

# Adolescents' Subjective Well-Being of Indonesian Migrant Worker's Families: The Role of Social Support and Parental Communication

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## Abstract

Subjective well-being is the perception of happiness and satisfaction with life experiences from someone's point of view. This research aims to analyze the effect of adolescent characteristics, family characteristics, social support, and adolescent-parental communication on the subjective well-being of adolescents in migrant worker families. The method used in this research is a non-probability sampling method with a convenience sampling technique in 5 selected schools in the Kesugihan District, Cilacap Regency, Central Java. The respondents of this study involved 99 junior high school students aged 12-16 years. Based on the results, teenagers whose parents leave behind to work overseas predominantly live with their grandparents. Migrant workers are dominated by mothers, with percentages up to 85.9 percent, and most work as household assistants. Migrant workers are dominated by married persons and belong to the small family category. Teacher social support for PMI family teenagers has an average index of 62.55, and peer social support is 63.67. The study also found that mother communication with adolescents is better than father communication with adolescents. The correlation test results stated that teacher social support, peer social support, and parent-adolescent communication had a significant positive relationship with adolescent subjective well-being.

## Keywords

adolescent-parents communication; migrant worker families; social support; subjective well-being

## INTRODUCTION

Remittances from migrant workers provide many benefits and continue to grow even during a pandemic. Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) are the second largest contributor to the country's foreign exchange. In 2021, the country's foreign exchange contributed by PMI will reach 159.6 billion, lower than the oil and gas sector (BP2MI 2021). Based on gender, the number of Female Migrant Workers (PMP) with a total

of 26,539 women is more than the number of male workers, which is only 3,795 people (BP2MI 2021). The second province with the most migrant workers in Central Java, with 17,504 people (BP2MI 2021). Data from the Central Java Statistics Agency show that Cilacap Regency has the highest number of

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contributors to migrant workers (BPS 2021). Migration is one way to achieve economic development goals because successful migration can reduce poverty through income from PMIs. However, apart from the positive impacts, there are also negative impacts that the PMI family can experience. One is a child left behind by one or both parents to work, called Left Behind Children (LBC) (Wahyuningsih & Wulan, 2019). PMI children are children of a vulnerable group due to parental migration; the separation can endanger the child's welfare and create obstacles to child development (Bakker et al., 2009). The absence of parents can harm children's development due to reduced family control and supervision, lack of parental support and guidance, and the bond between parents and children can become weak due to separation (Wen & Lin, 2012).

Adolescents who experience separation will feel sad because they have to grow up without the outpouring of parents' love, attention, and presence and do not feel parental care (Liao, Hu, and Zhang 2014). Based on research by Shen & Zhang (2018) (Karaca et al., 2016). The well-being of PMI children or those left migrating can be affected by feelings of abandonment, low self-esteem, anger, depression, material obsession, and violence. Parental abandonment sometimes permanently affects a child's life; sometimes, many feel rejected and lost (Bakker et al., 2009).

Open parent-child communication is a protective factor in adolescents at risk of experiencing psychological and behavioral problems (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2006). The communication process is the family's ability to adapt to changes that occur in the family flexibly. As a result, there is good connectedness within the family, the family can provide clarity on problems and families can share feelings and positive emotions, empathize with each other, and solve problems effectively and collaboratively (Saefullah et al., 2018). Previous studies have also concluded that open or positive communication between parents and children can be associated with adolescent life satisfaction (Levin et al., 2012). If the communication

process between parents and children takes place openly, the interactions in the family will run harmoniously. Harmonious interaction will facilitate socializing children (Palindangan, 2018). Harmonization in the family is a family condition in which there is affection, mutual understanding, support, time with family, communication, being able to work with one another, and being able to actualize oneself well and minimal conflict, tension, and disappointment (Awi et al., 2016).

