

## The Influence of Social Relationships, Self-Esteem, and Empathy on Schadenfreude

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### Abstract

This study aims to examine the variables of social relationship, self-esteem, and empathy towards schadenfreude in Pagutan Villagers, Mataram, Indonesia. The researcher hypothesizes that there is a significant influence on the variables of social relations, self-esteem, and empathy towards schadenfreude in Pagutan Villagers. The population in this study is people who live in Pagutan Village and are aged between 22-55 years. The respondents in this study found 500 people. This sample was taken using a non-probability sampling technique, namely purposive sampling. The researcher used the schadenfreude scale, the social relationship scale, the Rosenberg self-esteem scale, and the interpersonal reactivity index. Test the validity of the measuring instrument using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) technique. Data analysis used multiple regression technique. The results of data analysis show that communication, self-esteem fantasy, and empathetic attention have a significant effect on schadenfreude. Meanwhile, social contact, perspective taking and its effect are not significant on schadenfreude. The results of the study also obtained an R-square result of .330 or 33%. That is, the proportion of variance from Schadenfreude explained by all independent variables is 33%, while the remaining 67% is influenced by other variables outside this study. The researcher hopes that the results of this study will be reviewed and developed again in further research by adding other variables.

**Keywords:** empathy, schadenfreude, self-esteem, social relationship

### Abstrak

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji variabel hubungan sosial, harga diri, dan empati terhadap schadenfreude di Desa Pagutan, Mataram, Indonesia. Peneliti menghipotesiskan bahwa terdapat pengaruh yang signifikan antara variabel hubungan sosial, harga diri, dan empati terhadap schadenfreude di Desa Pagutan. Populasi dalam penelitian ini adalah masyarakat yang berdomisili di Desa Pagutan dan berusia antara 22-55 tahun. Responden dalam penelitian ini berjumlah 500 orang. Sampel ini diambil dengan menggunakan teknik non-probability sampling yaitu purposive sampling. Peneliti menggunakan skala schadenfreude, skala hubungan sosial, skala harga diri Rosenberg, dan indeks reaktivitas interpersonal. Uji validitas alat ukur menggunakan teknik confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Analisis data menggunakan teknik regresi berganda. Hasil analisis data menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi, fantasi harga diri, dan perhatian empati berpengaruh signifikan terhadap schadenfreude. Sedangkan kontak sosial, pengambilan perspektif dan pengaruhnya tidak signifikan terhadap schadenfreude. Hasil penelitian juga diperoleh hasil R-square sebesar .330 atau 33%. Artinya, proporsi varians dari schadenfreude yang dijelaskan oleh semua variabel independen adalah 33%, sedangkan sisanya 67% dipengaruhi oleh variabel lain di luar penelitian ini. Peneliti berharap agar hasil penelitian ini dapat ditinjau kembali dan dikembangkan lagi pada penelitian selanjutnya dengan menambahkan variabel lain.*

**Kata kunci:** empati, harga diri, hubungan sosial, schadenfreude

## Introduction

Without us realizing there is a phenomenon of emotion yangng spread around us, which is a phenomenon that is often given the term "happy above the suffering of others" is an allusion to an emotion of pleasure, pleasure, or funny when seeing the distress of others. Increasingly, this phenomenon was perceived by most people and over time became a cultural and socially widespread in the community (Leach et al., 2015). In the discussion of psychological science this phenomenon is called *schadenfreude*. According to Smith et al. (1996) *schadenfreude* is a feeling of emotion favors and sometimes can be raised as an expression of happy emotions or happy when seeing others experiencing distress. *Schadenfreude* is a psychological problem that can be felt internally in humans, so *schadenfreude* is often said to be a dark nature of the human self (Smith, 2013). Not only a dark nature of the human self, *schadenfreude* is also said to be an emotion that can not be accepted socially, because this *schadenfreude* can cause social conflict if manifested by emotional expression (Smith & van Dijk, 2018).

In Indonesia it self, *schadenfreude* can be seen from several social phenomena such as, gossip culture, prank, and competition in a political and sports atmosphere (Syahid & Akbar, 2020). In Wei & Lei (2020) it is also revealed that *schadenfreude* is often found in social media users, due to social media content that shows someone slipping, falling or being beaten, which intends to laugh at the laughter of people watching the video. In the context of rural communities Hafizah (2019) said that this *schadenfreude* can be found also in the life of rural communities.

