

Religiosity and Sense of Meaning in Life among Undergraduate Students

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Abstract. Meaning in life is a fundamental element that shapes how individuals interpret their world. Religion serves as one of the primary sources of meaning in life. This study aimed to examine the relationship between religiosity and sense of meaning in life during emerging adulthood. A non-experimental correlational design with quantitative primary data was employed, collected through the CRS-15 TII questionnaire and the Meaning in Life Questionnaire. Convenience sampling was utilized; however, participant representativeness was enhanced through probability sampling across various faculties at Universitas Padjadjaran. A total of 71 respondents were recruited through questionnaires distributed via Google Form, Line, and WhatsApp. Results indicated a substantial relationship between religiosity and the presence of meaning, but no significant association with the search for meaning. The majority of respondents demonstrated high scores in religiosity, presence of meaning, and search for meaning. These findings underscore the importance of religiosity as a source of meaning in life during emerging adulthood and open avenues for further research and the development of faith-based programs.

Keywords: *emerging adulthood; presence of meaning; religiosity; search for meaning; sense of meaning in life*

Introduction

Meaning in life constitutes a fundamental aspect of human existence. Viktor Frankl (1992) asserted that humans possess an innate drive to discover meaning, which helps clarify their purpose and direction in life (Steger & Kashdan, 2007).

The following two illustrative examples demonstrate the profound importance of having meaning in life. In a small village lived a pottery craftsman who deeply loved his work. For him, each piece of pottery was not merely an object, but a creation that brought benefit to others. He construed his work as something meaningful, a small yet significant contribution to the lives of those around him. This conviction became his reason for living, guiding every step in his pottery-making.

Elsewhere, an environmental activist lived with the profound conviction that the earth is our home and must be cared for with love. Thus, she resolved to live her life in accordance with the principle of preserving nature. This principle was reflected not only in her shopping choices (avoiding plastics) but in every action she took. The feeling that “I live to protect the environment” became her primary reason, providing her with meaning and purpose in life. From these two illustrations, we can observe how the meaning in life one embraces can serve as a compass directing every action and decision. Both the pottery craftsman and the environmental activist demonstrate that when individuals construe their lives with a particular purpose, their behaviors and efforts align with that belief. They live with full awareness that their actions have a greater purpose, which ultimately provides them with a sense of satisfaction and meaning in life.

In psychology, meaning in life or sense of meaning in life, refers to the feeling that life has purpose and an understanding of one’s life experiences (Steger et al., 2010). This concept comprises two primary dimensions: presence of meaning (the extent to which one feels that life is meaningful), and search for meaning (the effort to discover or deepen meaning in life) (Steger et al., 2008, 2009). Research indicates that these two dimensions are independent (Steger et al., 2006) yet interrelated, where the presence of meaning often triggers the search for meaning, particularly during the emerging adulthood phase (Bodner et al., 2014; Borawski et al., 2022; Chu & Fung, 2021; Dewitte & Dezutter, 2021; Grouden & Jose, 2015; Newman et al., 2018; Steger et al., 2009, 2021).

Emerging adulthood (ages 18–25) is a critical developmental phase in which individuals, although free from childhood dependency, have not yet fully assumed adult responsibilities. This phase is characterized by exploration and change, including in work, relationships, and worldviews (Arnett, 2000). Cognitive development and religious identity also play significant roles during this phase, marked by a shift from absolutist to relativistic thinking and the formation of a more mature self-identity (Bell, 2016; CÔTÉ, 2009; Fisherman, 2016; MacLean & Riebschleger, 2021; Petts & Desmond, 2016; Reich, 2014; Richert & Corriveau, 2022; Scroggs et al., 2018).