Happiness is one type of positive emotion adolescents feel in showing satisfaction reactions (Elfida et al., 2014). Teenagers who do not get happiness tend to behave differently and harm themselves and others. A number of problems that occur may be related to adolescents' subjective well-being. Research conducted by Shen and Zhang (2018) said that adolescents whose parents left them to work as PMIs have a lower level of subjective well-being than adolescents who do not. According to Abbey et al. (2010), social support can also affect subjective well-being. Social support can lighten the burden of problems individuals face to improve subjective well-being. Fan and Lu (2020) research shows that social support contributes to adolescent welfare. Early adolescents need social support during the transition period to overcome pressure and anxiety arising from various changes and developments that occur so that adolescents can solve the problems they face. As a result, adolescents can achieve subjective well-being (Králová, 2012). Social support is interactive communication that benefits individual psychological well-being (Chib et al., 2013).

The aims of this study were: 1) to identify adolescent characteristics, family characteristics, teacher social support, peer social support, adolescent-parent communication, and subjective well-being of adolescents from migrant worker families; 2) to analyze the relationship between adolescent characteristics, family characteristics, teacher social support, peer social support, adolescent-parent communication with the subjective well-being of adolescents in migrant worker families.

## METHODS

This study uses an explanatory study design through a quantitative approach to survey research. It is part of an umbrella research study to examine the welfare of children in families of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in their places of origin. This research was conducted in Kesugihan District, Cilacap Regency, Central Java Province. The location was determined based on Central Java BPS data (2021) which shows that Cilacap Regency has the most PMI districts in Central Java. Respondents in this study were 99 youth from junior high school (SMP) and their equivalent from 5 different schools whose fathers or mothers worked as migrant workers abroad. The data collection technique was carried out offline by visiting directly to schools in the research locations, and the respondents filled in directly using a written questionnaire. The data collection process was carried out in March 2022. Primary data includes family characteristics consisting of the father's and mother's age, education, occupation and income of father and mother, characteristics of parents' work as migrant workers, frequency of return, and last meeting with the family at home. In addition, characteristics of adolescents consist of age, sex, birth order, education, residential address, with whom the child lives, and parents' employment status.

The instruments used in this study included the Social Support Questionnaire for Children (SSQC) social support instrument developed by Gordon-Hollingsworth et al. (2015) has a Cronbach Alpha value of teacher social support of 0.871 and peer social support of 0.846. Parent-child communication instrument Parent Adolescents Communication Scale (PACS) was developed by Barnes and Olson (1982). Parent-child communication is divided into two, namely, father-adolescent communication and mother-adolescent communication, with each having a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.853 and 0.844. The subjective well-being instrument uses the Student's Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS) instrument compiled by Huebner (1991). The SLSS instrument assesses ado-

lescent life satisfaction from the dimensions of life satisfaction, positive affective, and negative affective aspects with Cronbach alpha of 0.913.

Data is processed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS for Windows. This study used descriptive analysis to identify the percentage distribution, average, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores on adolescent characteristics, family characteristics, teacher social support variables, peer social support variables, parent-adolescent communication variables, and subjective welfare variables. Some of the data on the characteristics of adolescents and families were given a dummy code, including gender (0=male; 1=female), father's education (0=junior high school and below; 1=junior high school and above), father's migrant status (0=father working migrants; 1=father not working migrants), mother's migrant status (0=mother working migrants; 1=mother not working migrants), youth's residence status (0=with parents; 1=not with parents). While the data obtained from the variables of social support, adolescent-parent communication, and subjective well-being will be scored (scoring data), then added together to get the total score of these variables. After getting the total score, then transformed into the form of an index. After the scores were converted into index form, they were then converted into three categories, namely with low cut-off points (0-<60), medium (60-80), and high (>80-100). Correlation analysis was used to analyze the relationship between adolescent characteristics, family characteristics, teacher social support, peer social support, and parent-adolescent communication with the subjective welfare of adolescent migrant worker families.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Characteristics of PMI Adolescents and Families

The characteristics of the adolescents examined in this study included gender, age, education, place of residence, and employment status of their parents. The results

showed that 54 percent of female adolescent respondents and 46 percent of male adolescents with an average age of 13.71. This means that young women dominated the respondents in this study. Furthermore, from the age range of 12-16, respondents have an average age of 13.71. Respondents were spread across five different schools, with the most respondents at SMPN 1 Kesugihan and were in grade 1 of junior high school. Respondents in this study predominantly lived with grandparents, with a proportion of 31.3 percent. Respondents whose parents work as PMI tend to live with their grandparents. Meanwhile, adolescents with mothers who are migrant workers have the largest proportion, namely 85.9 percent. This shows that mothers dominate migrant workers in the respondents and the areas studied.