According to the Central Statistics Agency of West Nusa Tenggara province, in 2015 the welfare level of rural communities in Mataram was still below 10%. This resulted in friction among the community related to social and economic status is still common. So it is a strong assumption that *schadenfreude* triggered through economic competition is very obvious. This is in line with the research (Smith & Van Dijk, 2018) that *schadenfreude* is often triggered by power struggles and social status among the community. In tune with that Feather (1989) also argues that *schadenfreude* in society is closely related to the clinical problem of Tall Poppy Syndrome in which a person will drop another person or friend who is more accomplished than him. But certainly the scientific cause of *schadenfreude* is still a lot of debate and disagreements from previous researchers, so the scientific study of *schadenfreude* still needs to be continued.

In addition, *schadenfreude* also has several factors that affect, such as the relationship with social relationships, where *schadenfreude* will not have bad implications with social relationships if there is no inhibitory factor. According to Konrad (2002) envy, *schadenfreude* and altruism have a positive correlation and can be mutually beneficial. If there is a harmonious advantage, the social relations that occur will be harmonious. The point is, *schadenfreude* can be suppressed emergence within a person if one's social relationships can be more dominant. Feather (1999) argues that the appearance of *shadenfreude* is not automatically related to the positive or negative results of the other party. According to Feather (1999) aspects of justice and social comparison always appear on *schadenfreude*. That is, when you feel happy because others get a disaster means there is a comparison between yourself and the person who receives the disaster.

Many studies have linked *schadenfrude* to a wide variety of psychological aspects. A scientific study investigated the influence of self-esteem with *schadenfreude* on a person. Fischcer & Manstead (2008) revealed that sharing emotional experiences would result in intimate interpersonal relationships. This reinforces the argument that if someone shares their emotional experiences (including *schadenfreude*) with others, that person will experience an increase in self-esteem. And also individuals in general, express and share the emotions they feel on someone they trust or with people they expect to be able to respond well to them (Fischer, et.al 2018; Fischer & Manstead, 2008).

There is a well-known hypothesis that empathy is an important driver of prosocial behavior. In an empathic response, a person steps into the other person's shoes and shares the same feeling, which is caused to exhibit prosocial behavior (Batson, et.al 1981; Decety, et.al 2016; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Masten, et.al 2011). One well-designed study showed that people showed an empathic response when

they saw someone else in pain. The more empathy an individual feels, the more often the individual makes altruistic decisions towards someone in the next allocation task (Hein et al., 2016). However, empathy will not always appear because it is very fragile and can be dampened or even disturbed by social context (Cikara, et.al 2011; Fu, et.al 2017; Hein & Singer, 2008; Smith, et.al 2009; Stürmer, et.al 2006). For example, empathy can be modulated by interpersonal distance or interpersonal preference. People will usually show empathy only to people they like, while they will show less empathy or even the opposite emotionally, such as *schadenfreude*, to people they don't like (Singer et al., 2006). Based on the description above, the researcher is interested in researching " The Influence of Social Relationships, Self-Esteem, and Empathy on *Schadenfreude*".

## Methods

This study took the population of the pagutan village community who have ages between 22-55 years amounting to 500 people. Sampling technique in this study is non-probability sampling with purposive sampling method, where not all samples have the same opportunity and researchers determine specific criteria in achieving the objectives of this study.

The measuring instruments used in this study have been modified to suit the purpose of the study. The *schadenfreude* measuring instrument uses a modified *schadenfreude* scale by Syahid & Akbar (2020) adapted to The Theory of Smith et al. (1996) consists of 60 items; Social relationship measuring instruments using social relationship scales constructed by researchers based on Soekanto theory (2012) (in Arifin & Hambali, 2015) consists of 23 items; Self-esteem measuring instrument using Rosenberg's Self-esteem Scale designed by Rosenberg (1965) consists of 10 items; Empathy measuring instruments using the Interpersonal Reactivity Index designed by Davis (1980) consisted of 28 items.

This study uses a quantitative approach. Test the validity of items used by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to see unidimensional fit models and valid items. While research hypothesis testing uses multiple regression analysis to test the influence of free variables on bound variables using true score estimates.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

The first step is to test the validity of the item with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The CFA results are present in **Table 1**. Based on **Table 1**, it can be seen that all measuring instruments show  $p$ -value  $> .05$  and RMSEA  $< .05$ , so that all models are declared fit.

The second step is to look at the value of the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) to find out the large proportion of the influence of independent variables on dependent variables. The value of R Square can be seen in **Table 2**. Based on **Table 2**, it can be known that the R-Square value is .330 or 33%. This value means that the proportion of variable *schadenfreude* that can be explained by social relationship variables (social contact, competition), cell-esteem, and empathy (perspective taking, fantasy, empathic concern, personal distress) is 33%. The other 67% were influenced by other factors or variables that also influenced *schadenfreude* beyond the discussion in the study.