Religion serves as a primary source of meaning in life for many individuals (Compton & Hoffman, 2020; Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2010), providing a profound value system (Ibenwa, 2014; Ives & Kidwell, 2019; Murphy, 2017; Schnabel & Grötsch, 2015; Steger et al., 2010). Western research demonstrates a positive relationship between religiosity and meaning in life, particularly in economically disadvantaged nations (Oishi & Diener, 2014). In recent years, scholarship on meaning in life has expanded considerably, especially regarding cross-cultural contexts and its associations with factors such as psychological well-being, religiosity, and individual development across various life stages (Abu-Hilal et al., 2017; Aflakseir, 2012; Campos et al., 2020; Dezutter et al., 2015; Du et al., 2017; García-Alandete, 2015; Haugan, 2014; Heintzelman, 2018; Krok, 2015; Krok & Telka, 2019; Negru-Subtirica et al., 2017; Park & Yoo, 2016).

Recent research has highlighted the importance of meaning in life in positive psychology interventions (Steger, 2022), mental health (Steger et al., 2023), and the achievement of “purpose” in education (Steger et al., 2021). However, similar studies in the Indonesian context, where religious values tend to be more dominant in daily life, remain limited, particularly those exploring the influence of religiosity on the sense of meaning in life among Muslim university students. Therefore, the primary research question addressed in this study is: “Is there a relationship between the level of religiosity and sense of meaning in life among Muslim students at Universitas Padjadjaran?”

This study aimed to conduct an empirical investigation of the relationship between religiosity and sense of meaning in life among Muslim students at Universitas Padjadjaran. By integrating developmental psychology approaches with religious studies, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of religiosity in shaping a sense of meaning in life. The study is also expected to provide novel insights relevant to interventions or self-development programs grounded in religious values within the Indonesian higher education context.

Method

This study adopted a quantitative, non-experimental design. This descriptive research aimed to describe the relationships between the variables under investigation, specifically within the context of a correlational study. The study involved two primary variables: religiosity and sense of meaning in life.

Religiosity was measured using The Centrality of Religiosity Scale (Huber & Huber, 2012), adapted to Islamic religious traditions (Wardhani & Dewi, 2015). This instrument underwent item validity testing, with Corrected Item–Total Correlation values for all items exceeding the *r*-table values. Subsequently, the researcher conducted reliability testing, yielding $\alpha = .911$. Meanwhile, the sense of meaning in life was measured using the Meaning in Life Questionnaire, which comprises two subscales: the presence of meaning and the search for meaning (Steger et al., 2006). This instrument was adapted into Indonesian and underwent reliability testing (Presence subscale: $\alpha = .939$; Search subscale: $\alpha = .792$), as well as Confirmatory Factor Analysis validity testing that produced model fit indicators. The Presence dimension demonstrated adequate fit on most indices (Chi Square = 9.566, *df* = 5, *p* = .089, CFI = .987, SRMR = .022); however the RMSEA = 0.110 indicates marginal fit, which should be interpreted with caution. The Search dimension demonstrated good model fit across all indicators (Chi Square = 1.858, *df* = 2, *p* = .395, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .027), with the exception of RMSEA = 0.000, which, while indicating perfect fit, may reflect model under identification due to the small number of degrees of freedom.

Sampling in this study employed convenience sampling. However, to enhance participant representativeness and minimize convenience sampling bias, following Etikan (2016) recommendations, probability sampling was initially applied. This was accomplished by selecting faculties representing each academic cluster at Universitas Padjadjaran (Unpad), namely the health sciences, science and technology, agrocomplex, and social humanities clusters. A total of 71 respondents were successfully recruited through online questionnaires distributed via Google Forms, Line, and WhatsApp. The majority of respondents were female (*n* = 46, 64.79%), aged 21 years (*n* = 19, *M* = 20.34, *SD* = 1.31), and from the 2020 cohort (32.39%). Most

respondents were of Sundanese ethnicity (n = 47, 66.20%), followed by Javanese (n = 11, 15.49%), mixed ethnicity (7.04%), while one respondent did not disclose their ethnicity (1.41%).

The study was conducted over one year. Following approval of the research proposal, the Meaning in Life Questionnaire was adapted according to cross-cultural instrument adaptation guidelines outlined by Sinantia & Milla (2018). This process included expert judgment and pilot testing to establish instrument reliability.

