



## Examining the potential role of self-transcendence in the relationship between filial piety and meaning in life among Batak Toba young adults

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the mediating role of self-transcendence in the relationship between filial piety and life meaning among young Batak adults. Cultural values, such as Dalihan Na Tolu principle and filial piety, are believed to play a central role in shaping individuals' perceptions of life's meaning. This quantitative correlational study involved 151 young Batak adults aged 18–40 years, selected through purposive sampling. The instruments used include the Indonesian-adapted versions of the Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ-21), Dual Filial Piety Scale (DFPS), and Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ). Mediation analysis revealed that self-transcendence did not serve as a significant mediator in the relationship between either reciprocal or authoritarian filial piety and meaning in life. However, a significant direct effect was found between authoritarian filial piety and meaning in life. These findings suggest that respect and obedience toward parents, as emphasized in authoritarian filial piety, positively contribute to the development of life meaning in the Batak cultural context. This study offers both theoretical and practical implications for understanding the importance of local cultural values in supporting psychological well-being, serving as a foundation for culturally sensitive interventions for young Batak Toba adults.

**Keywords:** *filial piety, self-transcendence, meaning in life, Batak culture, young adulthood*

### 1. Introduction

In life, everyone goes through various stages that have specific developmental tasks to be fulfilled, serving as the foundation for fulfilling developmental tasks in the next stage of life (Santrock, 2013). One of the life stages that must be passed is early adulthood. Early adulthood is a transitional developmental stage that bridges the gap between adolescence and adulthood, during which individuals face numerous challenges and changes. According to Hurlock (2010), early adulthood typically begins at the age of 18 and continues until approximately 40. During this period, individuals will choose a specific career field, begin thinking about work, select life partners, build a family, and take on responsibilities as part of a particular community or culture (Hurlock, 2010).

Schwartz (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022; S. H. Schwartz, 1994, 2012a) and his theory of fundamental values explain that every community or culture has values that influence individuals' perceptions and behaviors in daily life, including how individuals seek and create meaning in their lives. Furthermore, Schwartz (S. H. Schwartz, 1994, 2012a) proposed that 10 universal basic values can explain the fundamental motives underlying individual behavior in various cultural and social contexts. The ten basic values put forward by Schwartz are self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power, security, conformity, tradition,

benevolence, and universalism. In his theory, Schwartz grouped these ten basic values into four dimensions of higher-order values, which explain how these ten basic values interact and relate to each other. The four higher-order value dimensions are openness to change, self-transcendence, self-enhancement, and conservation (Schwartz, 2012a). The dimension of openness to change consists of basic values that focus on individuals' personal needs to explore new things and be innovative in experiencing change and growth. Unlike openness to change, the conservation dimension emphasizes the need for security, maintaining order, the status quo, and stability within the sociocultural environment. The self-enhancement dimension focuses on achieving accomplishments that strengthen individual identity in the pursuit of excellence. The self-transcendence dimension encompasses basic values that prioritize social interests and welfare. In this case, individuals are required to shift their focus from personal interests to larger ones, such as relationships with the community, spiritual beliefs, or moral principles that form the foundation of cultural values in society.

In Batak society, one of the moral principles that serves as the foundation for prioritizing social order and balance in community life is *daliha na Tolu* (Simanjuntak et al., 2022). *Daliha na Tolu* is a metaphor of three stone hearths that must support each other to maintain harmony and balance (Samosir & Pandian, 2023). The fundamental things emphasized from the *daliha na Tolu* are "somba marhula-hula, manat mardongan tubu, and elek marboru" (Harianja & Sudrajat, 2021). *Somba marhula-hula* means that individuals must respect the *hula-hula* or the family from the wife's or mother's side. The principle of *manat mardongan tubu* emphasizes the importance of caution in dealing with *dongan tubu* or relatives. *Elek Marboru* emphasizes the need for a patient and gentle attitude toward *boru* or daughters. According to Armawi (2008), the Batak people exhibit a high level of compliance and obedience to the three principles of *daliha na Tolu*, as they are perceived as a means to achieve meaning and purpose in life.

