

SOURCE OF LIFE SATISFACTION: THINKING ABOUT HOW OTHERS FEEL

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Abstrak

Minimnya kajian mengenai ToM dalam mempengaruhi life satisfaction pada remaja yang masih terbatas menjadi dasar dilakukannya penelitian ini. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji pengaruh ToM terhadap life satisfaction pada remaja di Palembang. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain survei eksplanatori yang melibatkan 274 remaja berusia 12–16 tahun yang dipilih dengan teknik convenience sampling. Life satisfaction diukur menggunakan Student's Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS), sedangkan ToM diukur menggunakan strange stories task. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) melalui SmartPLS 4, meliputi uji validitas, reliabilitas, dan pengujian hipotesis melalui bootstrapping. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ToM tidak berpengaruh signifikan terhadap life satisfaction ($\beta = -0,174$; $p = 0,485$; $R^2 = 0,03$). Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa kemampuan memahami kondisi mental orang lain tidak signifikan memprediksi kepuasan hidup remaja dalam konteks penelitian ini, sehingga faktor lain diasumsikan memiliki peran yang signifikan dalam menentukan life satisfaction pada remaja. Secara teoritis, temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa ToM bukan prediktor langsung life satisfaction pada remaja.

Kata kunci: life satisfaction; remaja; strange stories task; student's life satisfaction scale; theory of mind

Abstract

The lack of studies on ToM in influencing life satisfaction in adolescents is still limited is the basis for this study. This study aims to examine the influence of ToM on life satisfaction in adolescents in Palembang. This study used a quantitative approach with an explanatory survey design involving 274 adolescents aged 12–16 years who were selected using convenience sampling techniques. Life satisfaction was measured using the Student's Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS), while ToM was measured using the strange stories task. Data analysis was carried out using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS 4, including validity, reliability, and hypothesis testing through bootstrapping. The results showed that ToM had no significant effect on life satisfaction ($\beta = -0.174$; $p = 0.485$; $R^2 = 0.03$). These findings suggest that the ability to understand the mental state of others does not significantly predict adolescent life satisfaction in the context of this study, so other factors are assumed to have a significant role in determining life satisfaction in adolescents. Theoretically, these findings suggest that ToM is not a direct predictor of life satisfaction in adolescents.

Keywords: life satisfaction; adolescents; strange stories task; student's life satisfaction scale; theory of mind

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a dynamic developmental phase characterized by simultaneous physical, cognitive, social, and emotional changes (Hurlock, 1980; Santrock, 2012). During this phase, adolescents explore their identity, as described in Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. They seek to develop a stable self-image through social interaction and explore various roles (Erikson, 1989). This process doesn't always go smoothly, as teens also face academic pressure, social demands, and a desire to gain peer approval. Given these circumstances, adolescent mental health has become a central issue in the context of education and development (WHO, 2024).

In recent years, adolescent mental health and well-being have become increasingly important. According to a World Health Organization report (2024), one in seven adolescents aged 10 to 19 suffer from a mental disorder, with anxiety and depression being the most common conditions. In Indonesia, the National Adolescent Mental Health Survey (2022) found that about 34.9% of adolescents have experienced at least one mental health problem in the past twelve months. This data shows that adolescents' subjective well-being, including their life satisfaction, is a very important aspect. Life satisfaction is defined as a cognitive evaluation of a person's quality of life based on self-set standards (Huebner, 1994). For school-age adolescents, life satisfaction is reflected in satisfaction with their family, friends, school, environment, and themselves (Huebner, 1991).

The phenomenon of declining life satisfaction among teenagers has also emerged in the education sector. Based on a report from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2021), a number of students in Indonesia show low levels of psychological well-being. In the local context, data released by the Central Statistics Agency (2024) through the publication of the South Sumatra Provincial Happiness Index in the last five years shows that the dimensions of life satisfaction and the meaning of life in the young age group are still in the medium category and have not shown a significant increase. This condition underscores the difference between the ideal situation, in which young people, especially adolescents, can adapt well and have psychological stability, and the reality of the existence of persistent social-emotional obstacles. Therefore, it is important to identify factors that affect life satisfaction in adolescents, especially at the junior high school level.