Subsequently, data collection was conducted using the validated and reliable instruments. Data collection was performed online through questionnaire distribution (Google Form) via Line and WhatsApp. Participants were provided with informed consent at the study's outset. After data collection, analysis and the preparation of research draft were completed.

Data were analyzed descriptively and inferentially using JASP version 0.12.2.0 (JASP Team, 2020) to examine the profiles of religiosity, presence of meaning, and search for meaning. Inferential data analysis employed Spearman's Rho test, as parametric testing indicated non-normality. The research hypotheses were as follows: First, H0: There is no relationship between religiosity and presence of meaning among Muslim students at Universitas Padjadjaran; H1: There is a relationship between religiosity and presence of meaning among Muslim students at Universitas Padjadjaran. Second, H0: There is no relationship between religiosity and search for meaning among Muslim students at Universitas Padjadjaran; H1: There is a relationship between religiosity and search for meaning among Muslim students at Universitas Padjadjaran.

Result

Overall, the mean religiosity score was 4.238 with a standard deviation of .446. The highest score achieved was 5, while the lowest was 3.067. The categorization of these scores is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Categorization and Results of Respondents' Religiosity Levels

Score	Category	Frequency	Percentage
4.0 – 5.0	Highly Religious	58	81.69%

2.1 – 3.9	Religious	13	18.31%
1.0 – 2.0	Non-Religious	0	0%
Total		71	100%

Results indicated that the mean score for the meaning dimension was 25.113 (SD = 5.507), with a minimum of 11 and a maximum of 35. The majority of Muslim student respondents (n = 43, 60.57%) demonstrated a high level of meaning, while the remainder fell into the low category. Conversely, the search for meaning dimension had a mean score of 28.535 (SD = 4.732), ranging from 5 to 35. The majority of respondents (n = 58, or 81.70%) demonstrated a high search for meaning, while the remainder fell into the low category.

Table 2.
 Correlation Analysis Results Between Religiosity and Sense of Meaning in Life (Search for Meaning and Presence of Meaning)

V1	V2	Spearman's Rho	p
Religiosity	Search for Meaning	.158	.094
Religiosity	Presence of Meaning	.444	<.001
Presence of Meaning	Search for Meaning	-.079	.745

Data in Table 2 indicate a significant positive correlation between religiosity and the presence of the meaning dimension ($r_s = .444, p < .001$). According to Young (1982), correlation coefficient values between .4 and .7 indicate a substantial correlation (Wibisono, 2013). This suggests that higher religiosity is associated with greater meaning. However, no significant correlation was found between religiosity and the search for meaning dimension. Additionally, there was a very small, non-significant negative correlation between the presence of meaning and the search for meaning.

As shown in Table 3, a positive relationship was observed between meaning and the intellectual dimension. This indicates that the higher the subjective feeling among Muslim students at Universitas Padjadjaran that their lives are meaningful, the more frequently they contemplate religious issues, the more interested they are in learning about religious topics, and

the more often they retain information about religious questions from various media. The converse also applies.

Several positive relationships were found among religiosity dimensions, specifically between the intellectual dimension and the public practice, private practice, and experience dimensions, as well as between the private practice and experience dimensions. Analysis results indicated that the intellectual dimension exhibits numerous correlations with other dimensions of religiosity (Table 3).

Table 3.
 Correlation Analysis Results Between Religiosity and Sense of Meaning in Life (Search for Meaning and Presence of Meaning)

