

Happiness Differences among University Students Living with Family and Those Living Alone

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Abstract

Urban issues, particularly in the context of university students, were shaped by factors such as the type of residence, mode of transportation, and social interactions, which influenced their daily lives and decisions regarding privacy, freedom, and convenience. This study explored how the type of residence influences the happiness of university students, focusing on students living with their families versus those living independently. Using a descriptive qualitative method with semi-structured interviews, four students aged 23–30 years were interviewed. The data were analysed thematically, with the PERMA theory serving as a conceptual framework to understand the participants' experiences. Findings showed that students living with their families experience higher happiness levels due to stronger social support, which fostered positive emotions and a sense of meaning in their daily lives. In contrast, students living independently faced more challenges and limited social support, requiring extra effort to achieve acceptance and happiness. The key factors influencing happiness for both groups included the form of social support, engagement in daily activities, and the meaning attributed to challenges. Students living with their families received more support through direct interactions, while those living independently relied on support from significant others outside their residence. Despite differences in support sources, both groups demonstrated resilience and meaning-making strategies that contributed to their happiness. The study highlighted the importance of social support and individual coping strategies in shaping students' well-being.

Keywords: acceptance, family, happiness, resilience, social support

Abstrak

Isu perkotaan, khususnya dalam konteks mahasiswa, dipengaruhi oleh faktor-faktor seperti tipe tempat tinggal, moda transportasi, dan interaksi sosial, yang memengaruhi kehidupan sehari-hari mereka dan keputusan terkait privasi, kebebasan, dan kenyamanan. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana tipe tempat tinggal memengaruhi kebahagiaan mahasiswa, dengan fokus pada mahasiswa yang tinggal dengan keluarga versus yang tinggal secara mandiri. Data dalam penelitian ini dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dengan wawancara semi-terstruktur, dengan jumlah partisipan sebanyak empat mahasiswa yang berusia antara 23-30 tahun. Data dianalisis secara tematik dengan pendekatan fenomenologis, dengan teori PERMA sebagai kerangka interpretatif. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa yang tinggal dengan keluarga mengalami tingkat kebahagiaan yang lebih tinggi karena dukungan sosial yang lebih kuat, yang mendorong emosi positif dan rasa makna dalam kehidupan sehari-hari mereka. Sebaliknya, mahasiswa yang tinggal secara mandiri menghadapi lebih banyak tantangan dan dukungan sosial yang terbatas, sehingga memerlukan usaha ekstra untuk mencapai penerimaan dan kebahagiaan. Faktor utama yang memengaruhi kebahagiaan kedua

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kelompok ini mencakup bentuk dukungan sosial, keterlibatan dalam kegiatan sehari-hari, dan makna yang diberikan pada tantangan. Mahasiswa yang tinggal dengan keluarga menerima lebih banyak dukungan melalui interaksi langsung, sementara mereka yang tinggal secara mandiri mengandalkan dukungan dari orang-orang penting di luar tempat tinggal mereka. Meskipun terdapat perbedaan sumber dukungan, kedua kelompok menunjukkan ketahanan dan strategi penciptaan makna yang berkontribusi pada kebahagiaan mereka. Penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya dukungan sosial dan strategi coping individu dalam membentuk kebahagiaan mahasiswa.

Kata kunci: dukungan sosial, keluarga, kebahagiaan, penerimaan, resiliensi

Introduction

Urban issues are not solely concerned with the aggregation of physical environments such as population size and the number of buildings in urban areas, but also with the functions within them that have implications for various aspects of urban residents' lives. Type of residence, mode of transportation, and the people involved in daily life can also be contributing factors, especially for university students. In general, student's types of residence are divided into two categories: those who live alone and those who live with their families. Several reasons underlie the choice of residence type, such as recommendations or requests from certain parties, access to campus, privacy, freedom, facilities, and independence (Reski & Tampubolon, 2019). In terms of campus mobility, each student also has specific reasons for choosing a particular mode of transportation, such as using public transport to save time and cost or choosing private transport due to its flexibility, speed, and personal comfort (Alkam & Said, 2018). Although both public and private transportation modes offer their own advantages, some students still choose to live in rented rooms or apartments away from their families to avoid the limitations associated with both transportation options.