In the scope of education, especially what happened at SMP Negeri 39 Palembang, researchers found that some adolescents were seen to have difficulty understanding the feelings of others, lack confidence when interacting socially, and were prone to experiencing loneliness. So, this can certainly affect life satisfaction in teenagers. Adolescents' life satisfaction is influenced by several factors, namely mental state, mind, social support, family relationships, emotional regulation, and school environment (Huebner, 1991; Izaguirre et al., 2021; Orben et al., 2022). Of these various factors, this study only focuses on ToM, because these abilities are related to the quality of social relationships and adolescent self-adjustment.

ToM refers to the cognitive ability to represent and understand the mental state of others (which may differ from one's own), including their thoughts, beliefs, intentions, and emotions (Happe, 1994). This ability is the basis for predicting social behavior and controlling adaptive responses in interpersonal relationships. Adolescents with well-developed ToM skills typically demonstrate optimal social competencies, including the ability to demonstrate empathy, build positive interpersonal relationships, and resolve conflicts constructively (Caputi & Bosacki, 2023). Conversely, the limited ability to understand the perspectives and mental states of others can lead to distorted social interpretations, increased risk of misunderstandings, and increased social isolation, which ultimately negatively impacts an individual's life satisfaction (Caputi & Bosacki, 2023).

In the past five years, the empirical literature has consistently shown that socio-cognitive abilities, particularly ToM, have a significant contribution to adolescent psychological well-being. Caputi and Bosacki (2023) report that ToM capacity is significantly correlated with levels of anxiety and life satisfaction, indicating an important role in understanding the mental state of others in the process of emotional regulation and self-evaluation of adolescents. In line with these findings, Caputi et al. (2021) show that ToM plays a role in improving social competence, which further affects the quality of interpersonal relationships

and social adjustment. Koerber and Osterhaus (2020) also found that the advanced ToM dimension has to do with sensitivity to the principle of social equality, which in certain contexts can correlate with lower levels of subjective well-being. In addition, research by Lin and Paat (2024) and Izaguirre et al. (2021) confirms that the ability to understand the perspectives of others and navigate social dynamics is positively associated with life satisfaction in adolescence.

In the Indonesian context, Rizqi et al. (2022) found that the development of theory of mind in children in collectivist culture is closely related to socio-ethical aspects, such as prosocial behavior and sensitivity to social norms. However, most of these studies still associate the theory of mind with other variables, such as anxiety, emotion regulation, psychological homeostasis, and social support, and are more commonly conducted in primary school students and in the context of Western countries (Caputi et al., 2021; Koerber & Osterhaus, 2020; Kuntoro et al., 2023; Lin & Paat, 2024; Rizqi et al., 2022). Therefore, research on ToM and life satisfaction in adolescents in Indonesia is still relatively limited. Most recent studies have placed ToM as part of a more complex model involving specific mediation or moderation variables, so the direct influence of ToM on life satisfaction has not been studied specifically. In addition, research on adolescent subjects at the junior high school level in Indonesia that discusses ToM and satisfaction is also still very limited. This condition shows that there is a research gap that needs to be studied further.

From a developmental perspective, adolescence is an important period in the formation of self-identity and the search for social acceptance (Erikson, 1989). ToM ability allows adolescents to accurately understand the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others, so that they can form more positive interpersonal relationships, reduce social conflicts, and increase a sense of acceptance in the social environment (Happe, 1994). Such positive social experiences contribute to a better assessment of the life being lived. However, until now, research that discusses the influence of ToM on life satisfaction in adolescents in the context of Indonesian culture, especially in the city of Palembang, is still not clearly known. Therefore, the problem raised in this study is whether ToM affects life satisfaction in adolescents in the city of Palembang.

