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Social support, occupational stress among Indonesian nurses as elderly care workers in Japan

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Abstract

Background: Careworkers in Japan are one of the jobs that are popular with Indonesian nurses. The results of interviews with careworkers in Osaka, Japan, led to symptoms of work stress, both physical symptoms, mental symptoms, and social symptoms. Previous research stated that caregivers working in Japan experienced low stress levels as many as 6 respondents (17.1%), moderate stress levels as many as 24 respondents (68.6%) and high stress levels as many as 5 respondents (14.3%).

Purpose: To identify and analyze the relationship between social support and stress levels in Indonesian nurses as elderly caregivers.

Method: A quantitative descriptive with a correlation study using the Chi Square statistical test. The total population of the community of caregivers in Japan is 70 people.

Results: There were 33 careworkers with high social support who had moderate work stress, the Chi Square test obtained a result of 0.003 which means that there is a relationship between social support and work stress in caregivers working.

Conclusion: There was a positive relationship between social support variables and stress levels of nurses working in hospitals and nursing home facilities.

Keywords: Caregivers; Social Support; Stress Levels.

INTRODUCTION

Elderly care workers or Japanese care workers have become one of the most popular jobs among Indonesian nurses (Aminah, Wardoyo, & Pangastoeti, 2018). Work stress can occur when nurses are given workloads that exceed their capabilities, preventing them from fulfilling or completing their tasks, thus causing them to experience work stress (Herawati, Setyowati, Afriani, Yatnikasari, & Dewi, 2021). The majority of Indonesian elderly caregivers working in Japan are women. Elderly caregivers working in Japan are predominantly nursing diploma graduates because the initial recruitment process, which began with the establishment of the G to G (Government to

Government) cooperation in 2013, was dominated by graduates with a nursing diploma background and two years of work experience in Japan, with an average work period of 2-5 years. In addition to educational background, the most important requirement that prospective nurses and caregivers must meet is proficiency in Japanese, as evidenced by a JLPT (Japanese Language Proficiency Test) certificate with a minimum level of 4 (N4). Before departing for Japan, prospective caregivers must undergo Japanese language training. Japanese is a difficult language for Indonesian learners. However, prospective caregivers usually undergo several months of training before departure. The main

problems, apart from cultural, environmental, and weather differences that affect the nurses' psychological state, are differences in workload between colleagues.

The results of interviews conducted by the Indonesian Muslim Nurses Association (IPMI) in Japan with 19 Indonesian nurses showed that 50% of Indonesian nurses experience work-related stress, such as fatigue, boredom, discomfort, difficulty concentrating, feeling uncomfortable, feeling depressed, and so on, caused by socio-cultural differences, control over workload, and social relationships between coworkers (Fahrully, Solehudin, & Lannasari, 2024). Researchers conducted a preliminary study of careworkers in Osaka, Japan, through interviews that revealed symptoms of work stress, including physical, mental, and social symptoms. If stress is not addressed, it will cause nurses to feel tense, irritable, aggressive, lose concentration, and display uncooperative attitudes (Rangkuti, Harahap, & Simajorang, 2022).

This will certainly prevent nurses from working optimally, disrupt their performance, and reduce their productivity in providing services to the elderly. This explains why there are still nurses who experience work stress, which can be influenced by several factors such as workload, work environment, and others (Setiyana, 2023). Social support is a process of social relationships and interactions that include emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects that help a person adapt and cope with situations. Social support can also be interpreted as help from others to cope with changes in life and overcome problems. Social support is usually provided during normal interactions and when someone needs support in facing difficulties and challenges (Jang, 2022). Social support comes from family, friends, and significant others. Significant others include social groups, which in this case include peers (Wang, Tao, Bowers, Brown, & Zhang, 2018). Social support can come from family, friends, close relatives, and coworkers (Narayanan & Weng Onn, 2016). Social support makes a person feel cared for, which makes them feel more comfortable when facing difficulties and reduces stress and negative emotions in nurses (Asih, Fahmy, Novrianda, Lucida, Priscilla, & Putri, 2019).

RESEARCH METHOD

Quantitative descriptive with correlation studies, namely research or examination of the relationship between two variables in a situation or group of subjects. This is done to see the relationship between one symptom and another, between one variable and another. 10 This research design uses a cross-sectional survey, which is a one-time study with no follow-up.10. In this study, the researcher examined the relationship between social support and stress levels among Indonesian nurses working as care workers for the elderly in Osaka, Japan. The population in this study consisted of 70 Indonesian nurses working as care workers in Osaka, Japan.