The dynamics of daily life experienced influenced by their residential arrangements, can lead to different psychological conditions for two types of students—(1) those living with their families and (2) those living independently—can lead to different psychological conditions. University students are individuals undergoing an educational stage that presents challenges and learning patterns distinct from previous levels of education, requiring a considerable degree of adjustment (Katz & Somers, 2017). In this context, graduate students face even greater challenges compared to undergraduate students. The psychological condition of students can be influenced by both academic and non-academic factors, with the choice of residence type and/or mode of transportation to the university being among the non-academic contributors. Students who use public transportation may encounter issues related to crowding and time limitations, while those using private vehicles may deal with traffic congestion. In contrast, students who live independently and closer to the university may avoid these transportation-related issues but may be exposed to other psychological challenges. These issues can affect students' psychological well-being, one of which is happiness.

Everyone has the right to experience happiness, including university students. Multiple factors can influence students' happiness, such as physical and mental health,

high academic performance, effective communication with family, work-life balance, good time management, financial security, and external factors like a positive university environment and adequate campus facilities (Morales-Rodríguez et al., 2020; Wan Mohd Yunus et al., 2021; Jiang et al., 2022; Thongsri et al., 2024). When students are happy, they tend to have more stable mental health and are better able to engage in academic activities effectively and productively. Being a university student, particularly at the graduate level, presents a unique stage where individuals are granted greater autonomy in making decisions concerning their personal lives. These decisions include, but are not limited to, the choice of living arrangements and the mode of transportation used to support their daily routines. Each of these choices involves certain trade-offs that may have both practical and emotional implications, potentially shaping the student's overall academic experience and well-being.

Seligman (2002) introduced the PERMA theory to comprehensively explain happiness, presenting a framework that comprised five core dimensions: positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Each of these variables has different effects, as happiness in individuals is influenced by both internal and external factors (Seligman, 2002). For instance, the PERMA dimensions can be conceptualized within the student context: Positive Emotion could be linked to family presence, Engagement to a student's effort to stay involved in daily campus activities, Relationships to their connections with friends and family, meaning to their way of accepting life's events, and Accomplishment to their resilience in facing challenges to achieve goals. One factor that contributes to variations in individual happiness is the diversity of living environments. For example, in countries with strong economies, individuals living in rural areas tend to report higher levels of happiness compared to those living in urban areas (Requena, 2016; Sørensen, 2021; Sørensen, 2024). In addition, more specific studies have shown that individuals living in aesthetically pleasing environments—with ample green open spaces and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure—report higher levels of happiness (Christina Hart et al., 2018; Leyden et al., 2024). Therefore, the characteristics of one's living environment have an impact on individual happiness, making it important to further examine differences in happiness among master's students in Psychology at Universitas Indonesia based on their type of residence. While previous research has extensively addressed the topic of academic stress among students, far fewer studies have examined how specific daily-life choices, such as where a student lives, contribute to their happiness. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how graduate students perceive and experience happiness in relation to their chosen living arrangements and daily commuting practices. By adopting a descriptive qualitative approach, the study seeks to uncover meaningful insights into how these personal choices interact with students' happiness, offering a deeper understanding that complements prior quantitative findings.

Methods

Participants

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method. This approach was chosen to capture a deep and nuanced understanding of each participants' experiences.

Participants consisted of four master's students in Psychology, divided into two groups: two students who lived independently and used public transportation to commute to campus, and two others who lived with their family and used private transportation. The selection of a small sample is in line with the goal of qualitative studies, which prioritize deep, rich understanding of individuals' experiences rather than to seek generalizable claims across a population.

Participants were recruited using convenience sampling, which was a strategic approach in qualitative research to identify and select individuals who were particularly knowledgeable about or experienced with the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). This sampling approach was deemed appropriate not for broad generalization but for its effectiveness in achieving depth and a nuanced understanding from a small group, a hallmark of the phenomenological tradition. The transparency of this process was ensured by the explicit inclusion criteria: (1) currently enrolled as a master's program in Psychology; (2) aged between 23 and 30 years; (3) either living independently and commuting via public transportation or living with parents and commuting via private transportation. Exclusion criteria included inconsistent use of either public or private transportation to campus. This recruitment limitation was mitigated by the in-depth nature of data collection and rigorous analysis that focused on the unique essence of each individual's lived experience, thereby upholding the study's trustworthiness. The study involved minimal risk to participants and complied with ethical standards for social science research. All participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality and voluntary participation were ensured throughout the research process.