Based on these problems, this study aims to test and determine the influence of ToM on life satisfaction in adolescents in the city of Palembang. With this research, it is hoped that it can provide benefits both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study can enrich the study of social psychology and the development of the ability to understand the mental state of others on adolescent life satisfaction, as well as expand the empirical evidence in the cultural context in Indonesia. Practically, the results of this study are expected to be a source of reference for schools, parents, counselors, and education practitioners to increase awareness of the importance of mental states in adolescents. The findings of this study can also be used as a basis for the preparation of programs or interventions that aim to improve adolescents' social-cognitive abilities, so that they are able to establish positive social relationships and will ultimately affect their life satisfaction.

METHODS

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory survey design to test the influence of ToM on life satisfaction in adolescents, especially in SMP Negeri 39 Palembang. Data were collected cross-sectionally after the researcher obtained permission from the Faculty of Psychology UIN Raden Fatah Palembang (B-2196/Un.09/IX/PP.09/11/2025) and

official approval from SMP Negeri 39 Palembang (421.3/796/DISDIK/SMPN 39 PLG/2025). Participants totaled 274 students aged 12–16 years old who were selected using convenience sampling techniques (Azwar, 2022). This technique is used because the number of people who meet the criteria cannot be known for sure at the time of data collection due to the administrative data update process. In addition, the limited research time caused sampling to be carried out based on ease of access to participants who met the criteria. The sample size of 274 participants was considered adequate because it had exceeded the minimum number of 200 respondents recommended in the multivariate analysis, with the aim of obtaining stable results, and having good statistical strength (Hair et al., 2022).

Life satisfaction was measured using the Student's Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS) developed by Huebner (1991) and adapted into Indonesian by Safira (2021). The scale consists of 7 items with a 4-point Likert format (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree). An example of an item in the original language is: "My life is going well."

The ToM was measured using the Strange Stories Task by Happe (1994) which was performance-based and consisted of five stories (white lie, irony, persuasion, misunderstanding, and contrary emotions). An example of a question in the original language is: "Why did John say that, even though he knew it was not true?" Scoring is done with a range of 0 (incorrect), 1 (partial), and 2 (precise). This instrument was adapted by researchers following the procedure of Beaton et al. (2000) through forward translation, back translation, and expert review.

Before the main study, an instrument test was carried out to evaluate the psychometric quality of the measuring instrument. Data analysis was conducted using the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach with SmartPLS 4, including evaluation of convergent validity (outer loading and AVE), construct reliability (Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability), and hypothesis testing through bootstrapping with a significance level of 0.05 (Hair et al., 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study involved 274 adolescent respondents in junior high school (SMP). Data analysis was carried out using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach with the help of SmartPLS 4. Model evaluation is carried out through descriptive statistical testing, validity, reliability, and hypothesis testing.

Validity Test (Outer Loading)

The validity of the convergence is evaluated based on the outer loading value of each indicator. Hair et al. (2022) stated that reflective indicators are said to be valid if they have an *outer loading* value of ≥ 0.70 , while a value of ≥ 0.50 is still acceptable in exploratory research.

Table 1. Outer loading variabel life satisfaction

Indicator	Outer Loading
LS1	0.51
LS2	0.601
LS3	0.424
LS4	0.388
LS5	0.328

Indicator	Outer Loading
LS6	0.564
LS7	0.413

Based on table 1, all life satisfaction indicators have an outer loading value between 0.328 to 0.601. There is no indicator that reaches a value of 0.70 so the convergent validity is in the low to medium category. Hair et al. (2022) stated that a non-optimal loading value can affect the strength of the measurement model.