This study used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a sampling technique where the sample size is equal to the population size. Purposive sampling was chosen because the population size was less than 100, so the entire population was used as the research sample. Data collection was carried out by distributing questionnaires via Google Forms. The distribution of questionnaires and interviews were conducted on August 1-3, 2025. The questionnaire consisted of 33 statements. Of the 70 respondents, only 63 questionnaires were complete and suitable for processing. The indicators of social support variables in this study covered four main aspects, namely emotional support in the form of attention and empathy, informational support in the form of advice or direction, instrumental support in the form of tangible assistance, and evaluative support through positive feedback. All of these indicators were then categorized as low, medium, and high based on the respondents' scores. Meanwhile, stress level indicators included physiological reactions such as sleep disturbances or muscle tension, emotional reactions such as anxiety and depression, cognitive reactions such as difficulty concentrating and negative thoughts, and behavioral reactions characterized by changes in activity patterns. These indicators were then classified into mild, moderate, and severe stress according to the level of severity experienced.

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RESEARCH RESULTS

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Social Support Levels and Stress Levels (n=63)

Variable	Results
Social Support	
Low	8/12.7
Moderate	23/36.5
High	32/50.8
Stress Level	
Mild	52/82.5
Moderate	10/15.9
Severe	1/1.6

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of social support levels. Based on the survey results, it can be seen that most careworker respondents had high social support, with 32 people or 50.8%, followed by moderate social support, with 23 people or 36.5%, and then low social support, with 8 people or 12.7%. Of the 63 respondents, it was found that most careworker respondents had a mild stress level, with 52 people or 82.5%, a moderate stress level, with 10 people or 15.9%, and a severe stress level, with only 1 person or 1.6%. The results of this study show that out of 63 respondents, the average stress level of nurses in Osaka, Japan, as careworkers is 34.90 with a standard deviation of 2.01. The lowest stress level score is 16 and the highest is 63.

Table 2. Uji Chi Square

Variable	Stress Level		P-Value
	Moderate	High	
Social Support			0.003
Moderate	8.5	4.5	
High	32.5	17.5	

Based on Table 2, the result is $p=0.003<0.05$, which means that social support is related to stress levels, so H_0 is rejected and H_1 in this study is accepted.

DISCUSSION

The social support experienced by nurses comes from emotional support provided by families who pay attention when nurses experience problems, even if only via mobile phone; informative support, where families provide feedback such as listening, giving advice, information, and guidance that can be used to overcome problems; instrumental support, which provides direct assistance such as loans, food, and goods; and appreciative support, which provides encouragement and agreement with opinions that can

build nurses' self-esteem. Nurses in Osaka, Japan, have developed close relationships with people in their environment, both online and offline. Social support for nurses was low for 46 people (83.6%) and high for 9 people (16.4%), and the average social support received from family was 2.30 and from friends was 2.07, showing that the highest dimension of support was family support. The greatest social support comes from immediate family members such as spouses and extended family. The role of family can help in decision-making and is more likely to overcome physical fatigue so that they can concentrate more on work (Abduh, Alawiyah, Apriansyah, Sirodj, & Afgani, 2023).

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Social support from friends is smaller because when married, the support felt comes from family and close relatives such as husbands/wives. Researchers assume that the social support felt by nurses comes from family assistance and support, where the majority of nurses receive support from families who try to help in making decisions. People who have high social support are better able to cope with difficulties than those who face difficulties alone. Social support from family can reduce negative emotions, while social support from relatives and friends makes them feel comfortable and more understood. Social support from family, friends, and colleagues can help nurses cope with situations at work. Having good relationships with people who are close to nurses will enable nurses to refocus and contribute to their ability to cope with work and life situations. Social support makes individuals feel confident that they are loved and appreciated. Social support is assistance in the form of emotional, informational, and material aspects that come from other people in one environment (Hamzah, 2019).

Stress is a work demand that exceeds one's ability to cope with it, which can cause various reactions, such as physiological, psychological, and behavioral reactions. Work stress in nurses can cause nurses to suffer from fatigue, become rude, anxious, have increased blood pressure, dissatisfaction with work, and decreased work productivity (Rahmadia, Sarianti, & Fitria, 2019). The majority of stress levels were in the moderate category, namely 211 (61.88%), and the minority were in the low category, namely 130 (38.12%) (Putra & Susilawati, 2018). The high percentage of moderate stress experienced by nurses was influenced by several factors, including the high workload of nurses. A low level of stress is very necessary as it will increase enthusiasm, sharpness of vision, energy, and the ability to complete work. A low level of stress can spur individuals to think and try harder because it can motivate them to face life's challenges. A total of 8 respondents (61.5%) of nurses experienced work stress (Ananta, & Dirdjo, 2021). The majority of nurses experience moderate work stress. The average stress level is 9.9 in the mild stress category. Stress varies from person to person depending on the problems faced and the ability to solve them. If a person experiences too much stress, it will interfere

with their ability to cope with their environment and work (Saleha, Delfina, Nurlaili, Ardiansyah, & Nafratilova, 2020).