Measurement

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, in which the interviewer posed questions developed in advance using an interview guide (Hanurawan, 2016). The interview guide included 18–23 open-ended questions covering themes from Theory of Happiness (Seligman, 2002). The interview guide underwent expert judgment by a psychologist with expertise in well-being and urban psychology, who assessed the content validity, clarity, and relevance of the questions. Feedback from the expert was used to refine the coverage of the questions to ensure they could elicit rich, meaningful responses aligned with the phenomenological approach. Each interview lasted approximately 40–60 minutes and was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, either in person or via Zoom, depending on participant availability. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Analysis

The collected data were then processed by coding the interview results to identify answers to the main research question. Although the sample consisted of only four participants, data sufficiency was achieved in line with the commitment of qualitative research to obtain deep insights. Saturation of meaning was approached when no substantially new themes emerged during the final stages of analysis. To support this, data triangulation was employed. The data were analysed descriptively and narratively, using thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke (2006), the steps included: (1) familiarization with data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes,

(5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. The key verification strategy used was peer debriefing, conducted with two experts in Urban Psychology. They examined the codes and thematic structures to ensure coherence, challenge the researcher's interpretive biases, and ensure that the final themes were grounded in the data. This dialogic process was essential to enhancing the credibility and reliability of the analysis, ensuring that interpretations were robust and defensible (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Findings

Participants Living with Their Families

Theme 1: Forms of interaction with others

Participants interact mostly with their family because they live together. The forms of interaction include chatting during breakfast or sharing stories. For participant SR, although they don't interact much with their family, they try to interact with their friends at campus to boost their spirit to study. The interactions with both family and others have a positive impact such as feeling happy and excited for both participants.

Theme 2: Acknowledging responsibility for each task

Participants try to be responsible in carrying out daily activities optimally. They do this by setting priorities and managing time so they can perform every task well. Participants also try to choose the right actions to maximize their activities. Before starting their activities, to stay focused, participants try to arrive early and gather energy to study by interacting with friends in class to stay focused on their activities.

"The first thing is to avoid arriving last-minute. For example, if the class starts at 9:00, I make sure to arrive by 8:45. Since the road is unpredictable, I prefer to come earlier. Also, before class, I interact with friends like 'What are you working on?' or 'What are you going to eat?' It helps me feel excited before starting class."
(A)

Theme 3: Viewing challenges positively

There is an image that participants experience various feelings from the challenges they face but try to view everything they do positively. For example, with the challenge of having to use a private vehicle, participants try to acknowledge the risks of using a private vehicle, such as for participant SR who feels that although they must spend more on transportation by paying expensive tolls, it is still better than being stuck in traffic on narrow and small roads. Participants also try to adjust themselves to the environment to feel more comfortable. For participant A, when they feel bored and tired from driving on the road, they try to deal with it by interacting with friends or family to reduce the discomfort, so they feel more positive afterward.

".... Simple conversations like that really help. It makes us feel like 'we are one family.' If not, it feels awkward. We rarely meet, especially on weekends when

everyone tends to sleep in or go out to meet friends. So those small interactions at home are really positive. It makes me feel connected." (A)

Theme 4: Adjusting actions to the situation

Participants try to follow academic activities as best as they can. When there is work that needs to be done, participants will do the work first and then go home. Small interactions with others and the help from coffee or candy also make participants feel more energized in carrying out academic activities.

"I can't usually drink coffee, but because of the class, I started drinking coffee and bringing it to campus every day. I also have to eat candy. When I'm on campus, I socialize or chat with friends because it makes me feel more excited. It makes going to campus feel enjoyable because I interact with my friends (SR)

Theme 5: Efforts to face challenges

Participants often encounter challenges, whether in daily activities or while traveling on the road. When experiencing these challenges, participants try to calm themselves first and continue the activity with more mindfulness. Furthermore, when going through a difficult day, participants give themselves a self-reward to cheer themselves up.

"I usually calm myself down first. Once I'm calm, I continue with the things I need to do. And after a tough day, I reward myself, like eating something good or watching something." (SR)

Theme 6: Reasons for living with parents

Both participants chose to live with their parents for different reasons. For Participant A, living with their parents provides an opportunity for social interaction, especially during breakfast, where they can chat and share stories.

Theme 7: Advantages and disadvantages of using a private vehicle

Using a private vehicle is considered more comfortable, avoids crowds, and is more practical since the participant already owns a car. However, there are also disadvantages, such as traffic jams and unpredictable roads, which can sometimes make the journey feel tedious.

"Every time I'm on the road, I feel frustrated and bored. I always think, 'How long will this last?' It feels like I'm growing old on the road, spending almost half of my life in Jakarta's traffic." (SR)

Participants Living Alone

Theme 1: Support from significant others

Living alone makes the participants not involved with their surroundings, especially their neighbours. Participants do not build meaningful interactions with people around their residence, such as only engaging in small talk since each tenant is

busy with their own activities. Participants feel that the social support they receive comes from their family, who lives far away, and their friends outside the living environment.

