Marriage Satisfaction in Early Adult Women in Long-Distance Marriage

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Abstrak

Kepuasan pernikahan merupakan isu penting untuk dibahas beberapa dekade ini. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman pada wanita dewasa awal yang tengah menjalani pernikahan jarak jauh. Metode penelitian ini menggunakan kualitatif dengan desain fenomenologi, untuk melihat bagaimana pengalaman partisipan dan esensi dari pengalaman tersebut. Teknik pengumpulan data menggunakan *purposive sampling* dengan memilih partisipan sesuai dengan kriteria penelitian. Analsis data menggunakan *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan terdapat lima tema dalam kepuasan pernikahan, yaitu *understanding*, komunikasi, kebutuhan materi, kebutuhan psikologis dan cinta bertanggung jawab. Penelitian ini secara empirik dapat memberikan gambaran dan pengetahuan mengenai kepuasan pernikahan pada wanita dewasa awal yang tengah menjalani pernikahan jarak jauh dapat dilihat dari lima tema yang akan dibahas. Hasil penelitian ini diharapkan dapat mengembangkan keilmuan psikologi, khususnya dalam bidang psikologi keluarga. Perlunya penelitian lebih lanjut untuk memberikan pengembangan dalam ilmu psikologi keluarga.

Kata Kunci: Dewasa awal; kepuasan pernikahan; pernikahan jarak jauh; pasangan hidup

Abstract

Marriage satisfaction is an important issue to discuss in recent decades. This study aims to explore the experiences of early adult women who are undergoing long-distance marriage. This research method uses qualitative with a phenomenological design, to see how the participants experience and the essence of that experience. The data collection technique used purposive sampling by selecting participants according to the research criteria. Data collection was using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The results showed that there were five themes in marriage satisfaction, namely understanding, communication, material needs, psychological needs and responsible love. This research can empirically provide an overview and knowledge of marriage satisfaction in early adult women who are undergoing long-distance marriage. It can be seen from the five themes that will be discussed. The results of this study are expected to develop psychological science, especially in the field of family psychology. The need for further research to provide development in family psychology.

Keywords: Early adult; marriage satisfaction; long-distance marriage; spouse

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is an affective relationship between two people who maintain a commitment to live together and to be able to enjoy each other's relationship (Villa & Del Prette, 2013). Marriage is a commitment challenge to achieve goals that require patience and consistency between husband and wife (Ayub & Iqbal, 2012). In general, couples who are married will live together to build a family. However, in some cases, couples will undergo long-distance marriage for work reasons (Nastiti & Wismanto, 2017). Having a long-distance marriage is one of the problems in the family in the early adulthood range. The early adulthood phase is important for couples to foster love, attachment, family building, and intimacy, but building a career is equally important (Santrock, 2011).

Several studies have explained that long-distance marriages have a number of risks since partners are unable to make physical contact and sometimes lack communication (Amana et al., 2020) which is marked by difficulty in communicating, experiencing quarrels, and loneliness (Harsari, 2020). On the other side, to maintain a long-distance marriage, couples often rely on technology, such as video calls through social media. This feature makes it easier for them to build a trusting relationship since they can observe their partner's activities in real time (Lani et al., 2022). However, this type of communication only benefits those who consider online communication to be important (Sullivan et al., 2020). Various studies have explained that a long-distance marriage has challenges and requires various psychological aspects in order to help reduce conflict (Amana et al., 2020; Handayani, 2016; Litiloly & Swastiningsih, 2014; Nadia et al., 2017; Naibaho & Virlia, 2017; Prameswara & Sakti, 2016; Rubyasih, 2016). Marriage satisfaction is one of the important things to discuss in a long-distance marriage because, of course, every couple wants happiness in their family, which is one of the characteristics of marriage satisfaction (Nadia et al., 2017) and marriage satisfaction can help maintain mental health (Tavakol et al., 2020). Health indicators such as stress levels in women who undergo long-distance marriage tend to be higher than men (Anand et al., 2018) so that the wife's condition has more psychological vulnerabilities in undergoing long-distance marriages. There is another study, where it stated that wives will experience loneliness and feel the absence of husbands in caring for children (Harsari, 2020). A couple have material and sexual needs that can arise at any time and will certainly be difficult to fulfill if they are in a long-distance relationship. When one partner is not by his partner's side, it can cause several problems in a long-distance relationship (Primasari, 2020).

