



## Exploring Gratefulness in the Lives of Javanese Workers with Lowest Minimum Wages

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to provide deeper insights into how ethnic Javanese in Indonesia, especially Special Region of Yogyakarta live and practice gratitude in the context of their work, and how this affects aspects of their well-being. The research approach used is a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research type. The research was conducted in the Special Region of Yogyakarta with a purposive sampling technique that found four participants according to the predetermined criteria. The data collection technique was semi-structured interviews with interpretative phenomenological analysis technique. Based on the results of the research and the discussion that has been carried out, it can be concluded that the participants are quite grateful for the regional minimum wage of the Special Region of Yogyakarta.

**Keywords:** *Gratitude; Javanese; Workers*

### **Introduction**

Gratitude is a feeling of happiness that arises when an individual is in need of something or even already in a sufficient state, receiving gifts or gains from others so that the person feels fulfilled or receives advantages well. Gratitude is defined philosophically as a generosity, kindness, beauty of giving and receiving, or getting something without a specific purpose (Setyaningrum & Sindriana, 2023). Furthermore, gratitude is defined descriptively as a form of emotion and feeling that can develop into good moral traits (Yu et al., 2024), attitudes (H. Chen et al., 2023), personality traits (Azad Marzabadi et al., 2021), habits (Walsh et al., 2022), and will ultimately influence a person to respond to the situations they experience (Locklear et al., 2021). It is also added that gratitude makes one feel comfortable, happy, and can motivate constructively (Balthip et al., 2022).

Gratitude can be influenced by values in teaching (Baba'i & Athari, 2023), science (Cousin et al., 2021), mindset (Zhao et al., 2023), and culture (Chang et al., 2024). The concept of gratitude as a cultural and spiritual value is an important aspect of Indonesian life (Afandi & Pranajaya, 2022). In Indonesian society, various cultural aspects are reflected, one of which includes the context of Javanese ethnic life which is rich in local traditions and wisdom (Sobaya et al., 2023). Javanese ethnicity as one of the dominant ethnic groups in Indonesia upholds the values of gotong royong (Prasetiyo, 2022), kinship (Herlina, 2024),

and gratitude as an integral part of their identity and worldview (Locklear et al., 2021; Pasha-Zaidi et al., 2021).

In relation to the manifestation of gratitude within the Javanese ethnic group, gratitude has often been expressed through religious traditions such as thanksgiving ceremonies (Al Zahra, 2024; Wulandari & Budiman, 2022). Additionally, in daily life, gratitude was reflected in attitudes of mutual assistance, concern for others, and expressions of thankfulness through phrases like "Maturnuwun" (Chandra et al., 2024). Furthermore, the concept of *nrimo ing pandum* in Javanese culture was linked to the Javanese work ethic, characterized by hard work and diligence (Chayati et al., 2024; Zakiyah, 2024).

The work ethic of the Javanese people could be observed, where it was significantly influenced by the cultural values of the region (Assyofa et al., 2024). The work ethic of Yogyakarta's community was evident in the *nrimo ing pandum* tradition, which taught them to work hard and accept everything with sincerity (Jati, 2023). This ethos was reflected their roles as employees, who displayed a strong work ethic and creativity (Haryanto et al., 2023).

Workers in the Special Region of Yogyakarta did not work voluntarily; their wages were regulated by local government policies. The minimum wage or income in Indonesia, including in Yogyakarta, was determined by the provincial minimum wage (Wulansari, 2021). The minimum wage was defined as the lowest monthly wage set by the regional governor as a safety net (Herman, 2021). Yogyakarta was among the regions with the lowest minimum wages in Indonesia especially in Java island, ranking in the bottom nationally (Achmad, 2024; Anggraini, 2024).

As the era of economic progress became more dynamic, with growth in the industrial sector and ongoing social and cultural changes, human needs also increased. Monthly income became a key component of these needs. Wages or earnings received by individuals were a critical element in modern economic life (Izzah and Hendarti, 2021). Wages not only reflected the economic value of one's work but also profoundly impacted various aspects of life, such as productivity (Dwirainingsih, 2017) and well-being. Thus, low wages negatively affected an individual's well-being (Odgers and Adler, 2017). This finding was corroborated by other studies, which showed that salary or income significantly influenced personal well-being (Fadli & Fahimah, 2021).