“.... Although outside our rooms there are shared spaces like a pantry, fridge, and seating area, it’s rare to have meetings or even interactions like that... and the impact on me is that I feel fine because I’m also busy, and they are busy, that’s just how it is....” (R)

“... And what makes me stay the same is my active communication with my family every day... like my mom updates me when she leaves, or when she’s on the train... I also updated her, saying I’m on my way to the boarding house... Those small talks help maintain routine and purpose in our daily lives.” (R)

Theme 2: Focus on tasks and responsibilities

In daily life, participants have goals and try to achieve them. Participants engage in activities that reduce stress and improve mood to remain productive. Participants also strive to focus on academic activities and prepare themselves well when facing a lot of assignments.

“I balance activities like stress-relieving activities such as walking, watching, exercising, and doing assignments. But mostly, to maintain focus, I first fulfil my emotional needs, chatting with friends, hanging out, and then working on tasks. That’s what works best for me. I can focus better when I’m outside my apartment.” (DS)

Theme 3: Making sense of daily activities

This research shows that participants make meaning of everything they do. They take lessons from every challenge or event and try to accept the conditions they face. Participants also view their living choices positively despite various issues. This meaning-making leads participants to tolerate behaviours from neighbours that may be disturbing, accept situations, and perceive their life goals as more meaningful.

“I hope to finish my master’s degree soon because living in an apartment near a noisy railway is uncomfortable. It’s definitely unpleasant. The neighbours above are strange, so I want to finish as soon as possible. But this apartment is nice, complete, and fairly priced, and the owner is very kind. I see it as a blessing for me. It’s like a social dilemma, isn’t it? It’s really annoying. But I realized that the train noise is for safety, so people won’t be too close to the platform. The pedestrian sound is also for safety, so I’ve accepted it. I’ll try to finish my studies so I don’t have to live here anymore.” (DS)

Theme 4: Self-control and evaluation of challenges

Based on the interviews, participants who live alone have their own way of dealing with problems that arise from living alone. Participants realize that living alone has

consequences, so they know how to solve these problems. They also try to understand and recognize their limitations, so they can engage in activities effectively without exceeding their capabilities.

"If we live alone, we decide what we want to do. Living alone is challenging but also makes us more independent. The hardest part is when you're sick, unable to get out of bed. I've experienced that twice, in two boarding houses. I had back pain and couldn't move. I called my mom, but it was difficult because I didn't have family around to help me. I felt powerless, thinking, how am I going to survive like this? It's more about self-esteem. I couldn't do anything but cry and sleep." (R)

Theme 5: Depending on one's self

Participants who live alone face many problems, and they inevitably must solve these problems by themselves because there is no one who can help them except themselves. For example, Participant DS has a way of coping with the challenges of living alone by finding the advantages of living alone, socializing with the outside world, and spending a lot of time on campus.

"... When I feel lonely or really alone, I immediately look for friends, you know. I call, ask how they're doing, what they're up to, or chat." (D)

Theme 6: Background for choosing a type of residence

In choosing a residence, both participants prioritize the function of the residence as a place to rest, security and comfort, and accessibility to save energy. This choice is based on several reasons, such as avoiding traffic, saving time when traveling to campus, and avoiding the negative feelings that arise from long and distant travel.

Theme 7: Challenges of living alone

Living alone has its advantages and challenges. According to the participants, living alone gives more freedom to engage in activities without interference from others. However, both participants also face challenges such as noisy living spaces that affect sleep quality. Illness is also a challenge for both participants who live alone. The summary of the findings from this study can be found in Table 1 and Table 2.

"From living in two different boarding houses, the hardest part is finding a laundry, a place to eat, and a place to get water... I have many food allergies, so sometimes it's lucky, and sometimes it's not. So, I have to be cautious about what I eat, checking if it might cause an allergy..." (R)

