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The relationship between spirituality and quality of life of the elderly

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Abstract

Background: Various serious problems resulting from the lack of spiritual support for the elderly in nursing homes, particularly in mental health, impact their overall quality of life. Fulfilling spiritual support, as a value system that provides them with strength, hope, and meaning in life, as well as acceptance of the impact of aging, is crucial in maintaining inner peace, meaning in life, and the ability to adapt to the limitations of old age.

Purpose: to analyze the relationship between spirituality and the quality of life of the elderly

Method: This research is a descriptive correlational design using a cross-sectional approach. A population of 67 elderly people, a sample of 30 of whom were selected using purposive sampling techniques. The instruments used were the Daily Spirituality Scale (DSELS) and the modified World Health Organization Quality of Life Scale (WHOQOL-BREF). Data analysis was conducted bivariately with a chi-square test at the confidence level ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Results: The results of the study showed that the majority of elderly people had a low level of spirituality (11 people) (40%) and a low quality of life (21 people) (70%). The chi-square test obtained a p-value of 0.023 (<0.05).

Conclusion: It is necessary to provide guidance on routine spiritual activities, spiritual counseling sessions, and facilitate communication and visits from families. For the elderly, it is recommended to be more active in participating in activities organized by the foundation and to be proactive in establishing social and spiritual relationships, as an effort to improve the mental well-being and improve the quality of life of the elderly.

Keywords: Eldelrly; Nursing Home; Spirituality; Quality of Life.

INTRODUCTION

An elderly person is someone aged 55 or older. The quality of life of elderly patients is a perception influenced by spiritual aspects. Spiritual needs are related to closeness to God. The better the spiritual needs, the higher the quality of life. This can be achieved by consistently performing religious services (Rosyada, Faizin, & Noviasari, 2023). Aging is a natural process that causes seniors to face significant physical, mental, and social changes, impacting their quality of life. Spirituality plays a crucial role because it can help seniors find meaning in life, cope with psychological stress, and strengthen their emotional well-being. Spirituality is one parameter that influences quality of life,

consisting of two dimensions: vertical (relationship with God) and horizontal (relationships with others) (Destriande, Faridah, Oktania, & Rahman, 2021). The elderly experience many changes as a natural process of aging, resulting in both physical and psychological problems. High spirituality affects the elderly in facing problems, leading to a good quality of life (Munawarah, 2018).

Global data from the WHO (World Population Aging) in 2022 showed that approximately 14% of older adults worldwide experience depression, a condition often closely linked to spirituality (World Health Organization, 2025). In Indonesia, the 2022 Basic Health Research (Riskesdas) also recorded a

prevalence of depression among older adults of 13.4%. Specifically, in Medan City, data from the local Health Office in 2023 showed that 15.6% of older adults experienced mental health problems, including depression and anxiety, related to spirituality (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023).

Spirituality issues in the elderly can arise from various factors, ranging from the loss of a spouse, declining bodily functions, to intense social isolation. Elderly individuals who lack adequate spiritual support tend to struggle to rediscover the meaning of life and cope with stress, ultimately negatively impacting their overall quality of life. Quality of life can be maintained if four key aspects are met: physical condition, psychological well-being, social relationships, and the living environment. A healthy spirituality has been shown to potentially improve quality of life by helping older adults develop positive thoughts and feelings that contribute to life satisfaction (World Health Organization, 2021).

Spiritual needs are a necessity for every human being, a means of drawing closer to God (Ulandari & Astuti, 2019; Rachel, Chiara, Robert, & Francesco, 2019). Spiritual needs consist of two aspects: the vertical aspect, which is the relationship between human belief and God, and the horizontal aspect, which is the relationship between humans and other humans (Anitasari, 2021). Spiritual needs are also closely related to the fact that as a person ages, they grow closer to God (Hariani et al., 2019).

Consistent with previous research findings, there is a significant relationship between high levels of spirituality and a good quality of life in the elderly (Sibuea & Perangin-angin, 2020; Anggraini (2023). Based on a preliminary survey and interviews conducted at the Guna Budi Bakti Foundation (Nursing Home) in Medan in March 2025, it was found that of the 67 elderly residents, only about 50% regularly and actively engaged in spiritual activities such as worship, prayer, or reading scriptures. The remaining 50% reported a lack of religious activity, social interaction, and a lack of gratitude. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the fact that most elderly residents in the nursing home experience a decline in quality of life, characterized by feelings of loneliness, loss of meaning in life, and

chronic health problems. Furthermore, only about 10% of elderly residents receive family visits. This situation underscores the urgency of analyzing the relationship between spirituality and quality of life in nursing homes, so that appropriate interventions can be implemented to improve spirituality and the quality of life of the elderly at the Guna Budi Bakti Foundation.