However, a gap emerged between the income of Yogyakarta residents when considering the Regional Minimum Wage (UMR) of the Special Region of Yogyakarta and the actual conditions on the ground. An anomaly was noted in a national research, which reported that the percentage of poor residents in Yogyakarta Province was the highest in Java at 11.49% (Wanda & Azansyah, 2024), yet the region had high life expectancy (Nugraha et al., 2024) and happiness levels (Hanafi & Salsabilla, 2024). This was supported by other findings, indicating that although Yogyakarta had many impoverished residents (Hasanah & Karimah, 2024), its people remained happy and content with what they had (Mujidin et al., 2024; Ripai & Nurhayati, 2024).

Therefore, it was essential to understand how gratitude was interpreted and experienced by the Javanese community, especially in relation to minimum wages. Previous studies had limitations in that their results could not be generalized to a specific ethnic group. Thus, this study aimed to provide deeper insights into how the Javanese in the Special Region of Yogyakarta perceived and practiced gratitude in their work contexts and how this influenced their well-being. The findings could make a significant contribution to understanding the cultural and economic dynamics in the Special Region of Yogyakarta.

## **Method**

This research employs a phenomenological qualitative approach. Phenomenological research aims to explore and understand how individuals experience a particular phenomenon. This type of research is particularly useful when the goal is to capture the lived experiences of participants and the meanings they derive from those experiences.

The research location is the place where the study is conducted. This research took place in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, selected due to its significant Javanese population and relevance to the study's focus on the Regional Minimum Wage. The research was conducted from October to November 2024, during which the phenomenon of gratitude among Javanese individuals was explored.

The data sources for this study are primary, collected through interviews with participants. The data collection process involved face-to-face interviews to gain in-depth insights into the participants' experiences of gratitude while earning the minimum wage. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility in exploring participants' perspectives. The researcher used an interview guide with pre-prepared questions but also allowed room for spontaneous questions to delve deeper into relevant issues.

In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the primary instrument, as they interpret and analyze the data based on their understanding of the research context. To ensure data validity, methods such as triangulation and member checking were employed. The data analysis for this study was conducted using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which focuses on understanding how participants make sense of their personal and social experiences.

## **Research Results**

This study describes the gratitude of Javanese workers with lowest minimum wages Indonesia especially Special Region of Yogyakarta through aspects of sense of abundance, simple appreciation, and appreciation for others.

### **a. Sense of Abundance**

Grateful individuals are those who have a sense of abundance, reflecting their awareness that their lives are already good enough. This involves feelings of abundance and blessings from God. This aligns with the participants' statements when asked about their sense of abundance.

[...] "Yes, if I can still eat well and hang out with friends, because many people struggle to find food. As a boarding house student, it's hard to eat at the end of the month, but I'm still at home, eating well and saving money too." (AD).

[...] "My life feels abundant because I'm surrounded by people who help me when I face difficulties." (RAI).

[...] "For a sense of abundance, for me, it's more about having enough to meet my needs, meaning that my minimum wage is still sufficient for daily necessities..." (IT).

[...] "As for the feeling of abundance. I feel that being able to meet my family's needs is something abundant." (JS).

## **b. Simple Appreciation**

The second aspect of gratitude is simple appreciation, which emphasizes valuing the simple things in life. This includes appreciating small experiences and accepting various forms of help, material support, care, and even smiles from people around them.

[...] "Yes, it's mostly just about exercising. Like when we play badminton with the guys, that's a simple hobby of mine that can lift my mood after work." (AD).

[...] "For small moments, with the minimum wage in Special Region of Yogyakarta, I get a good and supportive environment. I think people here are known for their friendliness, and they don't cause trouble. In my surroundings, many practice simple living. Also, we're taught to be grateful here." (RAI).

[...] "I feel really grateful, even though the minimum wage isn't much, working in Jogja means having a relaxed work environment. From my friends' stories, those working in Jakarta feel really stressed because the environment is tough. But here, people are friendly, so I feel comfortable working." (IT).

[...] "A small moment I can share from my workplace is having supportive friends. For example, once I was late for work because I had to take my mom to the hospital. My friend was willing to sign me in, meaning I could rely on them for that. So, my friends are kind and supportive." (JS).

## **c. Appreciation for Others**

**Appreciation for others** emphasizes an individual's ability to express gratitude towards others in response to the contributions they have made. This aspect encourages individuals to show their thankfulness through positive actions.

[...] "For me, expressing gratitude is by helping my mom. She runs a catering business at home, making traditional market snacks. So, when I have free time, I help her because she makes the snacks on her own." (AD).