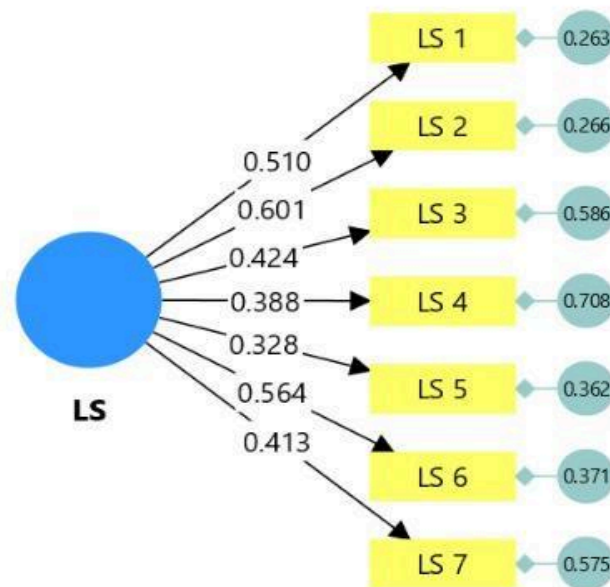


Figure 1. Test of the Measurement Model (Outer Loadings) of Life Satisfaction Variables

Based on figure 1, all indicators in the life satisfaction variable show standardized values with an outer loading range between 0.328 to 0.601. Although some values are below the ideal threshold, according to Hair et al. (2022), indicators with values above 0.40 can still be maintained in the model to maintain content validity and ensure that all variable dimensions are still represented in explaining the life satisfaction construct in this study. Meanwhile, indicators with low loading values can reduce the quality of the model because the construct representation becomes less than optimal (Hair et al., 2022). These findings show that the life satisfaction construct in this study has a moderate measurement quality.

Furthermore, the evaluation of the model within the PLS-SEM framework showed that the SRMR value of 0.065 was below the threshold of ≤ 0.08 , so it could be categorized as acceptable fit (Hair et al., 2022). Although significant CFI (0.833), TLI (0.749), RMSEA (0.096), and chi-square ($p < 0.05$) indicate a limited degree of compatibility, these indices are not the main criteria in the evaluation of the PLS-SEM model. Hair et al. (2022) emphasize that SRMR is the most relevant global measure of model fit in this approach, with values below 0.08 indicating adequate model fit. However, in terms of convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value of 0.221 is still below the $\geq$ limit of 0.50, which indicates that the construct has not been able to explain more than 50% of the variance of the indicator. Overall, the model has shown an acceptable fit based on SRMR, but the quality of the measurements is still suboptimal because the convergent validity has not been met.

Based on table 2, all ToM indicators have an outer loading value below 0.70. The TOM 3 and TOM 4 indicators have the highest values compared to other indicators, but have not yet reached the ideal limit of convergent validity. Hair et al. (2022) explained that a loading value below 0.50 indicates the contribution of a weak indicator to the construct

Table 2.
Outer Loading Variabel ToM

Indicator	Outer Loading
TOM 1	0.47
TOM 2	0.249
TOM 3	0.534
TOM 4	0.503
TOM 5	0.424

Based on figure 2, the TOM 1 indicator shows a value of 1 which serves as a marker variable for model scale identification. Although the standardized outer loading value of other indicators is in the range of 0.249–0.534, according to Hair et al. (2022), indicators with values above 0.40 can still be maintained in the research model to maintain content validity and still contribute information to the ToM construct. Meanwhile, indicators with low loading values can reduce the quality of the model because the construct representation becomes less than optimal (Hair et al., 2022). This condition shows that the measurement power of the ToM variable in this study is not completely ideal.