Family characteristics in this study were age, education, occupation, income, family size, and marital status. According to Hurlock (1980), the age of parents is grouped into three, namely, early adulthood (18-40 years), middle adulthood (41-60 years), and late adulthood (> 60 years). The results showed that the highest father's age was in the age range (of 41-60 years). This means that the dominant respondent's father's age was middle adulthood. Meanwhile, the highest number of mothers was in the age range (18-40 years), which means that the respondents' mothers were in their early adulthood. The average age of the father is 42.65, and the average age of the mother is 37.97. The father's last education was in elementary school, while the mother was in junior high. The types of work respondents' parents are household assistants, baby sisters, elderly caretakers, and factory workers. The highest father's income per month ranges from Rp. 1,000,000-Rp. 2,000,000, and the highest mother's income per month is ≥ Rp. 5,000,000. In terms of income, between the father's and mother's income as migrant workers, the mother's income is higher than the father's income. Furthermore, the distribution of migrant workers countries from the research results in Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Canada. Migrant workers with married (51 percent) status,

divorced (38 percent), and widowed (11 percent). Family size is divided into 3, namely small (1-4 people), medium (5-7 people), and large (> 7 people) families in accordance with BKKBN (2005). Based on the study's results, 73 percent of the teenage respondents were in the small family category, while the rest were in the medium category (27 percent).

### *Teacher Social Support*

Social support comes from the teacher, providing information, comforting when sad, giving awards to students when achieving success, and direct assistance when solving a problem (Fransisca et al., 2020). Five aspects of teacher social support can be given to students: first, emotional support. This can be formed through caring, caring, or giving expressions of empathy for students' conditions. Furthermore, providing guidance by reprimanding students who are guilty and advising students according to their mistakes. Third, providing information support, such as directing students to the information needed when they have difficulty doing assignments. Fourth, giving awards in the form of gifts or direct praise for student achievement. Then fifth, validation support is in the form of learning or self-development programs that students can benefit from (Galuh dan Desiningrum 2016). Teacher social support received by adolescents in PMI families has an average index of 62.55, meaning that teacher social support received by adolescents is in the moderate category. This can be shown in the answers of respondents who said 7 out of 10 questions asked, respondents answered always, and the rest answered sometimes. When viewed from the score of the respondent's answers, the highest score was obtained from the question, "my teacher gave me good advice."

### *Peer Social Support*

Peer social support is social support provided by peers or teammates who can be provided with information or feedback on what adolescents do in peer groups (Gordon et al., 2015). According to Sarafino (2010), peers are an important source of emotional

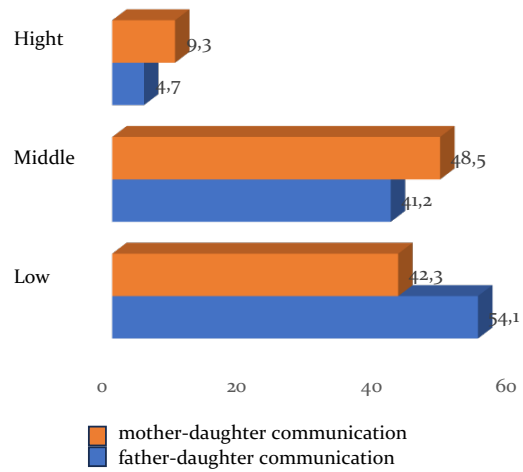
support during the transition of adolescence. Peer social support is the support given and felt by individuals in the form of physical and psychological comfort so that individuals feel loved, valued, and cared for in social groups. Peer social support received by adolescents in families of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) has an average index of 63.67, meaning that peer social support received by adolescents is in the moderate category. The highest score was obtained from the question, "My friend accepts me as I am." Furthermore, 5 out of 10 respondents always answered, while 4 out of 10 questions were answered sometimes.