The third step is to look at the results of the F test to determine the effect of independent variables on dependent variables whether or not. The results of test F are found in **Table 3**. Based on the results of the F test in **Table 2**, above, the level of significance ( $p$ ) in this study is .000. The model requirement is said to be significant if  $p < .05$ . Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected, so that there is a significant influence between the dimensions of social relationships (social contact, competition), cell-esteem variables, and dimensions of empathy (perspective taking, fantasy, empathic concern, personal distress) on *schadenfreude* in the village community of Mataram, Indonesia.

The fourth step is to look at the regression coefficient value of each independent variable. The value of the regression coefficient in each research variable can be seen in **Table 4**. From the regression

equation, it can be seen that there are four variables in this study that have a significant regression coefficient value to schadenfreude and vice versa, namely; (1) communication, (2) self-esteem, (3) fantasy, and (4) empathic concern.

Cross tabulation analysis was carried out to describe the relationship between variables in a simple way. In this study, cross tabulation was performed between suicidal ideation and life situation status using raw data. Based on the **Table 5**, it can be seen that the majority of the elderly who live alone or with a partner and other people are more prone to experiencing suicidal ideation in the high category. While the elderly who live only with their partners, only with children, with their spouses and children, and live with other people are more likely to experience suicidal ideation in the low category.

**Table 1.** Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Instrument	Dimensions	Chi square	df	P-value	RMSEA
1 Geriatric Suicide Ideation Scale		20.86	14	.10536	.046
2 Interpersonal Needs Questionnaire	Perceived Burdensomeness	6.16	4	.18769	.049
	Thwarted Belongingness	8.35	6	.21379	.041
3 Centrality of Religiosity Scale	Intellectual	.02	1	.88570	.000
	Ideology	.00	0	1.00000	.000
	Group Worship	.89	1	.34416	.000
	Private Practice	.11	1	.73939	.000
	Experience	.46	1	.49728	.000

**Table 2.** R Square

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.575 <sup>a</sup>	.330	.321	8.01562

**Table 3.** ANOVA

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	15583.595	7	2226.228	34.649	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	31611.101	492	64.250		
	Total	47194.696	499			

**Table 4.** Regression Coefficients

Coefficients					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	75.142	3.825		19.647	.000
social contact	-.049	.052	-.046	-.946	.345
communication	-.282	.056	-.267	-5.016	.000*
self-esteem	-.173	.050	-.147	-3.492	.001*
perspective taking	.057	.052	.051	1.116	.265
fantasy	.283	.043	.256	6.522	.000*
empathic concern	-.290	.038	-.298	-7.636	.000*
personal distress	-.049	.048	-.040	-1.034	.302

**Table 5.** Cross Tabulation Analysis

		<i>Bunuh diri</i>			
			Low	High	Total
Living	<i>Sendiri</i>	Count	4	11	15
		% within living	26.7%	73.3%	100.0%
		% within <i>bundir</i>	3.0%	11.2%	6.5%
		% of Total	1.7%	4.8%	6.5%
	<i>Pasangan</i>	Count	19	13	32
		% within living	59.4%	40.6%	100.0%
		% within <i>bundir</i>	14.4%	13.3%	13.9%
		% of Total	8.3%	5.7%	13.9%
	<i>Anak</i>	Count	57	40	97
		% within living	58.8%	41.2%	100.0%
		% within <i>bundir</i>	43.2%	40.8%	42.2%
		% of Total	24.8%	17.4%	42.2%
<i>Anak &amp; pasangan</i>	Count	41	28	69	
	% within living	59.4%	40.6%	100.0%	
	% within <i>bundir</i>	31.1%	28.6%	30.0%	
	% of Total	17.8%	12.2%	30.0%	
<i>Pasangan &amp; lainnya</i>	Count	1	2	3	
	% within living	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%	
	% within <i>bundir</i>	0.8%	2.0%	1.3%	
	% of Total	0.4%	0.9%	1.3%	
<i>Lainnya</i>	Count	10	4	14	
	% within living	71.4%	28.6%	100.0%	
	% within <i>bundir</i>	7.6%	4.1%	6.1%	
	% of Total	4.3%	1.7%	6.1%	
Total	Count	132	98	230	
	% within living	57.4%	42.6%	100.0%	
	% within <i>bundir</i>	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	% of Total	57.4%	42.6%	100.0%	