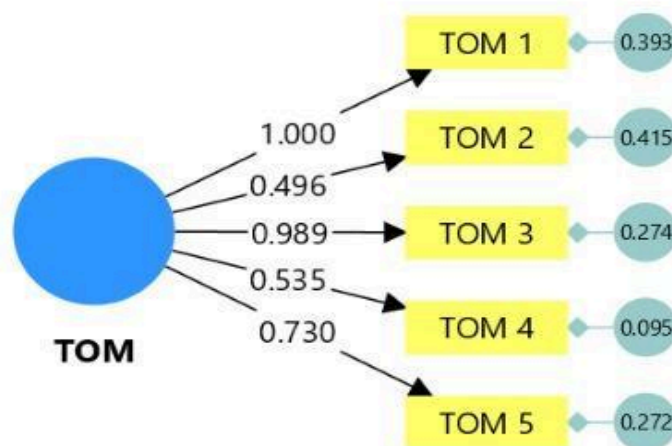


Figure 2. Test of ToM Variable Measurement Model (Outer Loadings)

In addition, the evaluation of the total overall model TOM in PLS-SEM showed an SRMR value of 0.036 which was below the $\leq$ limit of 0.08 so that it was categorized as good fit (Hair et al., 2022). Although CFI (0.961), TLI (0.923), and RMSEA (0.048) also show good model fit as well as significant chi-square ($p < 0.05$), in PLS-SEM SRMR is prioritized as a global measure of model fit. However, an AVE value of 0.20 which is still below ≥ 0.50 indicates that the validity of the convergence has not been met, so the quality of the model measurement still needs to be improved (Hair et al., 2022).

Reliability Test

Table 3.

Construct Reliability and Validity

Variabel	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)
Life Satisfaction	0.652	0.643
ToM	0.535	0.52

Based on table 3, Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values for both variables are below the ideal limit of 0.70. Hair et al. (2022) stated that if the CR value ≥ 0.70 indicates good reliability, then the value in this study shows relatively low reliability.

Descriptive Test

Table 4.

Results of Descriptive Analysis of Research Variables

Variabel	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Life Satisfaction	274	19.95	2.965	9	27
ToM	274	5.63	1.731	0	9

Based on the table 4, the results of descriptive analysis were obtained, namely for the measurement of life satisfaction variables in 274 participants obtained (M= 19.95; SD=2.965) with a minimum score of 9, and a maximum score of 27. In addition, the measurement of the ToM variable in 274 participants obtained (M=5.63; SD=1.731) with a minimum value of 0, and a maximum value of 9.

Table 5.

Categorization of Adolescent Life Satisfaction in Palembang

Category	Score Range	Frequency (f)	Percentages (%)
Low	< 14	7	2.6
Medium	14 – 21	144	52.6
Height	> 21	123	44.9
Total		274	100

The data in table 5, shows that the life satisfaction variable is dominated by the medium category, which is 144 participants (52.6%), meanwhile, the high category includes 123 participants (44.9%), and the low category includes 7 participants (2.6%). So it can be concluded that the majority of teenagers in Palembang have moderate life satisfaction skills, while the rest are spread across the high and low categories.

Table 6.

Categorization of ToM Adolescents in Palembang

Category	Score Range	Frequency (f)	Percentages (%)
Low	< 6.67	173	63.1
Medium	6.67 – 7.93	67	24.5
Height	> 7.93	34	12.4
Total		274	100

The data in table 6, shows that the ToM variable is dominated by the low category, which is 173 participants (63.1%), Meanwhile, the medium category includes 67 participants (24.5%), and the high category includes 34 participants (12.4%). So it can be concluded that the

majority of adolescents in Palembang have low ToM ability, while the rest are spread across the medium and high categories.

Hypothesis Test (Structural Model)

Hypothesis testing was carried out through a bootstrapping procedure to test the significance of the path coefficient between variables in a structural model. This procedure is used to obtain stable parameter estimates as well as determine whether the relationship between variables is statistically significant based on t-statistical and p-value (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 7.

Hypothesis Test Results

Connection	β	t-statistic	p-value
ToM $\rightarrow$ LS	-0.174	0.698	0.485

Based on table 7, the results of the analysis show that the ToM does not have a significant effect on life satisfaction because the p value of 0.485 is greater than 0.05. The t-statistical value of 0.698 is also below the critical limit of 1.96 at a significance level of 5%, so the research hypothesis is not empirically supported. The negative path coefficient (-0.174) indicates the opposite direction of the relationship, but the strength of the relationship is relatively weak and not statistically significant (Hair et al., 2022).