**Parent-Child Communication**

Parent-child communication exists between parents and children to share messages or convey opinions, thoughts, information, or advice. This study measures the communication that occurs between fathers and children as well as mother-child communication. Based on the condition of the respondents, some had not communicated with their father/mother either because they were gone, did not live in the same house, were separated, or something else. Therefore, respondents who answered father's communication and mother's communication received (n) different numbers, namely (n=85) for father's communication and (n=97) for mother's communication. The study's results in Figure 1 shows that the dominance of mother's communication is in the medium category, namely 48.5 percent.

Meanwhile, the dominant father's communication was in a low category, namely 54.1 percent. This shows that communication between mother-daughter tends to be more frequent than father-daughter communication. Even though the dominant mother is a migrant worker, communication with children continues to run well. In addition, the average mother-child communication index is also greater than the average father-child communication index. Furthermore, based on the minimum and maximum values of communication, the mother has a minimum value of 18.33 and a maximum value of 90.00. The mini-

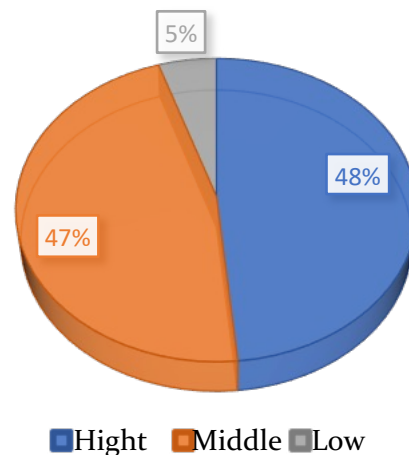
um and maximum values of father communication are 8.33, and the maximum is 86.67.



**Figure 1.** The percentage of mother-daughter communication and father-daughter communication by category

**Adolescent Subjective Welfare**

According to Puspitawati et al. (2021), subjective well-being is a person's perception of the two components in life, namely satisfaction and happiness with their life experiences. Based on the study's results, the dominant respondent's subjective well-being was in a low category, namely 48.5 percent. Meanwhile, the percentage of subjective well-being of 46.5 percent of respondents is in the moderate category, and the remaining 5.1 percent is in the high category.



**Figure 2.** The percentage of respondents' subjective well-being by category

The distribution of the minimum value is 13.00, and the maximum value is 84.44, with an average index of 57.21. When viewed from the distribution of respondents' answers, 11 of the 20 positive questions with the highest score of respondents answered sometimes. In addition, all the negative questions the respondents answered often felt the questions asked. One of the negative questions with the highest score is that the respondent feels sad.

### *Relations between Teacher Social Support, Peer Social Support and Parent-Adolescent Communication with the Subjective Welfare of Adolescents Migrant Worker Families*

Based on the data presented in Table 1, between teacher social support and father communication, the largest proportion is in a low category. This means that 3 out of 10 have low teacher social support and father communication.

**Table 1.** Cross-tabulation test results of teacher social support and father communication

	Low	Cur- rently	High	Total
Low	30.6%	10.6%	1.2%	42.4%
Currently	14.1%	14.1%	1.2%	29.4%
High	9.4%	16.5%	2.4%	28.2%
Total	54.1%	41.2%	4.7%	100.0%

The data presented in Table 2 of teacher social support and mother communication has the largest proportion in the low category. This means 2 out of 10 adolescents have low social support from teachers and their mother's communication. From the two tables, it can be said that more respondents received social support from teachers with low father communication.

Based on Table 3, the results show that the largest proportion of peer social support and father communication is in a low category. 2 out of 10 adolescents have low peer social support and father communication.

Meanwhile, in Table 4, peer social support with the mother's communication

is low. Similar to the previous results, more respondents were in the low category of peer social support with the father's communication compared with the mother's communication.

**Table 2.** Cross-tabulation test results of teacher social support and mother's communication

	Low	Cur- rently	High	Total
Low	21.6%	18.6%	3.1%	43.3%
Currently	14.4%	12.4%	3.1%	29.9%
High	6.2%	17.5%	3.1%	26.8%
Total	42.3%	48.5%	9.3%	100.0%

**Table 3.** Cross-tabulation test results of peer social support and father communication

	Low	Cur- rently	High	Total
Low	22.4%	15.3%	2.4%	40.0%
Currently	12.9%	11.8%		24.7%
High	18.8%	14.1%	2.4%	35.3%
Total	54.1%	41.2%	4.7%	100.0%