Other studies reinforce the role of age and chronic disease as unchangeable variables, and function, spirituality, and satisfaction with social support as changeable variables, in the quality of life of older adults. Health and education programs in the community need to be improved to enhance the quality of life of this population. Strategies to improve function and strengthen social support networks, especially for older adults with chronic diseases, should be a priority (Lima, Teixeira, Esteves, Ribeiro, Pereira, Teixeira, & Magalhães, 2020). It is necessary to invest in the practice of religiosity, spirituality and personal beliefs, as a health strategy, since they have shown an impact on the decrease of depression and a significant increase in quality of life (Molina, Tavares, Haas, & Rodrigues, 2020).

RESEARCH METHOD

The research was an analytical survey. The population consisted of 67 individuals, with a sample size of 30 using a purposive sampling technique. The research instruments used were questionnaires: the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES), consisting of 16 questions to measure spirituality, and the World Health Organization Quality of Life-BREF (WHOQOL-BREF), consisting of 26 questions to assess quality of life. To analyze the frequency distribution of the variables studied, bivariate analysis was used to test the research hypothesis, namely the relationship between spirituality and quality of life. The statistical test used in the bivariate analysis was the chi-square test with a confidence level (α) of 0.05. The decision-making criteria were as follows: if the p-value is <0.05 , there is a relationship between spirituality and quality of life in the elderly; conversely, if the p-value is >0.05 , there is no relationship between spirituality and quality of life in the elderly.

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RESEARCH RESULT

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Respondents (N=30)

Variabel	Results	P-value
Age (Mean±SD) (Range) (Years)	(75.1±9.24) (60-90)	
60-74	14/46.5	
75-90	16/53.3	
Gender (n/%)		
Male	15/50.0	
Female	15/50.0	
Marital Status (n/%)		
Married	9/30.0	
Not Married	21/70.0	
Spirituality (n/%)		0.023
High	7/23.3	
Medium	12/40.0	
Low	11/36.7	

Table 1 shows that the average age of respondents and standard deviation is (75.1±9.24) with an age range of (60-90). The number of male and female respondents was equal, namely 15 (50.0%) for males and 15 (50.0%) for females, with the majority of respondents being unmarried, namely 21 (70.0%), and the majority having medium spirituality, namely 12 (40.0%). The results of the bivariate analysis in this study indicate a significant relationship between spirituality and quality of life for the elderly at the Guna Budi Bakti Foundation in Medan, with a p-value of 0.023 (<0.05).

DISCUSSION

Quality of life is a person's view of their life based on values and beliefs that encompass all aspects of life, including 1) environmental and material aspects consisting of housing, including facilities and infrastructure to support life 2) physical aspects, including daily activities, dependence on medication medications and medical assistance, energy and fatigue, mobility (movement), pain and discomfort, sleep and rest, and capacity for work. 3) Mental aspects also include physical aspects. Mental well-being consists of self-image and appearance, positive and negative views, self-esteem, spirituality, thoughts, things learned, memory, and ability to concentrate. 4) The social aspect includes personal relationships, social support, and sexual activity. If all aspects of an individual's life are good, then their quality of life will also be good (Dewi, 2015).

These findings indicate that the majority of elderly people have relatively good spiritual practices

and experiences, although not yet at an optimal level. Regarding respondent characteristics, the majority of elderly people have a low educational background (66.6%, junior high school or below). This low level of education often results in a limited understanding of the importance of religious practices and in-depth spiritual reflection. Furthermore, marital status also plays a role, with the majority of respondents (70%) being unmarried or living alone, potentially lacking the emotional and social support that could strengthen their spirituality.

Theoretically, spirituality encompasses relationships with oneself, others, nature, and God. Older adults who are able to build positive relationships in these four dimensions tend to experience inner peace, tranquility, and strength in facing life changes in old age (Hamid (2008). The findings of this study are also in line with previous statements that spirituality is an important dimension

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of well-being in older adults because it can reduce stress and anxiety levels and give meaning to life (Yuzefo, 2015).

Previous research supports this finding, revealing that the majority of elderly people with high levels of spirituality have a good quality of life (Sibuea & Perangin-angin, 2020). Similar findings have also been reported by other researchers, who stated that spirituality is significantly related to the quality of life of elderly people in Surabaya (Anggraini (2023).

The results of the study showed that the quality of life of the majority of elderly people was classified as moderate, namely 21 people (70.0%). Judging from the characteristics of the respondents, the most influential factor was age. The majority of elderly people (53.3%) were aged 75–90 years, an age at which physical and cognitive function declines significantly. This is in line with previous theory which states that the older the elderly, the greater the risk of decreased quality of life due to physical limitations and degenerative diseases (Kurniasari, Yuniarti, & Mochyadin, 2024).

