

Family Support and Loneliness in The Elderly: Their Influence on Quality of Life

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ABSTRACT

Loneliness significantly affects the quality of life among older adults. Family support plays a crucial role as a protective factor in maintaining the health and well-being of the elderly. Positive family support is recognized as one of the key determinants in enhancing the quality of life of older individuals. This study aims to analyze the relationship between family support and the quality of life in elderly individuals experiencing loneliness. A quantitative approach was used, employing a correlational design with a cross-sectional method. A total of 80 elderly respondents were selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected using the UCLA Loneliness Scale, the Family Support Questionnaire, and the WHOQOL-BREF questionnaire. The results showed that 70.0% of the elderly respondents received adequate family support, and 80.0% had a moderate level of quality of life. Family support was found to have a significant influence on the quality of life among elderly individuals who experience loneliness. It is recommended that families provide consistent care and support to their elderly members, enabling them to feel accompanied and valued in their later years, thereby improving their overall well-being.

Keywords: Elderly, Family Support, Loneliness, Quality of Life

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INTRODUCTION

Loneliness among older individuals living in community settings shows varying prevalence rates across different countries. According to national surveys, in Sweden, approximately 7.68–9.88% of individuals aged 70 and above experience loneliness, while in Norway, around 11.6% of older adults aged 65 and over who live independently are expected to feel lonely by 2052. Similarly, in Nepal, 38.7% of older adults experience moderate levels of loneliness, while 16.9% report severe loneliness. In China, research findings indicate that approximately 8% of the elderly population aged 60 and above always feel lonely (1).

Research on the elderly population in Indonesia also highlights a high prevalence and significant impact of loneliness. Loneliness is associated with reduced psychological well-being in older adults. Although some studies have not found a significant relationship between loneliness and cognitive function, several others emphasize the crucial role of social support in alleviating feelings of loneliness. Family support, in particular, has a significant negative correlation with loneliness among older adults (2). Interventions such as gardening therapy have also been shown to effectively reduce levels of loneliness in this population (3).

The prevalence of loneliness among the elderly varies across demographic

groups. One study found that 36.7% of participants experienced loneliness, while another study reported that 55 out of 70 elderly participants experienced moderate levels of loneliness (3). As individuals age, their level of social participation generally declines, leading to significant psychological impacts (4)(5). Limited social engagement among the elderly is associated with increased loneliness, a higher risk of cardiovascular disease, mental health disorders, and cognitive impairment (4). Conversely, maintaining social relationships and participating in community activities have been shown to predict higher levels of physical activity among older adults (6).

The quality of life in older adults is influenced by various factors, including social vulnerability, disability, and physical frailty. Research indicates that elderly individuals residing in areas with high levels of social vulnerability tend to have a lower quality of life, particularly in the domains of social relationships and sensory abilities (7). Limitations in performing Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) and Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs) are associated with reduced overall quality of life, affecting both physical health and social participation (8). Family support is also a key factor influencing the quality of life among older individuals.

The presence of family support plays a crucial role in shaping the quality of life in the elderly. Studies have identified a significant relationship between family functionality and the well-being of older adults, where individuals experiencing family dysfunction report lower quality of life scores (9)(10). Family support for the elderly is multidimensional, encompassing instrumental, financial, psycho-emotional, healthcare-related, informational, and social preference

support (11). Evidence shows that older adults who maintain strong familial bonds report a higher quality of life compared to those who are more vulnerable and lack close family connections (10). Furthermore, family functionality mediates the relationship between social support from various family members and quality of life, while self-perceived health directly influences quality of life (12).

This study identifies a research gap specific to Lenang Village, East Manggarai Regency, due to the lack of existing studies addressing the unique challenges faced by elderly individuals in this particular locality. While aging-related difficulties have been extensively reported in broader contexts, the distinct sociocultural, environmental, and infrastructural characteristics of Lenang Village have not been sufficiently explored. These factors may significantly impact the elderly population's limitations in daily activities, experiences of pain, lack of environmental support, and diminished confidence in their physical appearance, as highlighted in preliminary findings. Addressing these issues will provide localized insights into aging-related challenges and inform targeted interventions for this specific community.

METHODS

This study was conducted in a village located in East Manggarai from March 25 to April 12, 2024, using a cross-sectional research design. The study population comprised 100 elderly individuals aged 60 years and above, with a total sample of 80 participants. A non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling, was utilized. This quantitative research aimed to examine the association between family support and the quality of life in

older adults, with a particular focus on their experiences of loneliness. In this study, family support served as the independent variable, while the dependent variable was the quality of life as influenced by loneliness among the elderly population.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study present the distribution of family support, including differences based on the presence or absence of a partner, as well as the distribution of quality of life among the elderly, categorized similarly. Bivariate analysis was conducted to examine the correlation between family support and the quality of life in the elderly. Detailed data are presented in Table 1.