Table 1. Summary of the findings from participants who live with their families

Participant	Positive relationships	Engagement	Meaning	Optimism	Resilience	Other findings
SR (23)	<p>Interaction with Campus Friends</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Engaging in interactions with campus friends before classes begin to boost energy <p>Interaction with Family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rarely spending quality time with family 	<p>Focus on Each Task Undertaken</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Finding ways to stay focused on daily activities ● Drinking coffee and eating candy to avoid feeling weak during lectures 	<p>Finding Meaning in Every Challenge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reflecting on activities ● Being aware of the risks of using private vehicles 	<p>Taking Appropriate Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Attending lectures optimally during class hours 	<p>Dealing with Challenges Appropriately</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Drinking coffee to increase focus ● Socializing with preferred friends ● Receiving new course information positively 	<p>Use of Private Vehicle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Higher costs (due to using toll roads to avoid traffic congestion) ● Still experiencing traffic near the campus <p>Reason for living with family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Requested by parents
A (30)	Interaction at home	Focus activities on	Accepting various feelings experienced	Managing positive feelings to provide motivation	Efforts to face challenges and negative feelings	Use of personal vehicle
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chatting during breakfast ● Sharing stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Being on time for class ● Chatting with friends before class to boost mood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Feeling happy when interacting with family ● Feeling positive and connected when gathering with family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Becoming more motivated to attend classes after interacting with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mindfulness ● Accepting and calming oneself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Already available ● Distance is still manageable ● Cheaper cost ● No access to public transportation ● Feeling bored during the trip ● Traveling through congested roads

Table 1. Summary of the findings from participants who live with their families
(Continue)

Participant	Positive relationships	Engagement	Meaning	Optimism	Resilience	Other findings
A (30)	<p>Interaction in other environments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chatting with friends • Talking with staff and security guard 	<p>Accepting various feelings experienced</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling happy when interacting with family • Feeling positive and connected when gathering with family • Feeling happy when interacting with others because feeling noticed • Feeling motivated to attend classes • Feeling unpleasant and bored during the commute • Feeling stressed during the ride to campus 				<p>Reasons for living at home</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More comfortable and easier • Can easily interact
The me	<p>Forms of interaction with others</p>	<p>Acknowledging responsibility for each task</p>	<p>Viewing challenges positively</p>	<p>Adjusting actions to the situation</p>	<p>Efforts to face challenges</p>	<p>A Reasons for living with parents</p> <p>Advantages and disadvantages of using a private vehicle</p>

Based on the table above, the sub-themes represent the broader themes, namely students' interactions with their families, fulfilment of responsibilities as graduate students, viewing challenges from a positive perspective, adapting to situations, having the willingness and effort to face challenges, and making meaning of the decision to live with family as well as the advantages and disadvantages of using a private vehicle (Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of findings for participants living alone

Participant	Positive relationship s	Engagement	Meaning	Optimism	Resilience	Other findings
DS (24)	<p>No involvement with the surrounding environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No interaction with neighbours • Comfort is greater when living with family 	<p>Focus on productivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having stress-relieving activities • Feeling productive 	<p>Meaning of daily situations and conditions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaining concentration from happiness • Finding meaning in every challenge or event that occurs • Having acceptance towards the conditions experienced 	<p>Motivated to be productive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sources of discomfort become motivation to engage in activities outside • Gaining motivation to be productive outside of the living space 	<p>Able to face challenges and obstacles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socializing outside • Socializing online • Spending a lot of time on campus • Returning home when not busy 	<p>Internal issues of living alone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative thoughts when feeling lonely • Difficulty concentrating • Poor sleep quality due to disturbances
	<p>Positive relationships outside the living environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention from parents: picking up • Support from friends 	<p>Finding the advantages of the living situation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling more accessible • Not getting tired easily • Walking for exercise • Becoming more cautious • Not troubling parents 	<p>Able to assess every condition and situation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realizing the consequences of living alone • Knowing the solutions to the discomforts experienced 	<p>External issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noisy neighbours during rest hours • Proximity to the railway tracks • Crossing alarm sounds • Uncooperative friends • Crowded or noisy environment 		

Table 2. Summary of findings for participants living alone (Continue)

Part icip ant	Positive relationships	Engagement	Meaning	Optimism	Resilience	Other findings
DS (24)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being able to face challenges • Sources of happiness come from outside the living space 	Purpose of living alone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renting an apartment to avoid traffic • To be closer and have easier access to complete assignments • To avoid bad mood when commuting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A place to rest • A safe and comfortable space • Energy-efficient accessibility
R (24)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on tasks and responsibilities • Concentrating on academic activities • Crowded atmosphere of the boarding house 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing to complete assignments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is meaning in events that occur in the environment • Understanding the behaviour of neighbours • Prefer to use personal vehicles • Finding entertainment • Having a life purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaning of limitations • Carrying out tasks and responsibilities according to capacity • Limiting oneself from stressors • Recognizing personal boundaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persevering in the face of problems • Finding the advantages of living alone • Having problem-solving skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges of Living Alone • Noisy boarding house • Physical limitations due to illness • Many allergies • Having to think about meals, drinks, and laundry on my own