D1	D2	Spearman's Rho	<i>p</i>
Search	Presence	-.079	.745
Search	Intellectual	.161	.090
Search	Ideology	.089	.230
Search	Public Practice	.103	.197
Search	Private Practice	.110	.180
Search	Experience	.078	.260
Presence	Intellectual	.366 ^c	< .001
Presence	Ideology	.259 ^a	.015
Presence	Public Practice	.359 ^b	.001
Presence	Private Practice	.241 ^a	.022
Presence	Experience	.332 ^b	.002
Intellectual	Ideology	.224 ^a	.030
Intellectual	Public Practice	.379 ^c	< .001
Intellectual	Private Practice	.417 ^c	< .001
Intellectual	Experience	.402 ^c	< .001
Ideology	Public Practice	.307 ^b	.005
Ideology	Private Practice	.287 ^b	.008
Ideology	Experience	.269 ^a	.012
Public Practice	Private Practice	.350 ^b	.001
Public Practice	Experience	.287 ^b	.008
Private Practice	Experience	.557 ^c	< .001

^a*p* < 0.05, ^b*p* < 0.01, ^c*p* < 0.001

In addition to correlation analyses, difference tests were conducted to identify differences in religiosity and sense of meaning in life by gender. These analyses were performed because several previous studies have demonstrated gender-based differences. However, in this study, no significant differences were found in religiosity, presence of meaning (Student's t-test, $t(69) = 1.417$, $p = .161$), or search for meaning (Mann-Whitney test, $U(69) = 595.500$, $p = .809$) based on respondent gender. This indicates no differences in the importance of religion in personality, the subjective feeling that one's life is meaningful, or the drive and orientation to find meaning in life between male and female respondents.

Discussion

Religiosity Profile

Table 1 indicates that the majority of respondents fell into the "highly religious" category. This finding is consistent with research by Huber & Huber (2012) involving Indonesian respondents. According to the personal religious construct concept proposed by these authors, individuals categorized as "highly religious" possess a clear personal religious construct that is central to their personality (Huber & Huber, 2012).

Table 1 also shows that no respondents fell into the "non-religious" category. This result is consistent with Huber & Huber's (2012) research, which reported that the 1st percentile rank for Indonesia was 2.4, meaning that only 1% of Indonesian respondents scored below 2.4, and this score still falls within the "religious" category. Thus, very few, or virtually no, Indonesian respondents are "non-religious" or lack a religious construct in their personality.

High religiosity among respondents demonstrates significant positive implications for students' subjective well-being. Other research indicates that religiosity, together with positive and negative religious coping, accounts for 14.9% of the variance in student subjective well-being. Specifically, religiosity contributes 1.761% to subjective well-being in students' personal lives (Utami, 2012).

The high level of religiosity among the majority of Indonesian students can be understood, given that they generally receive religious education for more than 12 years, from elementary school through undergraduate level. This aligns with provisions in Indonesia's National Education System Law and the national education curriculum.

Sense of Meaning in Life Profile

The majority of Muslim student respondents demonstrated a high level of meaning, while the remainder fell into the low category. Regarding the search for meaning dimension, the majority of respondents also demonstrated a high search for meaning, while the remainder fell into the low category.

High scores on both the presence-of-meaning and search-for-meaning dimensions are important indicators of individual well-being, particularly during emerging adulthood, as both can predict well-being (Battersby & Phillips, 2016). Other research indicates that meaning in life, together with religiosity, contributes to student mental health (Bukhori, 2006; Hill et al., 2016).

This study's findings indicate that the mean search for meaning score was higher than the mean presence of meaning score. This suggests that students' efforts to understand and enhance their comprehension of meaning, significance, and life purpose exceed their subjective views regarding life's meaningfulness. This finding aligns with Steger et al. (2009) research, stating that individuals in the emerging adulthood phase generally engage more actively in searching for meaning.

Additionally, this study found a negative correlation, although very small and non-significant, between the presence of meaning and the search for meaning. Similar findings were reported by Steger et al. (2008) who found an inverse correlation between the two dimensions, though non-significant. This supports the presence-to-search conceptual model, which posits that the presence of a meaning dimension can trigger the search for meaning (search for meaning), rather than the reverse (Steger et al., 2008).