**Table 6.** Characteristics and Categorization of Research Subjects

Characteristics of Research Subjects		
Description	Total	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
man	158	31,6 %
Woman	342	68,4 %
<b>Age</b>		
22-35 years old	232	46,4 %
36-55 years old	268	53,6 %
<b>Profession</b>		
Entrepreneur	151	31.5 %
Student	84	11.0 %
Housewife	165	36.3 %
Enterpriser	100	21.2 %

**Table 7.** Categorization of Research Variables

Variable	Low (%)	High (%)
Schadenfreude	250 (50.0)	250 (50.0)
Social Contact	270 (54.0)	230 (46.0)
Communication	283 (56.0)	217 (43.4)
Self Esteem	233 (46.6)	267 (53.3)
Perpsective Taking	288 (57.6)	212 (42.4)
Fantasy	235 (47.0)	265 (53.0)
Empatic Concern	392 (78.4)	108 (21.6)
Personal Distress	208 (41.2)	294 (58.8)

Based on the two tables above In terms of demographic conditions in this study as well, it can be discussed that someone who lives in a house or village, and has a lower middle economic level tends to have schadenfreude. This is evidenced by the results of research on this thesis that residents in The Village of Pagutan have an average population who have jobs as private employees, laborers, and housewives and are predicted to have middle to lower economic conditions. This resulted in the occurrence of schadenfreude with the setting of a gossip gathering of mothers and competition for ownership of luxury goods between residents in the social environment of the community in The Village of Pagutan.

## Discussion

This study was conducted to look at the influence of social relationship variables, self-esteem, and empathy on *schadenfreude*. The results of research and hypothesis testing show that there is a significant influence together between social relationship variables, self-esteem, and empathy on *schadenfreude*. Then the researchers conducted further analysis to find out which dimensions of the social relationship variables, self-esteem, and empathy had a significant influence on *schadenfreude*. Based on the results of the analysis, it was found that from both dimensions of social relationship variables, namely, social contact and communication found that the communication dimension has a significant influence together on *schadenfreude* while social contact does not. Meanwhile, of the empathy variables whose dimensions consist of four, namely perspective taking, fantasy, fouric concern, and personal distress only fantasy and fouric concerns that have a significant influence together on *schadenfreude*, while perspective taking and personal distress are not.

Looking at the communication dimension in the social relationship variable shows that when a person gives the result of his interpretation of the behavior of others or people he knows (in the form of speech, facial expressions or attitudes) and the feelings that the person wants to convey is a form of concern for others. the communication dimension shows a significant influence on *schadenfreude* but gives a negative direction. This means that when individuals give concern for people they know, in the form of warm talks, attitudes that show support and understand feelings, they will be able to have an effect on people they know and themselves to muffle *schadenfreude* on themselves. This is in line with the research Faturochman (2005) that communication can have a positive effect on *schadenfreude* if social relations in the community are perfectly established communication. However, intense communication will have no effect on *schadenfreude* a person's *schadenfreude* decline if they have bad friendships or social relationships. This is in line with research (Watanabe, 2019) that a person who faces poor social relationships will be prone to *schadenfreude*.

Furthermore, the self-esteem variable shows that the attitude of individuals, both positive and negative towards themselves as a whole. Then the self-esteem variable in this study showed a significant influence on *schadenfreude* but gave a negative direction, this means that when a person has high self-esteem and always looks positive towards themselves then the person can easily dampen the *schadenfreude* that appears on them. This is in line with the research (Van Dijk et al., 2011) that the higher the self-esteem (self-esteem) a person the lower *schadenfreude* perceived. While someone who always views themselves negatively and is not satisfied with their potential will be very difficult to muffle *schadenfreude* that appears to them. This is in line with research (Brambilla & Riva, 2017) that self-esteem negatively affects *schadenfreude*, due to social laziness and self-dissatisfaction.

Then the fantasy dimension on empathy variable suggests a person can transform themselves imaginatively through the medium of books, movies and characters in dramas they have already read or watched. dimension fantasy in this study shows a significant influence on *schadenfreude* and has a positive direction. This means that individuals who change themselves imaginatively through the medium of books, films and characters in plays they have read or watched can also increase the intensity of *schadenfreude*. This is in line with research (Pietraszkiewicz, 2013) which found that the belief in the media information, reading, and stories that individuals believe so far has begun to erode, then this causes the tendency of indivdu to seek the truth, and make the individual carried away the flow of information he received, giving rise to *schadenfreude*. This is also reinforced by research (Greenier, 2018) which found a positive correlation between the effect of belief media information, reading books, and stories with *schadenfreude*. However, the results of this study are contrary to research (Lerner, 1980) that the effect of belief in information, stories, and reading in harmony with the individual's desire will be negatively correlated with *schadenfreude*.