Table 2. Summary of findings for participants living alone (Continue)

Part icip ant	Positive relationships	Engagement	Meaning	Optimism	Resilience	Other findings
R (24)	<p>Interaction with family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekend recreation with family • Keeping in touch with family • Casual conversations with family <p>No meaningful interaction with the living environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions are only superficial • All boarders are busy with their own activities • Difficult to find conversational topics • No energy to interact with the boarding neighbours 					
The me	Support from significant others	Focus on tasks and responsibilities	Making sense of daily activities	Self-control and evaluation of challenges	Depending on one's self	Background for choosing a type of residence Challenges of living alone

The table above presents the thematic results from interviews with students who live alone. Although they live independently, these students still receive support from the people around them, remain focused on completing their academic tasks and responsibilities, find meaning in their daily activities, demonstrate good self-control to evaluate problems, show resilience in facing challenges, and make meaning of their reasons for choosing to live alone. A summary of the interview results based on Seligman (2002) happiness aspects is presented in the following table (see Table 3).

Table 3. Summary of interview results based on happiness dimensions

Dimensions of Happiness	Participants living with families	Participants living alone
Positive relationships	Participants experienced positive emotions through interactions with others, which in turn energized them to engage more actively in their academic activities.	Having minimal interaction with family and significant others, participants needed to put in extra effort to maintain their relationships with others.
Engagement	Participants realized they had responsibilities toward their academic activities, thus striving to focus fully on their tasks and duties.	Participants realized they had a responsibility toward their academic activities and therefore made their best effort to focus on their tasks and duties.
Meaning	Participants tried to interpret the challenges they faced in a positive way by recognizing the risks associated with their chosen options, such as feeling bored during the commute and spending more money on transportation costs to campus.	Participants sought to find valuable lessons from every challenge or problem that arose from living alone and accepted the conditions of their living environment.
Optimism	Participants turned discomfort into motivation to become more productive.	The participant (R) recognized their limitations, thus avoiding exceeding their capacity in daily activities.
Resilience	Seeking social support from family and friends to cope with problems.	Seeking social support from family and friends to overcome problems.

Source: Seligman (2002)

The table above presents a summary comparing the happiness of students who live with their families and those who live alone, linked to the dimensions of happiness. There are similarities found in several dimensions, such as the engagement dimension, in which both types of participants are aware that they have responsibilities related to their academic activities and therefore strive to stay focused, as well as the resilience dimension, in which both groups receive social support from family and nearby friends to overcome challenges.

Discussion

This study illustrates the differences in happiness between two groups of participants: those who live with family and those who live alone. In general, the participants in this study had different reasons for choosing their living arrangements and faced distinct challenges. The theme of the background behind choosing a living arrangement explains that participants A and SR chose to live with their families for comfort and ease of interaction with them. However, the challenges they faced involved the use of private transportation, which made them feel bored on the road, stuck in traffic, and required them to spend more money. On the other hand, participants DS and R chose to live alone to avoid traffic, seek minimal energy accessibility, and find it easier to focus on their tasks. Nevertheless, DS and R experienced noise from their surroundings and limitations in social interaction, which affected their physical and mental health. These findings suggest that while practical considerations such as traffic and convenience influence living choices, the resulting experiences have deeper emotional and psychological consequences. For instance, while participants who live alone avoid physical exhaustion from commuting, they encounter emotional strain due to limited social interaction, which may increase their vulnerability to stress and loneliness. Conversely, the inconvenience of commuting may be mitigated by the emotional security provided by living with family.

The theme of the background behind the choice of living arrangement and the theme of challenges faced, or the advantages and disadvantages of using private transportation, contribute to the differences in the happiness composition between participants living with family and those living alone. According to Seligman (2002) happiness is a concept of positive emotions in daily life, emphasizing the components of positive relationships with others, full engagement with one's surroundings, the process of finding meaning in daily life, optimism, and resilience.

Positive relationships, according to Seligman, (2002), involve connections with individuals in one's surrounding environment. These positive relationships are related to social support that individuals receive, which can reduce psychological problems, solve issues without obstacles, and promote physical well-being. For participants A and SR, who live with their families, Theme 3, which refers to interaction with others, explains the feelings of happiness, comfort, and energy due to their interactions with others. The difference in positive relationships between participants living with family and those living alone lies in the support received. Participants A and SR benefit from support derived from interactions with people they encounter at home, neighbours, or during travel, whereas participants DS and R receive support from significant others, such as family members living far away and friends at campus. Based on these findings, it can be inferred that the presence of social support from significant others can foster a sense of belonging in an individual, allowing them to feel accepted and supported. This aligns with previous literature which suggests that feelings of acceptance and support indeed influence an individual's physical and mental well-being, thereby facilitating the development of positive relationships with their surroundings (Diener et al., 2018; Kun & Gadanecz, 2022).