Relationships Between Religiosity Dimensions and Sense of Meaning in Life

Correlation analysis among religiosity dimensions and sense of meaning in life revealed several important findings. A positive correlation was found between the presence of meaning and religiosity; as well as between presence of meaning and the intellectual dimension of religiosity. This indicates that the more important religion is to one's personality, the higher the subjective feeling that one's life is meaningful among Muslim student respondents at Universitas Padjadjaran. Conversely, lower levels of religious importance are associated with lower feelings of life meaning. Given that this study is correlational rather than experimental, causal relationships between the two variables cannot be established.

To explain the process or dynamics of this relationship, it should be understood that a high level of religious importance means that one's personal religious construct is clear and central to their personality. This construct influences various aspects of their life, including how they experience meaning in life (Huber & Huber, 2012).

The process of forming a sense of meaning in life can be explained through several stages. Initially, individuals recognize that the world makes sense, is orderly, and has purpose. This awareness is then integrated with a coherent general worldview (Heintzelman & King, 2013; Krause & Hayward, 2012; Oishi & Diener, 2014). In other words, the sense of meaning in life begins with the awareness that the world has meaning and purpose, followed by the subjective evaluation that one has purpose and that life is meaningful.

Based on the presence-to-search conceptual model, individuals who initially possess the awareness that life makes sense and has purpose may not feel the need to search for further meaning. Conversely, if someone does not feel meaning in their life, they will search for it. If a subjective evaluation of life's meaning has already emerged, the individual will not pursue further searching.

The authors conclude that religiosity plays an important role in the process whereby individuals begin to recognize that life has meaning and purpose. Religious knowledge and belief

in God's existence, reflected in the intellectual and ideological dimensions, can guide individuals to this awareness. Subsequently, this awareness can generate a subjective evaluation that one's life is meaningful. Therefore, in the process of meaning-making influenced by religion, the intellectual and ideological dimensions play significant roles.

The relationship between religiosity and the presence of meaning can also be understood through the definition of a sense of meaning in life. As defined by Steger et al. (2008) meaning is the individual's feeling that their life has a clear purpose and direction, and the extent to which life feels meaningful (Jung, 2015; Lambert et al., 2010). In this regard, religion can play an important role as a source of meaning in life.

One function of religion is to enhance one's moral sense and serve as a guide in life (Basri, 2017). Through religion's guiding function, individuals can develop a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. Religion can also provide a set of guidelines for determining the meaning of life. When someone considers religion important in their life, it functions not only as a guide but also as a source of meaning (Compton & Hoffman, 2020; Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2010). Furthermore, religion can provide meaning in life through its educational aspect, as it has an educative function that encompasses the use of spiritual values in education. This function relates to the teaching of meaning and purpose in life as taught by religion (Fitriani, 2016). Thus, the relationship between religiosity and the presence of meaning can be explained by religion's role as a guide and source of meaning in life, both directly and through education.

Research indicates that a sense of meaning in life is positively associated with religiosity in economically disadvantaged nations. Sense of meaning in life in these nations tends to be higher, largely due to higher levels of religiosity. The mediating role of religiosity remains significant even after controlling for potential third variables such as education, birth rate, and individualism (Oishi & Diener, 2014). This demonstrates that religiosity indeed plays a quite significant role in one's sense of meaning in life.

The relationship between religiosity and the presence of meaning can also be analyzed by categorizing the sense of meaning in life using Steger et al. (2010) framework. In this study, the majority of respondents fell into the first category: high presence and high search. Individuals in this category are predicted to be active in religious activities and tend to be confident in their views and beliefs (Steger et al., 2010). Most respondents in this study also fell into the “Highly Religious” category, indicating that they are active in religious activities and have strong convictions in their religious beliefs (Huber & Huber, 2012).

One implication of the relationship between religiosity and sense of meaning in life is a positive effect on health. Religion provides individuals with a subjective sense of meaning in life, which subsequently positively influences health (Stroope et al., 2013).