Furthermore, the empathic concern dimension on the empathy variable shows a feeling or orientation to a person and shows concern for the misfortunes experienced by others. On the empathic concern dimension in this study shows a significant influence on *schadenfreude* but has a negative direction. This means that if a person who basically has an easily compassionate orientation of the mind towards

someone, then he will devote all his attention to others who are being affected by disaster, this indicates that the effect on the decline of *schadenfreude* can be seen. It is also consistent with research (Hein, Morishima, Leiberg, Sul, & Fehr, 2016) that people who show empathic responses when they see others in pain will elicit altruistic decisions and override negative emotions (in this case *schadenfreude*). But empathic concern is very easily disturbed by external social contexts such as crowded conditions, and scenes that do not allow action. This is in line with research (Cikara, Bruneau & Saxe, 2011) that empathy may not be realized in the individual due to the social conditions around that are not supportive.

Furthermore, the dimension of social contact in the social relationship variable. This dimension has no significant effect on *schadenfreude*. This means that the higher social contact in the individual will not decrease or minimize *schadenfreude* in him. This means that the social contact that a person makes such as having meetings, shaking hands, having conversations does not make *schadenfreude* decrease or under control. It is explained in research (Jung & Karasawa, 2016) that *schadenfreude* is a socially undesirable emotion, so social contact that occurs like anything will have no effect on *schadenfreude* if there are no triggering factors. But this is contrary to research Watanabe (2019) that social contact that occurs such as meeting and talking about the distress of others, this will have positive implications for the decrease in *schadenfreude*.

The next dimension of personal distress is the empathy variable. This dimension had no significant effect on *schadenfreude*. This means that personal reactions to misfortunes experienced by others expressed by feelings of fear, anxiety, concern that have excessive intensity and a sense of helplessness have no effect on the decline of *schadenfreude*. This is in line with research (Fu et al., 2017) that personal distress on empathy will not necessarily arise because it is very fragile and capable of being dampened or even disturbed by social context. this is also influenced by today's phenomenon, which considers paying excessive attention to other people's problems is useless and considered strange.

The latter is perspective taking on empathy variables. This dimension has no significant effect on *schadenfreude*. This means that the attempt to place one's self in a situation that the other person perceives to understand the person based on his or her point of view has no influence on the decrease in *schadenfreude*. These results are contrary to studies (Wei & Liu, 2020) and (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990; Stiff, et.al 1988) that the sub-chapter of empathy is perspective taking becomes one of the determining factors of a person who empathizes when experiencing *schadenfreude*. in other words perspective taking can make a person more empathetic when faced with the difficulties of others.

In the context of psychological theory, *schadenfreude* can be discussed based on cognitive social theory developed by Bandura (1980). In cognitive social theory, *schadenfreude* is able to form in a person with the influence of a negative peer environment, and the intensity with which they meet. Slowly this will make changes in the behavior of the individual because the process of modeling and imitating the individual and also the influence of the environment. This is supported by research (Bandura, 1962) that seeing scenes of intense violence will lead to modeling behavior that causes aggression behavior in individuals. Based on the dimensions of *schadenfreude*, aggression is one of the factors that make it up. Therefore, in theory Social Cognitive *schadenfreude* can be formed through modeling aggression behavior. So theoretically *schadenfreude* can be explained by psychological theory in general.

Apart from all the discussion that the researcher described above, there are also some limitations and weaknesses in *schadenfreude*'s research that affect the process in this study. The first limitation is the lack of previous research literature that discusses *schadenfreude* based on formal psychometric testing. Second, the weakness of researchers in analyzing and elaborating the phenomenon of *schadenfreude* so that less closely observe the core phenomenon of *schadenfreude*. While the weakness in this study is less careful researchers in deciding independent variable social relationship. Because in psychological theory, social relationship is still a big concept of social psychology theory and is not included in the construct of psychology which is one of the basic criteria of determining independent variables. So that in the future it is necessary to re-examine the determination of variable free from a scientific study.

## Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that there is a significant influence together from communication, self-esteem, fantasy, and empathic concern to schadenfreude with a level of significance of .000, and known the contribution to the independent variable (proportion of all variables variance) based on the value of R-square of 33% while another 67% is the influence of other variables outside the study.

Then after further analysis, the results of hypothesis testing based on each dimension separately showed that the dimensions of social contact, communication on social relationship variables, variabel, self-esteem variables and two dimensions of empathy, fantasy and empathic concern significantly affect schadenfreude. The other two dimensions of empathy, perspective taking and personal distress, have no significant influence on schadenfreude.

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