Overall, family serves as a crucial foundation for social support for participants, both for those living with family and those living alone. For participants who live with their families and are commuters or choose to commute, the positive relationships from interactions with family members provide reinforcement to help them get through their day. As explained by Parker et al. (2023), quality time spent together, the strength of family bonds, and feeling emotionally valued are types of support found to be higher among commuter students compared to those living far from their families. This suggests that family support indeed helps commuter students protect themselves from stress better than students living alone. Additionally, an interesting finding emerged where one participant mentioned that interactions with people they met on the road, such as greeting security guards or road workers, made them feel noticed and more motivated to continue their activities. This situation aligns with a study conducted by Gunaydin et al. (2021), which showed that interactions with strangers indeed contribute to a person's happiness. Compared to participants living alone, who do not initiate interactions with their surrounding environment, the positive affect was more evident in participants living with family and commuting to campus. It seems that social support from those around, especially family, can help students cope with stress and anxiety related to academic matters, thereby helping maintain mental health (Oktaviani et al., 2023; Ramadhana, 2024). While participants living with family have an easily accessible support system at home, participants who live independently develop a broader social network outside the household. This distinction underscores how individuals adopt varied strategies for nurturing social connections to support their well-being. Specifically, students who live independently might engage in a broader range of social interactions—including with peers, faculty, and community members—which are equally vital for cultivating feelings of connection and happiness, albeit through pathways distinct from the comfort provided by home-based familial support.

In terms of engagement, both groups of participants exhibited similar themes, which were related to the fulfilment of responsibilities. Participants A and SR acknowledged their responsibility toward each task they carried out, while participants DS and R also focused on their tasks and responsibilities. This shows that both groups made efforts to engage physically, emotionally, and mentally in completing daily activities, regardless of the background of their chosen living arrangement (Seligman, 2002). Moreover, Hidayat (2019) stated that the activities or tasks performed influence the process of forming experiences, shaping the individual's self, and creating a sense of meaning in life. Seligman (2002) also emphasized the concept of happiness as a positive emotion related to past experiences, present meaning, and optimism for the future. Furthermore, efforts to fulfil responsibilities toward tasks or work can reduce the negative impact of stress on an individual (Peifer et al., 2020). This means that when an individual strives to complete their tasks promptly, this condition also contributes to the emergence of positive affect in themselves. A key contributing factor that may strengthen engagement is the availability of social support, particularly from family. Familial support can foster a sense of emotional security, which subsequently motivates students to maintain commitment to their responsibilities. This mechanism aligns with previous findings; for instance, Amalia and Latifah (2019) demonstrated how family support positively influences students' academic achievements. Beyond the direct

benefits of receiving support, the successful fulfilment of responsibilities itself promotes positive emotions, contributing to a vital sense of accomplishment and self-worth. For students living with their families, this engagement might be further enhanced by the emotional reinforcement from family members, providing a sense of belonging and stability that can make the completion of tasks feel more rewarding. On the other hand, students living independently may face more emotional challenges, as their sense of achievement is primarily shaped by external factors, such as academic success or the ability to manage life independently. These differences in how engagement translates to emotional rewards further underscore the role of social support systems in shaping one's approach to responsibilities and their happiness.

The meaning of life for each group of participants appeared differently. In this case, Seligman (2002) narrowed the concept of meaning that makes up happiness to the meaning found in daily activities. Participants who lived with their families made efforts to positively interpret the challenges they faced, such as participants A and SR, who tried to recognize the risks of what they chose when feeling tired and bored due to long travel and having to spend more money. Participants A and SR interpreted and approached this by interacting with family at home and friends at campus. On the other hand, participants who lived alone found it easier to find lessons in every challenge or problem that occurred. Participants DS and R were more accepting of their urban environment and the condition of living alone, which led them to perceive a more meaningful life purpose. Hidayat (2019) highlighted that individual capabilities and strategies for everyone to build happiness through the meaning of life are different, as not everyone can evaluate or assess what they are doing. In this case, the students' ability to adapt and find lessons in adversity may be an important factor in how they perceive their life's purpose. This suggests that the sense of meaning in life is not only shaped by external circumstances, but also by the personal attributes and coping strategies that individuals employ to navigate their environments.