[...] "My way of saying thank you is through acts of kindness in return. When someone helps me with their effort, thoughts, or experience, I try to repay them in various ways, mostly by offering my assistance in return." (RAI).

[...] "I usually express my gratitude to my mom by praying for the best for her. When I visit home, I bring her food or something. For my boyfriend, I treat him to meals occasionally, and I help him with any difficulties he has that I can manage with my abilities." (IT).

[...] "To show my gratitude to my wife, sometimes I take her out for a meal, ask her what she wants, and I fulfill it. I always set aside part of my salary for her hobbies. Once, I saved for a long time and took her shopping for clothes. That's how I show my gratitude to my wife." (JS).

## **Discussion**

This subchapter discusses three key aspects of gratitude among Javanese individuals working with the minimum wage in the Special Region of Yogyakarta: their sense of abundance, simple appreciation, and appreciation for others. It explores how these individuals find contentment through recognizing sufficiency, valuing everyday joys, and expressing gratitude towards those who support them. The discussion highlights the cultural, social, and economic factors influencing these expressions, providing a conceptual framework for understanding the formation and impact of gratitude in their lives.

The sense of abundance, as articulated by the participants, reflected a profound appreciation for the essentials of life and the support they received from their surroundings. This feeling transcended material wealth, emphasizing the value of recognizing sufficiency (Garg et al., 2022) and appreciating what they had (Youssef-Morgan et al., 2022). Participants such as AD, RAI, IT, and JS highlighted that meeting basic needs, such as having enough to eat, feeling supported by others, and being able to contribute to their family or community, significantly contributed to their perception of abundance. Abundance was rooted in the perception of having enough rather than the actual quantity of resources (Hasbyallah & Rahmasari, 2023).

AD mentioned how being able to enjoy good food and still save money despite being a student living at home was a significant marker of abundance. RAI noted the value of being surrounded by people who helped during difficult times, while IT reflected on how a steady income, though modest, was sufficient to meet daily needs. JS emphasized the importance of being able to provide for his family, seeing it as a manifestation of abundance.

The participants' narratives underscored the importance of social (Deichert et al., 2021) and emotional support in shaping their sense of abundance (Wu & Bernardi, 2021). The presence of a supportive community, whether through friends, family, or a positive work environment (Aparicio et al., 2022), reinforced their sense of security and contentment (Balthip et al., 2022). This perspective suggested that abundance was not solely about financial stability (H. Chen et al., 2023) but also about the richness of social connections (Maheux et al., 2021) and emotional well-being (Badri et al., 2022).

Abundance involved a feeling of adequacy and a diminished sense of lack, fostering a general appreciation for life. This appreciation manifested in recognizing small moments of joy and support, which, in turn, bolstered one's overall sense of well-being. Simons et al (2020) added that a perception of abundance was associated with positive affect, indicating that individuals who felt abundant were more likely to experience happiness and satisfaction.

In sum, the experiences of AD, RAI, IT, and JS illustrated that the sense of abundance was intricately linked to both mindset and external support systems. Their stories highlighted the interplay between appreciating life's sufficiencies (Threet et al., 2022), the emotional (Garg et al., 2022) and social resources (H. Chen et al., 2023) that enhanced their quality of life. This holistic view of abundance underscored the importance of fostering gratitude (Armenta et al., 2022) and nurturing supportive relationships to cultivate a fulfilling and content life (Tang et al., 2022).

The simple appreciation expressed by the participants reflected their ability to value the small, everyday moments and the support they received from others. This appreciation was not limited to grand gestures but extended to recognizing the significance of ordinary experiences and interactions. Participants like AD, RAI, IT, and JS emphasized the role of simple joys, such as engaging in hobbies (Simpson, 2023), experiencing a supportive work environment (Badri et al., 2022), and being surrounded by caring individuals (Oktavia, 2022), in their overall sense of gratitude.

AD shared how playing badminton with friends helped him unwind and maintain a positive outlook after work. RAI appreciated the supportive and friendly nature of his work environment, which he found particularly valuable given the modesty of his income. IT felt grateful for the relaxed work atmosphere in Yogyakarta, contrasting it with the more stressful environments described by his friends working in larger cities. JS highlighted the camaraderie among his colleagues, noting how their willingness to help each other contributed to a sense of togetherness and support.