In addition to *daliha na Tolu*, Batak culture also emphasizes the importance of children's devotion to their parents. In this case, children need to respect, care for, and obey their parents as a form of honoring the moral and spiritual authority that parents possess (Yeh & Bedford, 2003). The purpose of life in Batak culture is reflected in three main values known as the 3H concept, namely *hagabeon*, *hasangapon*, and *hamoraon* (Hutahaean & Agustina, 2020). *Hagabeon* means to have descendants as a form of continuing the clan and the family lineage. *Hasangapon* refers to the honor earned through commendable behavior, obedience, and achievements that bring honor to the family. Meanwhile, *hamoraon* describes well-being or prosperity characterized by economic success.

The 3H values indicate that devotion to parents is a crucial aspect of the Batak cultural value system, which governs relationships within the family and serves as a moral benchmark for children. Within the framework of cross-cultural psychology, this form of devotion aligns with the concept of filial piety, which emphasizes respect, obedience, and care for one's parents. Yeh and Bedford (2003) explain that filial piety can manifest in two forms: reciprocal filial piety and authoritarian filial piety. Reciprocal filial piety emphasizes warm and reciprocal interaction between children and parents, where both parties support, help, and care for each other throughout their lives. Meanwhile, authoritarian filial piety emphasizes obedience, respect, and the child's willingness to maintain the family's good name and bring pride to the parents, even if it means placing personal interests below their will.

Sun, Yang, Jiang, Chen, and Xu's (2023) study of 343 students in China found a significant relationship between filial piety and life meaning. Furthermore, Sun et al. (2023) found that both reciprocal and authoritarian filial piety were positively correlated with a sense of meaning in life. In addition to filial piety, Li et al. (2021) also found that cultural values can influence individuals' sense of meaning in life. Therefore, based on the results of previous studies, this research aims to explore how self-transcendence, reflected through the principle of *daliha na Tolu*, can mediate the relationship between filial piety and meaning in life within the Batak cultural context. This research is important because it can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence the meaning of life for young people in the Batak culture. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of interventions or programs aimed at enhancing individuals' sense of meaning in life, particularly during the young adult developmental stage, which is prone to psychological problems such as stress, depression, and anxiety (Arnett, 2000; Mahmoud et al., 2012; S. J. Schwartz et al., 2009). Additionally, this research is also expected to provide new insights into the role of culture and traditional values in shaping the meaning of life for young people in the Batak Toba tribe. By understanding how filial piety and self-transcendence interact to influence the meaning of life, this research will contribute to enriching knowledge about the relationship between culture and psychological well-being.

## **2. Method**

This research employs a quantitative, correlational method to examine the mediating effect of self-transcendence on the relationship between filial piety and meaning in life within the Batak culture.

### *Research Participants*

The participants in this study are young adults with a Batak cultural background, aged 18 to 40 years. The sampling technique used to select participants was non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling. According to Sugiyono (Sugiyono, 2017), the purposive sampling technique is suitable for quantitative research because the researcher can determine the sample based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. This technique allows the researcher to select respondents who are considered most suitable and capable of providing data representative of the variables being studied.

#### *Data Collection Techniques*

Data collection was done using Microsoft Office Forms, which included a research description, informed consent, research measurement tools, and demographic data.

#### *Research Instrument*

Self-transcendence in Batak culture will be measured using the 21-item Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ-21) (Beramendi & Zubieta, 2017), which has been translated into the Indonesian language. The PVQ-21 consists of 21 items, with a Likert scale range of 1 to 6. Sandy et al. (2017) found that the PVQ-21 has good validity and reliability. To measure filial piety, the Dual Filial Piety Scale (DFPS), which has been adapted into Indonesian (Sugianto et al., 2024), will be used. The meaning of life will be measured using the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) (Steger et al., 2006), which has also been adapted into Indonesian.