An optimistic individual is one who utilizes their successes and is willing to embark on their journey. With optimism and hope, individuals become more resilient when facing adverse events, perform better at work, especially in challenging tasks, and maintain good physical health (Seligman, 2002). In this study, participants DS, SR, and A turned the discomfort they experienced into motivation to be more productive outside their living space to find happiness. On the other hand, participant R had several limitations and chose to set boundaries in their activities to prevent negative impacts on their daily life. By setting boundaries according to their abilities, R became an individual who was more satisfied and happier with their activities. These findings suggest that, for cultivating long-term happiness, reducing exposure to stressors can be as crucial as actively pursuing positive experiences. While some individuals are motivated to engage deeply with their environment to enhance their mood, others emphasize the importance of incorporating periods of rest and reflection. This highlights that happiness can also emerge from the ability to recognize when to disengage and recharge. Furthermore, these findings imply that optimism among students is not only reflected in persistent effort and outward productivity, but also in the capacity to adapt to one's personal circumstances, whether that means pushing forward or consciously slowing down. In this context, optimism becomes a flexible mindset, a belief that growth and

someone's well-being are possible through different kinds of paths, depending on the individual's needs and conditions.

Living alone or with family does not shield individuals from various problems. The amount of time it takes for individuals to bounce back and resolve their issues reflects their resilience (Seligman, 2002). In this study, participants A, SR, DS, and R all had their own ways of solving problems. However, a common thread among all four participants is that they all sought social support from family or close friends when facing challenges. This shared experience aligns with a study by Yıldırım and Green (2024), which explains that family members, friends, or mentors can be important sources of support for students. The social support provided, whether in the form of interaction, attention, or affirmation, can increase individuals' self-satisfaction as students and foster happiness. The process of obtaining social support also carries the meaning that each student has their own way of coping to achieve resilience, by consciously acknowledging that they are going through a difficult time and seeking social support from those around them, namely family and close friends. Seeking social support does not indicate weakness, but rather a strategy to balance mental health and achieve happiness that is not only temporary but also long-term.

This study has several limitations, such as the lack of methodological variation and research design. Therefore, a suggestion for future research would be to expand this study with different methods and designs, such as using an explanatory model, which combines qualitative data with quantitative data obtained through surveys, or employing a longitudinal study model. The combination of methods and an extended study duration would help enrich the data and make the research results more exploratory. Additionally, it is also important for future researchers to enrich the data by collecting data from more various types of students, such as different family conditions and backgrounds, beliefs, life experiences, or even personalities.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

Based on the result and discussions conducted with the participants regarding the research topic, the selection of participants is related to personal reasons that have been adjusted accordingly. The participants have considered the advantages and disadvantages of their respective choices, which they feel align with their underlying needs. These choices lead to several conditions related to the happiness experienced by each participant.

In general, this study explains the influence of housing choices and mobility on an individual's sense of happiness, whether they choose to live with family and use private transportation, or choose to live alone. It was found that more aspects of happiness emerged among participants who chose to live at home with family and use private transportation. Although challenges and problems still exist, participants living with family received sufficient social support, which made positive affect and meaning, leading to happiness, more easily emerge. On the other hand, participants who chose to live alone faced more limitations and challenges, as they felt a lack of social support from those closest to them. This condition led the participants to put more effort into

obtaining happiness. Significantly, this study offers new insights by clearly showing how housing choices influence students' happiness. It expands existing models of happiness to include an important environmental dimension that is often overlooked. Furthermore, the findings highlight the adaptive strategies students' use when facing a lack of social support, indicating that those living independently put in greater proactive effort to find happiness. This provides a more nuanced understanding of how people achieve well-being in different life situations.

Recommendation

Based on the result of the study, there are several recommendations we can give to several type of populations. For students, it is essential to carefully weigh the advantages and disadvantages of living alone compared to living with family, ensuring that their choice aligns with their personal needs and psychological well-being. For higher education institutions, it is recommended to establish mentorship programs or social communities specifically designed for students who live alone. Such initiatives may help reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness, thereby enhancing students' overall psychological well-being.

For future researchers, several recommendations can be made to enrich subsequent studies. First, it is important to examine potential mediating or moderating variables that may influence student happiness based on their housing situation, such as coping mechanisms, emotional regulation, or personality traits. Second, to strengthen the robustness of the findings, future research may adopt a mixed-methods approach or include a more diverse sample drawn from different academic programs. Third, considering the potential effects of social and cultural differences across universities in various regions may also lead to distinct findings. Finally, future studies should take into account economic factors, which were not extensively explored in this research but may significantly shape variations in students' experiences of happiness.

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