Several studies have provided an explanation for marriage satisfaction. Marriage satisfaction is a complex feeling that includes the pleasure and contentment felt by husbands and wives in fulfilling aspects of marriage satisfaction (Tavakol et al., 2020). Furthermore, marriage satisfaction refers to understanding, communication, division of household duties, and support for couples to spend time together (Ayub, 2010). Several researchers have revealed aspects of marriage satisfaction. Saxton (Fatimah & Cahyono, 2013) divides the aspects of marriage satisfaction into three, which are (1) material needs such as financial, physical, and housing, (2) sexual needs such as sexual exchange and intimacy, (3) psychological needs such as emotional bonds, acceptance, and appreciation. Ayub and Iqbal (2012), in detail, divide the aspects of marriage satisfaction in wives including understanding, communication, in-law relationships, compromise, and dual-earning. But still meanwhile, Tavakol et al. (2020) have conducted grounded theory research and found that the supporting aspects of marriage satisfaction are supportive friendship, responsible love, personality, interactive relationships, social status, and resources in society.

Based on the previously described explanations, the fulfillment of most marriage satisfaction needs is achievable for couples in non-long-distance marriages. In contrast, long-distance married couples encounter their primary challenge in the form of physical distance and limited physical contact. Therefore, we emphasize the following main research question: How do women involved in long-distance marriages fulfill their marriage satisfaction through non-physical means? This study aims to look at the description of marriage satisfaction through the experiences, as well as the essences of these experiences, in early adult women who undergo long-distance marriage. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used in this research in order to explore a detailed and comprehensive picture of the subjective experiences of women in long-distance marriages.

METHOD

This study uses a phenomenological qualitative method, to see how individual experiences are in carrying out a phenomenon and see the essence of the meaning in that experience (Creswell, 2007, 2013). The Interpretative Phenomenological Qualitative approach was utilized to obtain a more in-depth interpretation of the subjective experiences of marriage satisfaction among women in long-distance marriages, considering perspectives from both informants and the researcher (Kahija, 2017). Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interview, each lasting 30-40 minutes per participant. This approach was chosen to facilitate a more open exploration of issues, allowing research participants to freely express their opinions (Sugiyono, 2020). The participants collection technique used purposive sampling through open invitations on Instagram by selecting participants according to the research criteria. The data collection procedure was conducted through online interviews via cell phones and using the Zoom app after obtaining consent from participants. Informed consent was approved by all participants prior to data collection. The criteria for the participants of this study were early adult women in long-distance marriage aged 22-39 years old according to Santrock (2011) for early adult age criteria. This study consisted

of two participants, both participants were female in the early adult range. The first participant is 25 years old with 27 days of marriage and 17 days of long-distance marriage, the participant's location is in Malang and the partner is in Yogyakarta. The second participant is 33 years old, with 8 years age of marriage and the same period of long-distance marriage age, the participant's location is in Makassar and their partner is in Maluku.

Data analysis was carried out using a method compiled by Collaizi (Karimi et al., 2020) with seven steps, including (1) collecting participant descriptions with interviews via cell phones and Zoom app, (2) understanding meaning in-depth, (3) choosing important sentences from participant statements, (4) conceptualizing important themes by revealing the meaning of important parts, (5) categorizing concepts (concepts obtained are placed in categories that have the same concept), (6) making comprehensive descriptions of the phenomena under study, (7) conducting data validation.