#### *Validity and Reliability Test Results of the Measurement Instrument*

In testing the validity of the measurement instrument, the researcher used the corrected item-total correlation value with an acceptable coefficient of at least 0.2 (Friedenberg, 1995; Sugiono, 2017), and the reliability of the measurement instrument was tested using Cronbach's Alpha value with an acceptable coefficient of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1994). Here are the results of the validity and reliability tests obtained:

*Table 1: Results of the Validity and Reliability Test of the Measurement Tool*

Measurement Tool	Variable/Dimension	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Item-rest Correlation
<i>POV-21</i>	<i>Self-Transcendence</i>	5	.702	.349 - .600
<i>Dual Filial Piety Scale</i>	<i>Reciprocal Filial Piety</i>	8	.774	.287 - .641
	<i>Authoritarian Filial Piety</i>	8	.823	.405 - .684
<i>Meaning in Life</i>		9	.826	.399 - .636

Based on the psychometric test results above, the measuring instrument used has good reliability and validity.

#### *Data Analysis Techniques*

The data analysis process will use the Jeffrey's Amazing Statistics Program (JASP) version 0.18.3.0. Before conducting hypothesis testing, the researcher first performed reliability and validity tests on the research measurement instrument. Reliability testing was conducted using the Cronbach Alpha value, with a minimum coefficient criterion of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1994). Validity testing is conducted using item-rest correlation values. After conducting validity and reliability tests, the researcher performed a hypothesis test to examine the role of self-transcendence in the relationship between filial piety and life meaning.

### **3. Result**

#### *Participant Characteristics*

The study included 151 participants from the Batak Toba ethnic group. Most respondents were female, comprising 102 respondents (67.55%), while the remaining 49 respondents were male (32.45%). The study respondents' age range was dominated by the 18- to 21-year-old group (67.55%), with 80 respondents (52.98%) residing in North Sumatra Province. Participants who can actively speak the local language (Batak Toba) number 87 (57.61%), 89 (58.94%) understand *Dalihan na Tolu* as the philosophy of Batak culture, and 94 (62.25%) believe that *hagabeon*, *hamoraon*, and *hasangapon* are the goals of life for the Batak Toba community.

*Table 2: Participant Characteristics*

Characteristics		Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	49	32.45
	Female	102	67.55
Status	Single	134	88.74

	Married	17	11.26
Age	18-21 years	102	67.55
	22-25 years	15	9.93
	26-29 years	6	3.97
	30-33 years	6	3.97
	34-37 years	9	5.96
	38-40 years	13	8.60
Residence	Sumatera Utara Province	80	52.98
	Outside Sumatra Utara Province	71	47.02
Can actively speak the Batak Toba language	Yes	87	57.62
	No	64	42.38
Understanding <i>Dalihan Na Tolu</i> as the philosophy of life in the Batak culture	Yes	89	58.94
	No	62	41.06
Believing <i>hagabeon</i> , <i>hasangapon</i> , and <i>hamoraon</i> are the purpose of life	Yes	94	62.25
	No	57	37.75

### Mediation Model Analysis Results

Mediation analysis in this study used the JASP program version 0.14.1.0. The results of the mediation analysis in this study indicated that *self-transcendence* did not mediate the relationship between filial piety and life meaning.

*Table 3. Indirect effects coefficients*

							95% Confidence Interval	
			Estimate	Std. Error	z-value	p	Lower	Upper
Reciprocal Filial Piety	→ Self-Transcendence	→ Meaning In Life	0.039	0.034	1.149	0.250	-0.028	0.106
Authoritarian Filial Piety	→ Self-Transcendence	→ Meaning In Life	-0.004	0.014	-0.309	0.757	-0.031	0.023

*Note.* Delta method standard errors, normal theory confidence intervals, ML estimator.

Table 4: Indirect effects coefficients

						95% Confidence Interval	
		Estimate	Std. Error	z-value	p	Lower	Upper
Reciprocal Filial Piety	→ Meaning In Life	0.120	0.176	0.680	0.496	-0.225	0.464
Authoritarian Filial Piety	→ Meaning In Life	0.262	0.086	3.055	0.002	0.094	0.431

*Note.* Delta method standard errors, normal theory confidence intervals, ML estimator.