Furthermore, marital status also plays a role. Unmarried elderly people (70%) are more likely to experience feelings of loneliness, loss of a partner, and limited emotional support. This supports the WHO (2021) findings that the quality of life of elderly people is influenced by physical, psychological, social, and environmental aspects. The absence of social support can worsen the psychological condition of elderly people, ultimately reducing their quality of life (World Health Organization, 2021). This aligns with other research, which also shows that the quality of life of older adults is highly dependent on spiritual support, physical health, and social support from family. These findings align with the findings of this study, which found that most older adults in nursing homes felt lonely due to limited family visits (10%) (Sibuea & Perangin-angin, 2020).

The results of the bivariate analysis in this study indicate a significant relationship between spirituality and quality of life for the elderly at the Guna Budi Bakti Foundation in Medan, with a p-value of 0.023 (<0.05). This means that the higher the level of spirituality an elderly person possesses, the better their quality of life will be. Conversely, if spirituality is low, their quality of life tends to be moderate or even at risk of decline. Based on the univariate analysis,

the majority of elderly people at the Guna Budi Bakti Foundation have moderate spirituality (40.0%), followed by low spirituality (36.7%), and only a small proportion have high spirituality (23.3%). This situation illustrates that the daily spiritual experience of the elderly is relatively adequate, but many are still not optimal. Meanwhile, the quality of life of the elderly is also mostly in the moderate category (70%), while 30% of respondents have achieved a good quality of life, and none have achieved a poor quality of life. This relationship shows that the condition of the elderly in the institution is quite stable, but there is still a lot of room for improvement, especially in the psychological, social, and environmental aspects that are closely related to their spiritual needs.

The findings of this study align with the theory that spirituality encompasses relationships with oneself, others, nature, and God. Fulfilling spiritual needs through prayer, worship, social interaction, gratitude, and caring for others can create inner peace, provide meaning in life, and strengthen the psychological resilience of older adults in the face of physical decline and loss of social roles. Older adults with strong spirituality are better able to accept their limitations, adapt to change, and view life more positively (Hamid, 2008). Furthermore, the results of this study also support the findings of previous studies. Research in Bali showed that the majority of elderly people with high spirituality had a good quality of life, and there was a significant relationship between the two variables (Sibuea & Perangin-angin, 2020). Research in Surabaya also found that good spiritual conditions in elderly people were associated with a better quality of life, with the majority of respondents falling into the moderate to good category (Anggraini (2023)). Similarly, research in Deli Serdang proved that high spiritual needs were significantly associated with improved quality of life in elderly people (Simbolon & Simbolon, 2023). This demonstrates consistency between the results of this study and previous research, further strengthening the evidence that spirituality is a significant factor influencing quality of life in elderly people.

Furthermore, this relationship can be explained through the WHO (2021) quality of life theory, which emphasizes that quality of life is an individual's perception of their position in life, influenced by

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physical health, psychological well-being, social relationships, and the environment. Spirituality can influence these four aspects directly and indirectly. For example, physically, prayer and worship can calm the mind, thereby reduce stress and improve sleep quality. Psychologically, spirituality provides hope, gratitude, and acceptance of life's circumstances, thereby reducing depression and anxiety (World Health Organization, 2021).

Regarding the increasing number of elderly people, their quality of life becomes more important. Spiritual well-being is one of the most important aspects of health status which has often been neglected in some nations (Seraji, Shojaezade, & Rakhshani, 2016). Previous research found that the average spiritual well-being score was (96.26 ± 17.93) . There was a positive correlation between spiritual well-being and quality of life ($P = 0.008$). Based on the positive correlation between spiritual well-being and quality of life scores, awareness of the importance of spiritual well-being in caring for these individuals is recommended (Ali, Marhemat, Sara, & Hamid, 2015).

Therefore, it can be concluded that spirituality acts as a protective factor, helping older adults cope with significant changes in old age, such as declining physical health, loneliness, and limited social roles. Elderly individuals with a strong spirituality are better able to cope with stress, are more optimistic, and are better prepared to face the aging process and even death. Conversely, elderly individuals with low spirituality are more susceptible to life dissatisfaction, loneliness, and difficulty adapting to change.

CONCLUSION

It is necessary to provide guidance on routine spiritual activities, spiritual counseling sessions, and facilitate communication and visits from families. For the elderly, it is recommended to be more active in participating in activities organized by the foundation and to be proactive in establishing social and spiritual relationships, as an effort to improve the mental well-being and improve the quality of life of the elderly.

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