The validity of qualitative research uses the term credibility to obtain the accuracy of the research results according to the perspective of the researcher and the participants. Credibility in this study uses member checking to see the accuracy of the data by ensuring whether the descriptions and themes that have been obtained are accurate by showing them back to research participants (Creswell, 2013). The member checking procedure was carried out by means of follow-up interviews

RESULT

Participants' characteristics is shown in **Table 1**. There are five themes produced in this study in the form of understanding, communication, material needs, psychological needs, and responsible love which will be shown in **Table 2**.

Understanding
Understanding the couple's condition is an important component in fulfilling marriage satisfaction among wives who undergo long-distance marriages. This theme contains sub-themes such as the meaning of marriage, the meaning of long-distance marriage, character adjustment, and conflict resolution.
1) The Meaning of Long-Distance Marriage
   The meaning of long-distance marriage is important for the understanding of every couple so that they can interpret the conditions they live in. Participants discuss having a long-distance marriage as the best way to achieve common goals. This meaning is confirmed by the following participant descriptions:
   "*Marriage is supposed to be uniting, not separating. Long-distance marriage is actually not the ideal choice, but base on many considerations, we finally decided to do long-distance marriage.*" (P1)
   "*We still decided on a long-distance marriage even though we felt uncomfortable with the situation we were going through*" (P1)
   "*The discomfort of long-distance marriage situation made us learn a lot about accepting the situation*" (P2)
2) *Character Adaptation*
   Character adjustment of each couple is part of understanding to realize each other's differences. Husband and wife can adjust their own character so that they can create meaningful understanding. The following is a confirmed description by a participant:
   "*Adjusting to his character, he also adapted to my character.*" (P1)
   "*I can adapt to my partner gradually, at first there were often arguments but now I can respect each other's opinions*" (P2)
3) Conflict Resolution
   Couples who can resolve conflicts can provide understanding and meaning of marriage. There are different ways of resolving conflicts in married couples, one of which is by communicating and listening to opinions. The following is a confirmed description by a participant:
   "*Resolving conflicts is of course by communicating. I communicate with my husband and we listen to each other.*" (P2)

Communication
Researchers have found that communication is a factor that can fulfill marriage satisfaction. Research findings regarding communication have two sub-themes, maintaining relationships and communication intensity.
1) Positive communication
   Maintaining a relationship through good communication can support marriage satisfaction for wives who are undergoing long-distance marriages. Participants use their spare time to ask about the condition of their partner and vice versa. The following is a confirmed description of a participant:
   "*I often ask his condition. Every day we know what his condition is like and avoiding things that allow us to turn (cheat).*" (P1)
   "*We respect each other's way of communicating even over the phone*" (P2)
2) Intensive communication
   Communication carried out by participants with their partners by taking their time to call when there is spare time. The participant's description is as follows:

"*Usually we call, if both of us have spare time we usually call each other. When we are at work, we call in our break time*." (P1)

Material Needs
Marriage satisfaction includes material needs, one of which is financial. Participants can manage finances by making plans regarding income and expenses. In addition, financial independence also determines marriage satisfaction in one of the participants. The following is a confirmed description by a participant:
1) Financial Management
   Participants make expenditure and income plans every week through the WhatsApp group and create targets for solutions to financial problems. The following is a description by participants about managing finances:
   "*There is a special group to discuss finance. So, every… what day was it, Thursday? We discuss our expenses, our income, and which ATM we want to use to collect our savings together*." (P1)
   "*There are 3 targets... pay off debts, then a house, and other necessities*." (P2)
2) Financial Independence
   One of the participants explained that they already have an income so that they can help their partner to manage and plan financially. The following is a confirmed description by a participant:
   "*We both have an income. So, I'm also not too dependent on him*." (P1)