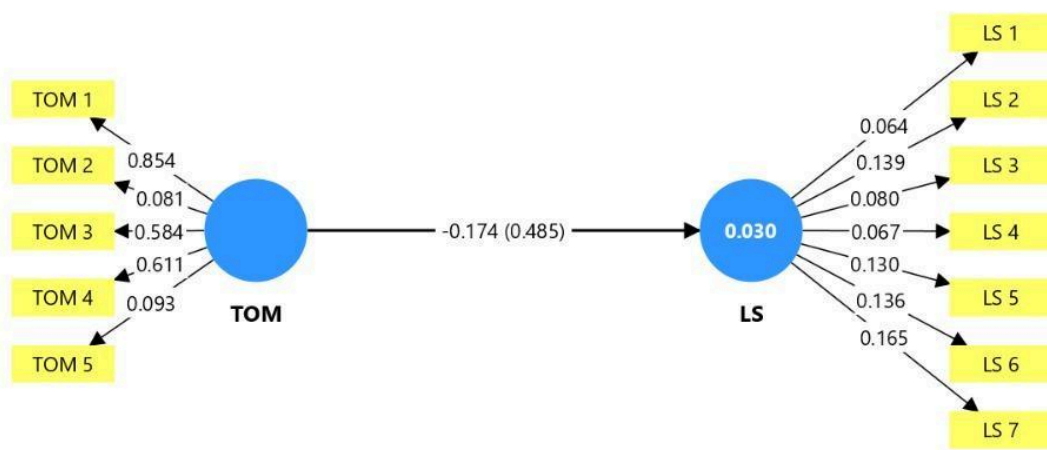


Figure 3. Structural Models and Bootstrapping Results

Based on Figure 3, it shows that the coefficient of the path from ToM to life satisfaction has a negative value of -0.174. The negative direction shows the tendency of the opposite relationship, but the bootstrapping results result in a pvalue of 0.485 so that the relationship is not statistically significant. An R^2 value of 0.03 indicates that ToM is only able to explain 3% of variance in life satisfaction. Hair et al. (2022) stated that the R^2 value of 0.25 is relatively weak, so the value of 0.03 in this study is included in the category of very weak in explaining dependent variables.

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of ToM on life satisfaction in adolescents in Palembang. Hypothesis testing was carried out using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach through SmartPLS 4. The results of the structural model analysis showed that the influence path of Theory of Mind (ToM) on life satisfaction was not significant ($\beta = -0.174$; $p = 0.485$; $R^2 = 0.03$). An R^2 value of 0.03 indicates that ToM is only able to explain 3% of life satisfaction variance, while the

remaining 97% is influenced by other variables outside the model. Thus, the research hypothesis is rejected.

Based on the evaluation of the measurement model (outer model), several indicators meet the criteria for convergent validity, even though there are outer loading values that are not optimal. However, in general, the model can still be continued at the structural evaluation stage (inner model) in accordance with the characteristics of PLS-SEM which is predictive and tolerant of non-normal data distribution. However, the low R^2 value indicates that the model has very weak explanatory power.

Theoretically, life satisfaction is an individual's cognitive evaluation of his overall quality of life (Huebner, 1991). This construct belongs to the component of subjective well-being that emphasizes a global assessment of life, not just momentary emotional conditions. In the adolescent context, the evaluation includes family domains, peer relations, academic experience, and social-emotional conditions. Meanwhile, ToM according to Happe (1994) is the cognitive-social ability to understand the thoughts, beliefs, emotions, and intentions of others. Individuals with high ToM tend to be more empathetic and able to understand other people's perspectives flexibly, while individuals with low ToM tend to have difficulty interpreting the psychological meaning behind social behavior.