However, this study found no correlation between religiosity levels and the search for meaning. The authors speculate that this may occur because religion has already provided meaning in life, so individuals do not feel the need to search for it further. This explanation aligns with the presence-to-search conceptual model, in which the search for meaning occurs when individuals feel a lack of meaning and does not when they already feel their lives are meaningful. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents had high scores for both the presence of meaning and the search for meaning. This may be related to characteristics of the emerging adulthood population, who are indeed in an exploratory phase regarding meaning in life and religiosity, thus requiring further investigation. Additionally, the authors speculate that the non-normal distribution of the search for meaning data may have influenced the results, which showed no correlation between search for meaning and religiosity.

Implications of the presence-to-search conceptual relationship and the relationship between religiosity and the presence of meaning include the potential to design interventions that enhance religiosity. Increased religiosity may contribute to a greater sense of meaning in life, which benefits individuals' well-being. Furthermore, the presence of meaning has been found to correlate positively with life satisfaction (Steger & Kashdan, 2007).

Inter-Dimensional Relationships Within Religiosity

Several positive relationships were found among religiosity dimensions. Analysis results indicate that the intellectual dimension exhibits numerous correlations with other dimensions of religiosity. As previously discussed, the five dimensions of religiosity function as channels for forming and activating personal religious constructs (Wardhani & Dewi, 2015). The combination of these dimensions represents the totality of religious life, although the activation frequency of each dimension may differ.

Within the context of the emerging adulthood phase, which emphasizes identity development including religious identity (Bell, 2016; CÔTÉ, 2009; Fisherman, 2016; MacLean & Riebschleger, 2021; Petts & Desmond, 2016; Reich, 2014; Richert & Corriveau, 2022; Santrock, 2014; Scroggs et al., 2018), individuals tend to question the existence and their religious beliefs (Santrock, 2014). The exploration and questioning of religious teachings should, in theory, lead to lower religiosity, particularly in the Ideology dimension related to beliefs. However, the results indicate that the Ideology dimension had the highest mean score, suggesting that Muslim students at Universitas Padjadjaran tend to hold strong beliefs in the existence of God and the afterlife.

One conclusion that can be drawn is that the intellectual dimension plays an important role in overall religiosity and in the formation of one's sense of meaning in life. In other words, one's knowledge of and interest in religion significantly contribute to the clarity and centrality of their personal religious construct. This influences their experiences, behaviors, and other personality constructs.

Gender Differences Analysis

This study found no significant differences in religiosity, the presence of meaning, or the search for meaning by gender. This indicates no differences in the importance of religion in personality, the subjective feeling that one's life is meaningful, or the drive and orientation to find meaning in life between male and female respondents.

This finding differs from Basri's (2017) study, which found that males had lower religiosity than females. It should be noted that Basri's study used a different measurement instrument than this study. Additionally, this study's results differ from Steger et al. (2009) findings, which reported significant differences in the presence of meaning (MLQ-P) and the search for meaning (MLQ-S) based on respondent gender.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the majority of Muslim students at Universitas Padjadjaran exhibit high levels of religiosity, presence of meaning, and search for meaning. Within the emerging adulthood context, a high search for meaning aligns with the exploratory characteristics of this age period; however, the high scores on the Ideology dimension are inconsistent with the religious identity exploration patterns typical of this developmental stage. This study found a positive relationship between religiosity and the presence of meaning, indicating that the more important religion is to one's personality, the greater the feeling that one's life is meaningful. This supports the view that religion can serve as a guide and source of meaning in life. However, no relationship was found between religiosity and search for meaning, possibly because religion already provides meaning in life for respondents. These findings strengthen the hypothesis that individuals who feel their lives are meaningful may no longer seek further meaning. This study also found no differences in religiosity, the presence of meaning, or the search for meaning by gender. Further research is needed to examine causal relationships between religiosity and meaning in life, as well as to extend the investigation to populations of other religious affiliations.

Suggestion

It is suggested that further research is conducted to understand the relationship between religiosity and a sense of meaning in life across broader contexts, including other religions, different age groups, and varying educational backgrounds. The result of this research can serve as grounds for faith-based intervention to increase undergraduate students' well-being.

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