Psychological Needs
The psychological needs of the wife are important when undergoing long-distance marriages. The results of the research findings indicate that the participants' psychological needs include affection, partner's support, gratitude, and appreciation.
1) Trust
   Participants created trust despite being in a long-distance marriage
   "*We trust each other even though we are separated by distance*" (P2)
   "*Creating our trust is giving each other news every day*" (P2)
2) Affection
   The partner expressed love when undergoing a long-distance marriage. The partner's expressions of affection for the participants were in the form of asking about their condition, darling nicknames, and appreciation for the participants. The following is a confirmed description by the participants:
   "*I am usually the one who cares more, like asking him, "What are you up to?" And I often ask, "Have you eaten? If you're free let's call*." (P1)
   "*When I was called darling, it turned out to be comfortable, being appreciated is comfortable*." (P1)
3) Partner's Support
   Partner's support is an important part of the participants' psychological needs. Social support can be in the form of support for ideals and mutual support between husband and wife. The following is a confirmed description by the participants:
   "*Just support each other dreams. That is one of the things that strengthen us even though we are in an LDM, we still feel like partners*." (P1)
   "*I give support to my husband... he also gives support to me*." (P2)
   "*Because his work is far away, well the wife must support him*." (P2)
4) Gratitude
   The findings of this study regarding gratitude in participants is accepting all circumstances, including when undergoing long-distance marriage. The following is a confirmed description by a participant:
   "*Alhamdulillah, yes we are still grateful, whatever it is*." (P2)
5) Appreciation
   Participants are rewarded by their partners in the form of praise and gifts. The following is a confirmed description by a participant:
   "*When I cook, he gives me praise, sometimes he also gives gifts*." (P2)

Responsible Love
The participant's marriage satisfaction is supported by the aspect of responsible love. The forms of responsibility can come from an example of when the participants prioritize their children even though they are not with a partner and try to provide for all the children's needs. In addition, commitment with the partner is part of the responsibility.
1) Responsibility to the child
   Children are a priority for participants because children are the future of the couple. Children's needs have always been a priority to be met so that they feel fulfilled. The following is a confirmed description by a participant:
   "*I prioritize my children. Their diaper, the milk, the food, the clothes*." (P2)
   "*We agreed that the child would live with me and my partner would be responsible for the costs*" (P2)

2) Commitment
    Commitment is an important part of responsible love for every couple. The form of commitment by the participants is carried out on a commitment to prioritize children and commitment to stay faithful in all circumstances including when undergoing long-distance marriages. The following is a confirmed description by a participant:
    "*My husband and I are committed... whatever it is, we have to prioritize the children first.*" (P2)
    "*We promised to be loyal with each other.*" (P2)

Table 1. Characteristics of Participant.

ID	P1	P2
Gender	Female	Female
Age	25 Years	33 Years
Marriage Age	27 Days	8 Years
Long-Distance Marriage Age	17 Days	8 Years
Participants' Domicile	Malang, East Java	South Sulawesi
Spouse's Domicile	Yogyakarta	Maluku
Occupation	Master's Student	Private Employee
Education	Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree
Children	None	2

Table 2. Theme, subtheme and description of participant.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Description of Participant
Understanding	The Meaning of Long-Distance Marriage	"Marriage is supposed to be uniting, not separating. LDM actually not the ideal choice, but from many considerations, we finally decided to do LDM" (P1) "We still decided on a long-distance marriage even though we felt uncomfortable with the situation we were going through" (P1) "The discomfort of long-distance marriage situation made us learn a lot about accepting the situation" (P2)
	Character Adaptation	"Adjusting to his character, he also adapted to my character" (P1) "I can adapt to my partner gradually, at first there were often arguments but now I can respect each other's opinions" (P2)
	Conflict Resolution	"Resolving conflicts is of course by communicating. I communicate with my husband and we listen to each other" (P2)
Communication	Positive Communication	"I often ask his condition. Every day we know what his condition is like and avoiding things that allow us to turn (cheat)" (P1) "We respect each other's way of communicating even over the phone"
	Communication Intensity	"Usually we call, if both of us have spare time we usually call each other. When we are at work, we call in our break time" (P1)
Material Needs	Financial Management	"There is a special group to discuss finance. So, every… what day was it, Thursday? We discuss our expenses, our income, and which ATM we want to use to collect our savings together" (P1) "There are 3 targets... pay off debts, then a house, and other necessities" (P2)
	Financial Independence	"We both have an income. So, I'm also not too dependent on him" (P1)
	Trust	"We trust each other even though we are separated by distance" (P2) "Creating our trust is giving each other news every day" (P2)
	Affection	"I am usually the one who cares more, like asking him, "What are you up to?" And I often ask, "Have you eaten? If you're free let's call" (P1)