Although conceptually ToM contributes to the quality of social interaction, the results of this study show that it does not directly affect the evaluation of life satisfaction. This indicates that the relationship between ToM and life satisfaction may be indirect, and requires intermediate variables such as social support, the quality of interpersonal relationships, or emotion regulation (Caputi et al., 2021; Caputi & Bosacki, 2023; Izaguirre et al., 2021; Koerber & Osterhaus, 2020; Lin & Paat, 2024).

In addition to the possibility of mediating variables, socio-cultural context also needs to be considered in understanding the relationship between the two constructs. The results of this study do not completely negate the relationship between ToM and life satisfaction, but suggest that the relationship may be contextual. In a collectivist culture such as Indonesia, the development of ToM is often more related to social and moral values as well as the ability to adapt to group norms (Kuntoro et al., 2023; Rizqi et al., 2022). Therefore, ToM does not always contribute directly to the evaluation of life satisfaction that is personal and global. Rather than acting as a direct predictor of life satisfaction, ToM is more likely to function in supporting the development of social skills that can ultimately affect well-being through indirect mechanisms.

Viewed from the empirical side, the characteristics of the data in this study are also important to explain why the relationship between ToM and life satisfaction does not show significance. Based on the categorization of hypothetical norms, the majority of adolescents were in the category of moderate life satisfaction (52.6%), followed by the high (44.9%) and low (2.6%) categories. Meanwhile, ToM ability is dominated by the low (63.1%) category, then the medium (24.5%) and high (12.4%) categories. The distribution of scores that tend to be concentrated in certain categories causes data variation to be limited. In PLS-SEM analysis, the low variation of the data can have an impact on the small path coefficient and the low R^2 value. In addition, the homogeneity of samples from one study site also has the potential to narrow the range of responses, so that the model's ability to detect structural relationships is limited.

From a developmental perspective, adolescents are at the stage of identity versus role confusion, where the formation of identity and stability of self-concept is still in the process of developing (Erikson, 1989). At this stage, both ToM ability and life satisfaction are still greatly influenced by external factors such as parental upbringing, school environment, and friendship dynamics. These developmental conditions can make the relationships between variables more complex and do not always show linear patterns in structural models. This study has several limitations that need to be considered in interpreting the research results. First, this study uses a cross-sectional design, so it cannot explain the causal relationship or changes in ToM ability and life satisfaction over time. Second, sampling uses convenience sampling techniques, so that the results of the study have limitations in generalization to the entire adolescent population. Third, the study only focused on the influence of ToM on life satisfaction, without considering other factors that have the potential to affect these two variables, such as social support, quality of friendships, parenting or self-esteem.

Therefore, further research is recommended to involve a more diverse sample, use more representative sampling techniques, include other variables as relevant mediators or moderators, and consider the use of longitudinal research designs so that both variables can be comprehensively and accurately understood.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of ToM on the life satisfaction of adolescents in Palembang. However, the PLS-SEM analysis showed no significant effect of ToM on life satisfaction and thus did not confirm the research hypothesis. These results suggest that the ability to understand the mental perspectives of others is not directly related to adolescents' life satisfaction in the context of this study. This insignificant contribution may be due to the relatively homogeneous characteristics of the participants and the possibility that other variables, such as social support, emotion regulation, and school environmental factors, have a stronger influence on life satisfaction. Although the hypothesis put forward is not supported, the findings of this study still make an important contribution to the understanding of adolescent well-being.

Theoretically, the results suggest that ToM may not be a direct predictor of life satisfaction in adolescents, so conceptual development is needed that considers the role of other psychological and social factors. Practically, these findings indicate that efforts to improve adolescent life satisfaction not only focus on the ability to understand the perspectives of others, but also need to pay attention to other factors such as social support, parental parenting, and the quality of social relationships in the school environment. Therefore, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of ToM on life satisfaction, further research is recommended to consider other factors that have the potential to play a role in explaining life satisfaction in adolescents other than ToM.

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