This emphasis on simple appreciation who noted that individuals practice gratitude tend to recognize and value the small but meaningful aspects of their lives (Sawyer et al., 2022). The participants' ability to appreciate these moments contributed to their overall well-being (Nguyen & Le, 2021), reinforcing the idea that gratitude is not only about recognizing significant achievements or

possessions but also about finding joy in the everyday (Emmons & Afshar, 2021). This perspective can enhance emotional resilience (Hartmann et al., 2021), promote positive emotions (Huang, 2022), and contribute to a more fulfilling life (Emmons & Afshar, 2021). The participants' reflections on simple appreciation illustrate how this form of gratitude can serve as a foundation for a more positive and content outlook on life (Locklear et al., 2023; Ruini & Mortara, 2022).

In summary, the experiences of AD, RAI, IT, and JS demonstrated how simple appreciation played a vital role in their sense of gratitude. By valuing the small, everyday moments (Nicuță & Constantin, 2021) and the support of those around them (Kim et al., 2024; You et al., 2022), they cultivated a deeper sense of contentment and well-being (Komase et al., 2021; Stefan et al., 2021). Their narratives underscore the importance of fostering a mindset that appreciates the simple aspects of life, which can significantly enhance overall happiness and life satisfaction.

The discussion of appreciation for others centers on the participants' ability to express gratitude towards those who have contributed to their well-being. This aspect highlights the importance of acknowledging and reciprocating the kindness received from others. Participants such as AD, RAI, IT, and JS demonstrated their gratitude by engaging in positive actions, such as helping their parents with family businesses or showing appreciation through thoughtful gestures.

AD mentioned assisting his mother with her catering business as a way of showing gratitude for her support. RAI expressed appreciation by offering help in return for the support he received, emphasizing the importance of reciprocity. IT and JS both highlighted how they express gratitude through small but meaningful acts, such as bringing gifts or fulfilling the wishes of their loved ones.

Gratitude fosters a deeper connection between individuals (Youngsun et al., 2024), encouraging a cycle of positive reciprocity (Chen et al., 2024). Watkins (2014) further emphasizes that appreciation for others involves not only recognizing the assistance received but also making conscious efforts to give back (Sawyer et al., 2022). The participants' actions illustrate this reciprocal nature of gratitude, where the acknowledgment of help received leads to a willingness to support others in return.

The cognitive aspect of gratitude, where individuals consciously recognize and appreciate the efforts of others (Locklear et al., 2023; Sawyer et al., 2022), enhancing their emotional well-being (Park et al., 2023) and social bonds (Feng & Yin, 2021). The participants' experiences reflect this cognitive engagement, as their gratitude is not merely reactive but a deliberate acknowledgment of the value others bring into their lives.

In summary, the participants' expressions of appreciation for others reveal a dynamic interplay between receiving and giving, underpinned by a mindful acknowledgment of the support they receive. This reciprocity not only strengthens their relationships but also contributes to a broader sense of community and well-being.

A limitation of this study is the background of the participants, the majority of whom are not yet married. Among the four participants, only one has a family, while the other three are single. This poses a limitation as their income is primarily allocated for personal needs rather than family necessities. This could influence their perceptions of gratitude and appreciation, which might differ if they had greater family responsibilities. Therefore, the findings of this study may not fully represent the experiences of individuals with family obligations, and any generalizations should be made with caution.

## **Conclusion**

1. Participants expressed significant gratitude for the minimum wage in the Special Region of Yogyakarta.

2. Participants felt a sense of abundance, perceiving their current situation as fulfilling and adequate.
3. Participants demonstrated how small moments and engaging in simple hobbies related to the minimum wage contributed to their gratitude and happiness.
4. Participants recognized the support from others and expressed gratitude for the mental and material help they received.
5. The assistance and support from others played a key role in enhancing the participants' sense of gratitude, contributing significantly to their overall well-being.

### **Suggestion**

1. Participants can maintain their gratitude by appreciating the small things they receive in life.
2. Participants are encouraged to continue expressing gratitude while also seeking opportunities to increase their income outside of their primary job.
3. The government of the Special Region of Yogyakarta should consider raising the minimum wage, as not all individuals in the community have the same privileges as the participants in this study.
4. Future researchers may consider targeting participants who do not have the privileges, such as those not living under one roof with their parents. Additionally, quantitative methods could be employed to reach a larger sample size, providing a more comprehensive understanding of gratitude in relation to the minimum wage.

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