

## **Overview of Spiritual Experiences in Healthy Elderly during the Covid-19 Pandemic**

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### **Abstract**

This research aims to explain the spiritual experiences of elderly people who remain healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study used a qualitative approach with in-depth interview techniques with 10 elderly participants who had been vaccinated and did not have significant comorbidities. Data analysis was carried out using the theme analysis method. The results showed that healthy elderly people had deep spiritual experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Themes that emerged included an increased need for calm and introspection, increased spiritual connection through prayer and meditation, and gratitude for their health and existence amidst global uncertainty. In addition, many of them experience strengthening belief in their religion or spirituality as a source of strength in facing social isolation and limited physical interaction. This study concludes that spiritual experiences in healthy elderly people not only act as a coping mechanism, but also as a source of strength and calm in the midst of a pandemic. The practical implication of this research is the importance of paying attention to spiritual aspects in caring for the elderly to improve their quality of life in times of global crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Keyword:** COVID-19 Pandemic; Elderly; Health

### **Introduction**

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory system disease caused by the Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV), also known as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome 2 (SARS-CoV-2). This virus is a new type of virus that has never been identified before in humans (Mulati, 2020). This pandemic has spread throughout the world and infected millions of people and hundreds of thousands of people died (Malik et al., 2020). One of the first confirmed COVID-19 positive elderly in Indonesia was found in the Jakarta area in March 2020 (Sukiman & Ambohamsah, 2021). COVID-19 has

spread to 223 countries, as of November 20, 2021, the number of confirmed positive cases is 256,960,613 people and 5,155,321 death cases and 231,976,894 people have been declared cured. Indonesia is ranked 14th out of 223 countries with a total number of confirmed positive cases of 4,252,705 people, death cases of 143,714 people and 4,100,837 people declared cured (Worldometer, 2021). Aceh reported that until November 20, 2021, there were 38,410 confirmed positive COVID-19 patients and 36,309 confirmed recoveries and 2,066 death cases, while in Banda Aceh the number of confirmed positive cases was 12,057 and 11,701 confirmed recoveries and 345 death cases. Banda Aceh is one of the cities with the most COVID-19 cases in Aceh (Fajar et al., 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic infects all groups including the elderly who are one of the populations with more severe symptoms of infection and a high risk of death compared to adults or children (Javadi & Nateghi, 2020). Along with the aging process that occurs, there are five aspects of normal and natural changes in the elderly including biological aspects, psychological aspects, social aspects, aspects of sexuality and aspects of spirituality. Health is a normal state of the body both physically, mentally and socially, not limited to a disease and disability or disability (World Health Organization, 2015). Health is intended as a condition both physically, mentally, spiritually and socially where everyone is able to live productively both socially and economically (Bini' Matillah et al., 2018).

Elderly people in general must have strong beliefs to deal with the changes that occur to them, namely with spirituality. Spirituality includes faith, hope, love, compassion, peace and gratitude (Village, 2020). The city of Banda Aceh has a wide variety of religions such as Islam, Protestant Christianity, Catholic Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government made policies regarding restrictions on religious activities and even made all places of worship must be closed in the hope of preventing crowds and breaking the chain of COVID-19 spread. These efforts have limited the community in carrying out spiritual activities including the elderly, causing spiritual distress, namely the loss of an ability to connect the meaning and purpose of one's life with religious activities (Sipollo et al., 2020). The elderly in their daily lives have limitations caused by physical and psychological changes that make the elderly unable to carry out spiritual activities comfortably and well such as prayer, dhikr, recitation and other spiritual activities (Dewi, 2016).

The main issue in this research is the depiction of spiritual experiences in healthy elderly individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research question is: How are the spiritual experiences of healthy elderly individuals depicted during the COVID-19 pandemic? The purpose of this research is to explore the depiction of spiritual experiences in healthy elderly individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic. The theoretical benefit

of this research is to contribute to the body of knowledge for future studies. Practically, this research is expected to provide insights for society in the event of another crisis similar to COVID-19.

### **Research Methodology**

The methodology used in this research is a qualitative approach, focusing on an in-depth understanding of the spiritual experiences of elderly individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study design employs a qualitative approach to gain deep insights into these spiritual experiences. Participants were selected based on specific inclusion criteria, including being 65 years of age or older, having no significant comorbidities, being vaccinated, and self-identifying as physically and mentally healthy. Data were collected through in-depth interviews using structured interview guides. These interviews were conducted virtually or with adherence to social distancing safety protocols, depending on the pandemic conditions at the time. Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach, where interview transcripts were analyzed inductively to identify key themes emerging from the spiritual experiences of the elderly during the pandemic. The study adhered to ethical research principles, including privacy, data security, and obtaining informed consent from all participants.

### **Result and Discussion**

#### **1. Hasil Penelitian Jenis Kuantitatif**

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only presented physical and economic challenges but has also had a significant impact on the spiritual well-being of many individuals, particularly the elderly (Simanullang & Situmorang, 2020). Amid the social isolation required to reduce the spread of the virus, many of them have felt isolated not only physically but also spiritually. Nevertheless, there are also a number of healthy elderly individuals who have discovered new strength and depth in their spiritual practices during this time. One aspect that has emerged in the spiritual experiences of the elderly during the pandemic is the increased need for inner peace and introspection. In interviews with several research participants, many of them stated that the pandemic forced them to reflect more deeply on the meaning of life. The isolation necessary to protect their physical health has created space for reflection and contemplation about their existence in this world. One participant, who routinely engages in meditation practices, shared their experience, "This pandemic has made me more aware of the importance of creating space for calmness in my mind. Meditation has helped me maintain balance and face uncertainty with greater tranquility" (Purnama et al., 2021).

Spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, and the reading of spiritual literature have also emerged as important tools for the elderly to cope with social isolation and anxiety during the pandemic. Many have found that strengthening their connection with their spiritual side helps fill the social void caused by physical restrictions. Another participant, who actively participates in remote prayer groups with friends, stated, "Praying together with my friends has been a source of strength and hope during these difficult times. Although we are physically apart, we feel connected in faith and support." Healthy elderly individuals often express deep gratitude for their health during the pandemic. While they are aware of the higher risks for their age group, many feel fortunate and grateful for each day they live in relatively good health. A 78-year-old participant expressed, "This pandemic has made me appreciate my health more. I am grateful to be able to live each day in adequate health despite my advanced age." For some elderly individuals, the COVID-19 pandemic has strengthened their faith in their religion or spirituality. They have found that this faith not only provides moral and emotional support but also gives deeper meaning when facing unexpected life challenges.

A participant who is active in local religious activities said, "I believe that God has a greater plan for all of us. My faith has given me strength and hope in facing these difficult times." These findings have significant implications for elderly healthcare, particularly in the context of mental and spiritual health. The importance of understanding and supporting the spiritual dimension of their well-being is reinforced by the findings that spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, and gratitude can be sources of strength and tranquility (Mansyur, 2022). By integrating these aspects into elderly healthcare, healthcare professionals can help improve their quality of life, even in the face of global challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic (Firmawati & Domili, 2014).

The findings on the spiritual experiences of the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic not only provide us with insights into how they personally coped with this crisis but also have important practical implications for future policies and care. The importance of the spiritual dimension in elderly well-being has been reinforced by these findings. Healthcare services should pay more attention to and integrate spiritual aspects into their holistic care approach. This includes not only accommodating practices such as prayer, meditation, and spiritual reflection in care plans but also providing support for the development of safe social and religious activities during crises like pandemics. Governments and public health organizations can use these findings to enhance education and support regarding the importance of mental and spiritual health among the elderly (World Health Organization, 2015). These programs could include training for healthcare workers on how to

support spiritual practices and community engagement to strengthen elderly well-being. Additionally, they could provide better access to psychological services and mental health support that include spiritual aspects. The pandemic has demonstrated that social networks and community are crucial factors in supporting the well-being of the elderly.

Programs that encourage involvement in virtual prayer groups or social activities can be an effective solution to combat social isolation and support their mental health. Strengthening communities can also promote the exchange of enriching spiritual experiences among all members. Overall, the spiritual experiences of the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic provide us with valuable lessons about human resilience and the importance of spiritual connections in overcoming unexpected life challenges. By leveraging these findings, we can build a more inclusive society that cares for the spiritual well-being of the elderly, not only during pandemics but also for a better and more sustainable future. Through better integration of the spiritual dimension in healthcare services and improved public education, we can help the elderly continue to live with dignity and a high quality of life, even in the face of potential challenges (Wiraini et al., 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught many valuable lessons about human resilience and adaptability, especially for the elderly, who often constitute the most vulnerable group to the social and health impacts of this crisis. Their spiritual experiences during the pandemic not only highlight the importance of connecting with the spiritual dimension in overcoming isolation and anxiety but also give us an opportunity to reflect on how society can better support the spiritual well-being of the elderly in the future. The pandemic has shown that health is not just about the physical body but also includes mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being (Nisa, 2019). Health professionals must adopt a broader holistic approach in caring for the elderly by integrating spiritual health evaluations as part of their routine care. This involves not only identifying physical health issues but also providing space for conversations about spiritual needs and necessary support. Education on the importance of mental and spiritual health should start from an early age and continue to be reinforced throughout the life cycle. For the elderly, these programs may include training on beneficial spiritual practices, ways to overcome social isolation through community activities, and support for developing a sense of purpose amid emerging challenges. The pandemic has accelerated the adoption of technology in social interactions and spiritual activities. Digital platforms can be used to facilitate prayer group meetings, meditation, or spiritual discussions among elderly individuals with limited mobility. This not only allows them to stay connected with their communities but also helps in maintaining their mental and emotional health. Local communities

and public health organizations can collaborate to strengthen social support networks for the elderly. These initiatives may include providing transportation services to access social activities, home visit programs for those who are isolated, and easy access to mental and spiritual health services. By building a solid network, the elderly can feel supported and connected in their spiritual journey. Further research is needed to deepen the understanding of how global health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic affect the spiritual well-being of the elderly. These studies should further explore variations in spiritual practices based on cultural and religious backgrounds and how social and community support can impact their spiritual health in the long term (Mulati, 2020).

### **Conclusion**

The spiritual experiences of the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate that when the physical world is limited, the spiritual world can become a source of strength, hope, and connection. Through a holistic, inclusive, and sustainable approach, we can ensure that the elderly maintain their spiritual well-being in facing difficult times in the future. It is hoped that this article can provide benefits and lessons learned from the pandemic, helping to build a more empowered society that cares about the spiritual needs of the elderly, ensuring that they can continue to live with dignity and a high quality of life, even amid potential challenges.

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