**Table 4.** Cross-tabulation test results of peer social support and mother's communication

	Low	Cur- rently	High	Total
Low	16.5%	20.6%	5.2%	42.3%
Currently	10.3%	12.4%	2.1%	24.7%
High	15.5%	15.5%	2.1%	33.0%
Total	42.3%	48.5%	9.3%	100.0%

Based on the results of the correlation test presented in Table 5, shows that social support is related to the subjective well-being of adolescents in PMI families ( $r = 0.210$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). That is, the higher the teacher's social support will further improve the subjective well-being of adolescents in the PMI family. Furthermore, peer social support has a significant positive relationship with the subjective well-being of adolescents in the PMI family ( $r = 0.244$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). This means that if peer social support is high, it will increase adolescents' subjective well-being in

the PMI family. The next variable shows that the father's communication has a significant positive relationship with adolescents' subjective well-being ( $r = 0.426$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). That is, the more frequent communication between adolescents and their fathers, the more subjective well-being of adolescents in the PMI family will improve. Finally, the mother's communication with adolescents' subjective well-being in the PMI family has a significant positive relationship ( $r = 0.505$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). More frequent communication between mothers and adolescents will further improve the subjective well-being of adolescents in the PMI family.

**Table 5.** Correlation test results of teacher social support, peer social support, father's communication, and mother's communication with the subjective well-being of adolescents

Variable	Subjective Welfare
Teacher Social Support	0.210*
Peer Social Support	0.244*
Father Communication	0.426**
Mother Communication	0.505**

\*significant at  $p < 0.05$ , \*\* significant at  $p < 0.01$

Children left by their parents as migrant workers will face considerable psychological and social development challenges. Separation from parents, family supervision, and inadequate emotional fulfillment will affect children's quality of life and physical and psychological well-being as children grow up. Psychologically affected children are at risk of suffering from various psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, loneliness, and negative self-perceptions and can also experience behavioral problems (Hu et al., 2014). Being tied to material resources is one of the behavioral problems experienced by abandoned children. Sometimes, parents try to compensate for their absence by sending a lot of material resources in the form of money. However, it turns out that this kind of compensation can result in children being more attached to the material resources provided. This re-

sults in a loss of morals, love, and respect for absent parents (Bakker et al., 2009). The relationship between parents and abandoned children is weaker than that of non-abandoned children (Jia & Tian, 2010). Adolescence requires a variety of things, especially to fulfill developmental tasks properly. One of these needs is psychological, especially the adolescent need for happiness (Andani et al., 2017). Subjective well-being is one of the things that teenagers need to deal with the developments or changes they are experiencing because if teenagers have happiness and satisfaction in their lives, they will have a positive mindset and have a more meaningful life. Happiness and life satisfaction prevent adolescents from negative feelings, which in turn trigger adolescents to take actions that can harm themselves or others (Herawaty, 2015). Subjective well-being is a term that can be used to describe a person's level of well-being that is subjectively evaluated for his own life (Diener et al., 2008).

Based on the study results, the subjective well-being of adolescents in the PMI family is in a low category. This is in line with research conducted by Shen and Zhang (2018), which states that adolescents whose parents leave them to work as PMI have a lower level of subjective well-being than adolescents whom their parents do not abandon. Other studies have also revealed the same thing, that is, adolescents from non-migrant worker families tend to have higher satisfaction than adolescents whose parents work as migrants (Zhao et al., 2019). The findings in this study also support this statement, which shows that the status of residence of adolescents has a significant negative relationship with the subjective well-being of adolescents. This means that the subjective well-being of adolescents who live with their parents tends to be higher than that of adolescents who do not live with their parents.

This study shows that teacher social support has a significant positive relationship with adolescents' subjective well-being. Based on the respondents' answers, the youth answered that the teacher always shows affection for adolescents, cares for

adolescents, has a reliable teacher, always gives advice and always helps when teenagers need it. Galuh and Desiningrum (2016) said that students who are familiar with the teacher would more easily express the difficulties they are experiencing so that students easier to build discussions and obtain the information needed. The interactions that exist between teachers and students can help acquire and develop positive values in students, knowing their weaknesses and strengths (Shofiah & Raudatussalimah, 2010). Regular communication, involvement in school activities, and interaction with friends can be factors that help adolescents adjust (Asis, 2006).

