Providing financial support may serve as a culturally meaningful form of role fulfillment, which enhances a sense of usefulness, moral agency, and life satisfaction.

This study also draws relevance from the Indonesian sociocultural context in which prosociality is normatively embedded through communal practices such as *gotong royong* (Marhayati, 2021). While not all ethnic groups in Indonesia were represented, the inclusion of major ethnicities provides a preliminary cross-cultural insight that prosocial values anchored in collectivism may interact with gratitude in shaping happiness.

This study is limited by its reliance on self-report measures and online data collection, which may introduce social desirability bias and coverage bias. Moreover, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences. Future research should consider longitudinal or experimental designs to test causal pathways, expand contextual predictors (e.g., religiosity, personality, stress exposure), and include more diverse sociocultural samples for broader generalization.

Conclusion

This study confirms that gratitude and prosocial behavior are substantial psychological contributors to happiness among early adults in the Indonesian context. Both constructs align with the cultural orientation of Indonesian society, where religiosity and collectivism are central, making gratitude and prosocial engagement not merely social norms but also psychological resources that foster subjective well-being. Furthermore, happiness in this sample was not determined by gender or marital status, but rather by individuals' engagement in socially meaningful roles, such as providing financial support to family members, which appears to enhance feelings of meaning, relatedness, and fulfillment.

The findings reinforce the tenets of positive psychology by demonstrating that happiness is shaped not only by external life circumstances but also by internal dispositions that promote socially constructive actions. This is consistent with the broaden-and-build theory and the self-determination theory, both of which explain how positive emotions and prosocial engagement accumulate into long-term psychological resources.

The results provide an empirical foundation for designing educational, organizational, and community-based interventions aimed at enhancing well-being through gratitude training, family-based support programs, and initiatives that strengthen collective prosocial practices such as community cooperation and mutual aid.

Suggestions

Future studies are encouraged to employ a more demographically balanced sampling strategy to strengthen the generalizability of findings across different population groups. Researchers should also consider integrating additional psychological and contextual variables such as socioeconomic status, personality traits, perceived social support, or exposure to stressors to develop a more comprehensive explanatory model of happiness. Moreover, longitudinal or experimental designs are recommended to clarify causal direction and temporal stability of the relationships between gratitude, prosocial behavior, and happiness, which cannot be inferred from cross-sectional data. Expanding the cultural scope beyond the Indonesian context is also advised to determine whether similar patterns emerge in societies with differing value orientations and social structures.

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