The table above shows that there is a significant direct effect between authoritarian filial piety and meaning in life, with an estimated value of 0.262 and a p-value of  $< .005$ . These results suggest that authoritarian filial piety can impact one's sense of meaning in life. This study's analysis also shows the total effect of authoritarian filial piety on meaning in life, as shown in the following table:

Table 5: Total effects coefficients

						95% Confidence Interval	
		Estimate	Std. Error	z-value	p	Lower	Upper
Reciprocal Filial Piety	→ Meaning In Life	0.159	0.177	0.899	0.369	-0.187	0.505
Authoritarian Filial Piety	→ Meaning In Life	0.258	0.087	2.970	0.003	0.088	0.429

Note. Delta method standard errors, normal theory confidence intervals, ML estimator.

The table above shows that there is a total effect or significant total influence of authoritarian filial piety on the meaning of life with a p-score of  $< .005$  and an estimated value of 0.258. In addition to the above results, further analysis was conducted to examine the correlation between variables and research variable dimensions.

Table 6: Correlation between Research Variables

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1). Self-transcendence	—					
(2). Reciprocal filial piety	0.214**	—				
(3). Authoritarian filial piety	0.137	0.557*	—			
		**				
(4). Meaning in life	0.247**	0.249*	0.32	—		
	*		1***			
(5). Search for meaning	0.262**	0.274*	0.31	0.882	—	
	**		1***	***		
(6). Presence of meaning	0.225**	0.206*	0.26	0.884	0.595	—
			2**	***	***	

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Based on Table 6, it was found that self-transcendence has a positive correlation with reciprocal filial piety ( $r = 0.214$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and meaning in life ( $r = 0.247$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Authoritarian filial piety was found to be not significantly correlated with self-transcendence. However, it has a significant correlation with meaning in life ( $r = .321$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). When examining the correlation between the dimensions of meaning in life, it was found that both the search for meaning and the presence of meaning dimensions have a significant positive correlation with self-transcendence and both types of filial piety. The search for meaning dimension is positively correlated with self-transcendence ( $r = 0.262$ ,  $p < .01$ ), reciprocal filial piety ( $r = 0.274$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and authoritarian filial piety ( $r = 0.311$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Meanwhile, the presence of the meaning dimension is positively correlated with self-transcendence ( $r = 0.225$ ,  $p < .01$ ), reciprocal filial piety ( $r = 0.206$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and authoritarian filial piety ( $r = 0.262$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

#### 4. Discussion

This study aims to investigate the role of self-transcendence in the relationship between filial piety and life meaning among young Batak individuals. The results of this study found that self-transcendence does not play a significant mediating role in the relationship between filial piety and meaning in life among young Batak people. However, this study supports the findings of Sun et al. (2023), which revealed that filial piety has a significant positive correlation with life meaning. This means that the higher the value of filial piety among young Batak people, the greater the sense of meaning in life they feel.

Yeh and Bedford (2003) explain that reciprocal filial piety is a child's devotion to their parents based on gratitude, love, and appreciation for them. Within this framework, children feel compelled to reciprocate the love and sacrifices of their parents, which strengthens interpersonal relationships, meaning, and purpose in life. Conversely, authoritarian filial piety is an attitude of devotion based on obedience and compliance with parents, as dictated by the child's role within the family.

In Batak culture, which upholds traditional values, internalizing the values of *dalihan na Tolu* can help young people understand their roles and responsibilities in life. By fulfilling their role in culture, individuals can have clear goals, which can contribute to family well-being and ultimately strengthen the meaning of their lives. This finding reinforces Yeh et al. (2013), who demonstrate that in Chinese culture, filial piety encompasses not only hierarchical obedience to parents but also a reciprocal bond rooted in affection, moral responsibility, and mutual respect between children and parents, thereby fostering family harmony and the continuity of cultural values. For the Batak people, having descendants (*hagabeon*) is one way to pass down their clan or lineage. Therefore, through obedience or devotion to parents, reflected in the life goal of *hagabeon*, children can preserve family traditions, build intergenerational relationships, and ensure the continuity of the clan's lineage.