This study found that peer social support had a significant positive relationship with adolescents' subjective well-being. That is, the greater the peer social support, the greater the subjective well-being of adolescents in migrant worker families. This is in line with the findings by Andjasari and Shafira (2021), which state that peer social support has a significant positive relationship to subjective well-being, which means that higher peer social support will further improve the subjective well-being of adolescents. Research supporting this statement says that social support is a function of social ties that describe the general quality of interpersonal relationships. The bond is considered an aspect that provides emotional satisfaction in individual life. Teenagers get more social support from peers, and this is because friends are considered figures who can understand what teenagers feel, have feelings of the same destiny, understand each other and gain more sympathy from peers. Therefore, teenagers feel more comfortable listening to complaints, releasing negative emotions, and reducing pressure and anxiety (Kumalasari & Nur, 2012). The research found by Matsuda et al. (2014) revealed that relationships with friends in adolescence began to have a greater impact on student life satisfaction. Interaction with friends can influence the feelings of joy, or sadness adolescents feel at school because adolescents tend to develop many activi-

ties with their peers (Liu et al., 2015). The research results found by Wijayanti et al. (2020) said that the lack of support and the lack of perceptions of social support from friends and family resulted in psychological difficulties. The research found by Yuspita et al. (2021) if social support is low, subjective well-being will be low.

Adolescent-parent communication is communication that exists between parents and adolescents. Adolescent-parent communication is more often associated with levels of life satisfaction, academic satisfaction, and happiness (Su et al., 2012). On the other hand, inadequate parent-child communication makes migrant children more likely to be lonely (Hu et al., 2014). The findings in this study stated that the father's communication was lower than the mother's. This is supported by the findings of Pramono et al. (2017), which state that teenage girls and boys agree that even if mothers are busy working, teenagers will still communicate with mothers. The study also found that mothers' communication had a significant positive effect on adolescents' subjective well-being. This means that the higher the communication between mothers and adolescents, the higher the adolescents' subjective well-being will be.

Furthermore, the study results show that both father and mother communication has a significant positive relationship with adolescents' subjective well-being. This shows that higher or more often communication between fathers and mothers with adolescents will further improve the subjective well-being of adolescents in migrant worker families. This is in line with findings by (Andani et al., 2017) that there is a significant positive relationship between the quality of communication between parents and adolescents on adolescent happiness. In addition, another finding made by Levin et al. (2012) showed that the parent-child relationship is an important determinant of adolescent life satisfaction.



## CONCLUSIONS

Respondents in this study were dominated by young women with an average teenage age of 13.71. Most of the respondents were at SMP N 1 Kesugihan and the dominant ones were at grade 1 SMP. On average, teenagers live with their grandparents, with the dominant mother being a migrant worker. The average age of the father is 42.65 and the average age of the mother is 37.97. Migrant workers with married status are 51 percent and 73 percent are in the small family category. The subjective well-being of adolescents in migrant worker families is in the low category. Teacher social support and peer social support have a significant positive relationship with the subjective well-being of adolescents. The average index of mother-adolescent communication is higher than that of father-adolescent communication. Parent-child communication has a significant positive relationship with the subjective well-being of adolescents.

Based on the results of research on communication between fathers and adolescents is still lower than communication between adolescents and mothers. Therefore, it is expected that fathers and adolescents must be more open in establishing communication. In addition, parents who will work as PMI need to add parenting skills when they are away from their children. Then suggestions for the government or the Indonesian Migrant Worker Protection Agency (BP2MI) should also pay more attention to the lives of children left by their parents working abroad. This can be done by providing or providing a platform for abandoned children in the form of a sharing or consulting community so that children can express what they feel in the right place when they are far away from their parents and do not feel alone when their parents abandon them. In addition, BP2MI also provides a place for parenting training for parents who are going abroad. This can be done through parenting skills workshops focusing on children's emotional needs, more effective and frequent parent-child communication, and building a supportive family environ-

ment. Suggestions for future researchers to conduct research on the same variables with additional methods such as in-depth interviews and add other variables that can affect adolescents' subjective well-being.

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