Psychological Needs		"When I was called darling, it turned out to be comfortable, being appreciated is comfortable" (P1)
	Partner's Support	"Just support each other dreams. That is one of the things that strengthen us even though we are in an LDM, we still feel like partners" (P1) "I give support to my husband... he also gives support to me" (P2) "Because his work is far away, well the wife must support him" (P2)
	Gratitude	"Alhamdulillah, yes we are still grateful, whatever it is" (P2)
	Appreciation	"When I cook, he gives me praise, sometimes he also gives gifts" (P2)
Responsible Love	Responsibility to the child	"I prioritize my children. Their diaper, the milk, the food, the clothes" (P2) "We agreed that the child would live with me and my partner would be responsible for the costs" (P2)
	Commitment	"My husband and I are committed... whatever it is, we have to prioritize the children first" (P2) "We promised to be loyal with each other" (P2)

DISCUSSION

This study explores the experiences of early adult women undergoing long-distance marriages. The themes of the findings in this study are understanding, communication, material needs, psychological needs, and responsible love. Understanding is the comprehension of a married couple with various conditions by understanding each other. Understanding is an aspect of fulfilling marriage satisfaction, especially in women (Ayub & Iqbal, 2012), in line with the research of Tate et al. (2019) that understanding in marriage partners can increase marriage satisfaction. Our findings indicate that building understanding can be achieved by accepting the challenges of a long-distance marriage and demonstrating a willingness to comprehend the individual differences in each partner's characteristics. This involves a genuine eagerness to attentively listen to each partner's viewpoints. Lani et al. (2022) further posits that, in order to sustain long-distance marriages, couples should consistently maintain high levels of positive emotions by fostering of mutual acceptance, cooperation, support, and sharing. By maintaining specific attitudes, a couple could build trust, leading to the preservation of their long-distance marriage (Sawai et al., 2023). This could strengthen aspects of understanding. Couples who comprehend the challenges of long-distance conditions, understand each other's characters, and navigate conflicts for effective problem-solving are more likely to achieve satisfaction in their marriage.

Ayub and Iqbal (2012) suggest that communication is one aspect of marriage satisfaction. The findings in this study resulted in a communication theme in the form of relationship-maintaining patterns, such as communicating with the aim of monitoring a partner's activities and preventing them from engaging in illicit behaviors, such as cheating. Zebua and Kartikawati (2023) also state similar to this finding to couple who have long-distance marriages with a lack of communication, which could lead to a lack of trust because of the increasing sense of suspicion and uncertainty in the relationship. Besides monitoring a partner's activity, communication can be one of the ways of giving attention to a partner in a distant manner, as simple as asking about our partner's condition, as found in one of our participants. In order to maintain communication, attention is also one of the variables of happy relationships (Afdal et al., 2022). This proven interpersonal communication skill can increase marriage satisfaction in married couples (Haris & Kumar, 2018). Communication is an important thing with implications for marriage partners and families.

Material needs are one of the findings in this study, Saxton (Fatimah & Cahyono, 2013) explains that material needs are one of the aspects that can support marriage satisfaction. The findings of material need in this study are to manage financially and be financially independent. This finding found that when the couple is able to manage their finance well, it can support marriage satisfaction. Financial management could be achieved by monitoring expenses through social media and having each own income, contributing to a fuller and more secure financial situation like one of our participants did. This is also important, as the quality of life is based on the couple's capability to manage emotional and financial stress in their current relationship (Sumari et al., 2021). The results of research by Archuleta et al. (2011) have also provided findings that couples who are able to have financial satisfaction can increase marriage satisfaction.