Children who are obedient (devoted) to their parents and follow family rules are also considered to bring honor (*hasangapon*) to the extended family. In Batak society, honor not only reflects the individual but also the entire family. One way to achieve this is by pursuing higher education (Haloho, 2022; Hutahaeon & Agustina, 2020) or by attaining a respected social position in society. Additionally, a child's devotion to their parents can also be reflected in fulfilling their economic obligations to the family. In Batak culture, children who are successful and financially well-off (*hamoraon*) are considered a sign of success for their parents and extended family. In the context of Batak culture, authoritarian filial piety can be a means of internalizing the collective and family-based life goals of 3H (*hagabeon*, *hasangapon*, and *hamoraon*).

The three values of *hagabeon*, *hasangapon*, and *hamoraon* (3H) are inseparable from the *dalihan na tolu* value system, which forms the foundation of social relations in Batak society. The *dalihan na tolu* principle, which emphasizes the balance of roles between *hula-hula*, *dongan tubu*, and *boru*, imposes moral and social responsibilities on each individual to maintain family harmony and honor. Within this framework, *hagabeon* is realized through the continuation of the *marga* lineage. At the same time, *hasangapon* is expressed in mutually respectful relationships across the roles of *hula-hula*, *dongan tubu*, and *boru*. *Hamoraon*, in turn, emerges as the result of hard work and support from family and kin. Thus, *dalihan na Tolu* is not only a social system that regulates relationships between relatives but can also be a value framework that shapes how young Batak people interpret success, honor, and well-being in life. Through the internalization of these principles and value systems, young people learn that personal achievement has collective meaning, as the success of one family member also elevates the dignity of the family and the entire clan.

This study did not find any mediating effect of self-transcendence in the relationship between filial piety and meaning in life. This study may be because the concept of self-transcendence proposed by Schwartz encompasses broader universal and benevolent values, extending beyond family or community groups (S. H. Schwartz, 2012b; S. H. Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990). Meanwhile, in the Batak Toba culture, authoritarian filial piety tends to emphasize the values of loyalty, respect for the immediate family, and the clan (*marga*) community. Universal values in self-transcendence may be less relevant, making it a weak mediator between filial piety and the meaning of life for young Batak people. For many young people in the Batak Toba culture, the meaning of life is often derived from values or obligations related to family, such as making one's parents proud, having children to continue the clan's lineage, and maintaining a good financial standing (Barus et al., 2019). In this regard, authoritarian filial piety can directly contribute to the meaning of life without the need for mediating variables.

Although this study highlights the important role of Batak cultural values in understanding the relationship between filial piety and life meaning, it has several methodological and contextual limitations. First, the measurement instruments used remain general in nature and do not yet fully accommodate the distinctive values of *Dalihan na Tolu* and the 3H. Therefore, it is necessary to adapt indicators that are more sensitive to the Batak cultural context so that the resulting mediation mechanisms can more deeply reflect the dynamics of Batak sociocultural relationships. Second, the demographic data distribution of participants, which was dominated by women in the early adulthood stage (18-21 years), likely influenced the research results, considering that the process of internalizing cultural values is still ongoing at this stage. The immature understanding and role in internalizing Batak values can limit the strength of the relationship between variables, so it is suggested that future research involve a wider age range.

Additionally, several studies suggest the presence of potential variables that could enrich the conceptual model of this research, such as family cohesion (Olson et al., 1985), self-concept (Markus & Kitayama, 2014), and

religiosity (Pargament, 1997), all of which are rooted in spirituality and traditional values. These variables could serve as mediators explaining how the value of filial piety translates into individuals' sense of meaning, social connectedness, and psychological well-being. Therefore, future research is suggested to develop more culturally calibrated measurement tools and test a comprehensive mediation model within the context of Batak society (Sibarani, 2012).

This study found that self-transcendence does not act as a mediating variable in the relationship between filial piety and meaning in life among young Batak people. However, authoritarian filial piety has been shown to have a direct influence on the meaning of life. This finding confirms that internalizing Batak cultural values – particularly the principle of *daliha na Tolu* and the life goals of the 3H (*hagabeon*, *hasangapon*, and *hamoraon*) – can serve as a foundation for young Batak people to find meaning in life rooted in social responsibility, family honor, and the continuity of clan generations. Thus, the results of this study enrich our understanding of how filial piety is interpreted and experienced in the context of collectivist societies, highlighting the importance of considering local cultural values in studies on the meaning of life among young people.

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