Factors that influence work stress, especially among nurses. Workload can take the form of expectations or demands related to tasks, organizational structure, or working conditions. In the context of nursing, nurses face workloads that consist of physical and mental aspects. Physical workload includes tasks such as lifting patients, cleaning patients, accompanying patients to the bathroom, and other physical activities that involve physical strength. Meanwhile, mental workload can include working in a shift system that demands endurance and consistency, establishing effective communication with colleagues, superiors, and patients, as well as managing the emotional and psychological aspects related to work. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Health in 2017, it was found that 60.6% of workers suffered from depression and 57.6% of them experienced sleep disorders in the form of insomnia (Azteria & Hendarti, 2020). The relationship between workload and work stress: there is a significant relationship between workload and work stress (Pramono & Paramananda, 2024).

Other factors such as nursing task demands resulted in 49 respondents experiencing more stress. Based on the results of the hypothesis test using the Chi-Square test, a p-value of 0.025 (<0.05) was obtained, which means that there is a relationship between task demands and work stress among nurses in the inpatient ward of Putri Hijau Hospital in Medan (Mahendra, 2021). Based on the results of the bivariate test of job demands and work stress, a p-value of 0.011 ($p < 0.005$) was obtained, indicating a relationship between job demands and work stress. A p-value of 0.037 ($p < 0.05$) indicates a relationship between job demands and work stress (Lestantyo & Kurniawan, 2018).

In addition to task demands, length of service is also considered to influence work stress. Nurses with 1-10 years of service experienced more stress, with 52 respondents. Based on the results of the hypothesis test using the Chi-Square test, a p-value of 0.029 (<0.05) was obtained, which means that there is a relationship between length of service and work stress among inpatient nurses. This is because length of service is an important factor in triggering

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work stress; workers with longer service tend to have better skills and understanding of their work compared to workers with shorter service (Suska, 2021). A strong correlation was found between social support and the stress experienced by nurses, with a p-value of 0.000 and an inverse relationship. This means that the higher the social support, the lower the stress. The results of the correlation between social support and stress levels ($r = -0.142$, p-value < 0.05) show that the higher the social support, the lower the stress levels among nurses. The results of this study indicate that the respondents have high social support and low stress levels. There is an influence of social support on work stress (Mallapiang, Azriful, Nursetyaningsih, & Adha, 2017). Lack of social support can cause stress, where low social support disrupts nurses' comfort at work. Nurses with low social support will experience uncomfortable working conditions due to disharmonious relationships with family, friends, relatives, and colleagues. Low social support will affect a person's level of work stress. So, if a nurse has high social support from the people around them, they will be able to manage the work stress they face well and improve their performance, and vice versa. Many respondents in this study agreed that social support from family is important, as seen in the results of the MSPSS questionnaire point 11 with answer no. 6, which means agree. When carrying out their duties as nurses, they really need social support from their environment, especially family, superiors, and coworkers, to build energy in providing services for health workers. Previous studies have assumed that social support is very much needed by nurses as the front line in fulfilling their duties while on duty and away from their families. Thus, continuous intervention is needed to maintain the resilience of nurses in obtaining social support from family, spouses, friends, social groups, work partners, superiors, and management. For example, having a family that always supports them at work, social groups with similar activities, coworkers who recognize their competence and skills, supervisors who reward nurses for good work, and management that supports nurses' welfare in the form of incentive payments, vacations, leave, immunity boosters, and vitamins (Maijefri & Rizal, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Social support, especially from family, plays an important role in maintaining nurses' psychological well-being and has been proven to be the highest dimension of support they receive. Emotional, informational, instrumental, and appreciative support helps nurses make decisions, manage emotions, and maintain concentration while working. Conversely, nurses' stress levels remain in the moderate category, with contributing factors such as physical and mental workload, task demands, and length of service. Various studies show a significant negative relationship between social support and work stress, where the higher the social support received, the lower the stress levels felt. Thus, strong social support—especially from family, coworkers, and supervisors—is an important element in helping nurses manage job demands and improve their resilience and performance.

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