The next finding is psychological needs, which is one aspect of marriage satisfaction by Saxton (Fatimah & Cahyono, 2013). The psychological needs in the findings of this study are affection with partner's attention and comfort, partner's support in the form of supporting mutual goals, gratitude by being grateful for their living conditions, and appreciation from partners in the form of praise and

gifts. Several research results can explain the findings on the theme of psychological needs. First, affection can contribute to marriage satisfaction, the results of the research of Jelić et al. (2014) found that affectionate behavior can predict marriage satisfaction, on the contrary, without affection with antagonistic behavior will reduce marriage satisfaction. Expressions of affection in the findings of this study are given by partners such as providing comfort and attention, reinforced by Sadiq (2014) research that life satisfaction in wives can be supported by expressions of affection. Second, there are findings of partner's support, confirmed by research by Yedirir and Hamarta (2015), Gallimore et al. (2006) that the importance of partner's support is to increase marital satisfaction. Third, the research findings state that the participants are grateful for their family condition. Gratitude is a predictor of marriage satisfaction, especially in wives which have been empirically proven (Yusuf & Latifa, 2019). Fourth, the appreciation given to the wife. Therefore, it is important for couples to give appreciation towards what has been done by their partner. There is a research result that appreciation has a positive relation with marriage satisfaction (Abbasi & Montazar, 2019). Our findings highlight that the majority of wives who predominantly handle household chores alone, as the husband becomes the main provider in a distant relationship, can still achieve marital satisfaction. Citing Sumari et al. (2021), it is common for husbands to have the obligation to fulfill their wives' sexual and material needs. However, this condition may not apply to long-distance marriages when it comes to fulfilling sexual needs. Additionally, it's worth remembering that one of our participants still maintains her own income, ensuring that she's not fully dependent on her husband. This research findings' emphasis on positive affections like the explanations above plays a crucial role in maintaining long-distance relationships for our participants.

The last finding in this study is responsible love, participants share responsibility for children's needs and commitment to their partners. Responsible love is an aspect of marriage satisfaction in the research of (Tavakol et al., 2020), which is characterized by their responsibility to partners, loving each other. Children become an important aspect for every couple because children are part of a marriage perfection, as the couple is trying to give their best in taking care of their children. This explanation is supported by the results of this study that the participants have a commitment to their partner in the form of loyalty and to do their best for the child as well as their responsibility to meet all the children's needs. This commitment to provide for their children, in line with the research of Pedro et al. (2012) that the practice of parenting can create a broader marriage that is mediated by the assistance of a spouse. Even though participants are in long-distance marriages, their commitment can create a sense of responsibility. Faqihatur Rohmah et al. (2020) stated commitments occur due to several things: 1) personal and moral reasons, where spouses have already promised to maintain the relationship whether in good or bad situations; 2) children, they believe children shouldn't be sacrificed for their own matters. Therefore, such is the importance of commitment in married couples to achieve marriage satisfaction (Hou et al., 2019). This study has a limitation due to its small number of participants. In future research, it would be beneficial to include a larger and more diverse group of participants to ensure that the findings can be applied to a broader range of situations and to gain a deeper understanding of the topic. Furthermore, the need for additional research could contribute to the development of family psychology topics, particularly in areas like family well-being and problem-solving within this topic.

CONCLUSION

Marriage satisfaction is an aspect needed in marriage to create family well-being. Long-distance marriage in early adult women who are in the phase of needing affection, is a challenge in itself. Various psychological dynamics occur to create marital satisfaction. Understanding, communication, material needs, psychological needs and responsible love are important themes in achieving satisfaction in marriage for every woman.

IMPLICATION

This study can be implicated in early adult women who undergo long-distance marriages. Research themes can be a reference in increasing marital satisfaction and developing family psychology as well as being a reference for couples who will and are undergoing long-distance marriages.

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