According to Table 3, 38 elderly individuals (47.5%) received strong family support, 26 individuals (32.5%) received moderate family support, and 16 individuals (20%) received poor family support.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Family Support

Family Support	f	%
Good	38	47.5
Adequate	26	35.5
Poor	16	20.0
Total	80	100

Table 2. Distribution of Family Support Among Elderly Individuals With and Without Partners

Elderly With Partner		
Family Support	f	%
Good	24	52.2
Adequate	14	30.4
Poor	8	17.4
Total (1)	46	100
Elderly Without Partner		
Family Support	f	%
Good	14	41.2
Adequate	12	35.3
Poor	8	23.5
Total (2)	34	100
Total (1+2)	80	100

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of the Quality of Life in Elderly Individuals with Loneliness

Quality of Life	f	%
Low	9	11.3
Moderate	64	80.0
High	7	8.8
Total	80	100

Table 4. Distribution of the Quality of Life Among Elderly Individuals With and Without Partners

Elderly With Partner		
Quality of Life	f	%
Low	5	10.9
Moderate	35	76.1
High	6	13.0
Total (1)	46	100
Elderly Without Partner		
Quality of Life	f	%
Low	4	11.8
Moderate	29	85.3
High	1	2.9
Total (2)	34	100
Total (1+2)	80	100

Table 4 shows that among elderly individuals with partners, 24 individuals (52.2%) received strong family support, 14 individuals (30.4%) received moderate support, and 8 individuals (17.4%) received poor support. Meanwhile, among elderly individuals without partners, 14 individuals (41.2%) received strong support, 12 individuals (35.3%) received moderate support, and 8 individuals (23.5%) received poor support.

Table 5 reveals that 9 elderly individuals (11.3%) had a low quality of life, 64 (80.0%) had a moderate quality of life, and 7 (8.8%) had a high quality of life.

Table 6 indicates that among elderly individuals with partners, 5 individuals (10.9%) had a low quality of life, 35 (76.1%) had a moderate quality of life, and 6 (13.0%) had a high quality of life. In contrast, among elderly individuals without partners, 4 (11.8%) had a low quality of life, 29 (85.3%) had a

Table 5. Results of the Correlation Test Between Family Support and Quality of Life Among Elderly Individuals Experiencing Loneliness

Family Support	Quality of Life Among Elderly Individuals Experiencing Loneliness				P-value
	Low	Moderate	High	Total	
Good	0	34	4	38	0.002
Adequate	3	20	3	26	
Poor	6	10	0	16	
Total	9	64	7	80	

moderate quality of life, and only 1 (2.9%) had a high quality of life.

From the tabulated data, it was observed that none of the elderly individuals with strong family support experienced a low quality of life. Instead, 34 reported a moderate quality of life and 4 a high quality of life. Among those with moderate family support, 3 had a low quality of life, 20 had a moderate quality of life, and 3 reported a high quality of life. In contrast, among individuals with poor family support, 6 had a low quality of life, 10 had a moderate quality of life, and none reported a high quality of life.

The Chi-Square test revealed a statistically significant association between family support and the quality of life among elderly individuals experiencing loneliness, with a p-value of 0.002 and a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.391. This indicates a moderately strong and meaningful relationship between family support and quality of life.

The results confirm that elderly individuals experiencing loneliness who receive strong family support tend to report a moderate or high quality of life. This suggests that consistent and meaningful family support plays a vital role in enhancing the well-being of the elderly. However, it was also found that some individuals with strong family support still reported a low quality of life, while others with inadequate

support experienced relatively good outcomes.

Quality of life (QoL) is a multidimensional concept encompassing both objective and subjective aspects (13). Objective indicators include material and environmental factors such as income, education, and health status, while subjective indicators reflect individuals' personal perceptions of well-being (14). Thus, even among those receiving strong family support, factors such as chronic illness, financial hardship, dependency, isolation, or support that does not meet personal needs may reduce quality of life. Conversely, elderly individuals with insufficient family support may report a good quality of life due to high independence, good psychological well-being, social engagement, positive community interactions, access to healthcare, and good physical health.

In conclusion, the study supports the notion that while family support is an important contributor to the quality of life among the elderly, it is not the sole determinant. Factors such as subjective health, economic status, recreational activities, access to services, and the absence of depression significantly impact QoL (15). Social services also play a crucial role in enhancing the physical and mental well-being of dependent older adults, promoting independence (16). Furthermore, physical activity, emotional recognition,

and healthcare involvement from family and community members contribute to improving quality of life.

Family support directly influences elderly behavior and lifestyle, serving as a foundation for physical, psychological, social, and environmental well-being (11-18). It fosters self-esteem and acts as a motivator for continued life satisfaction. Multidimensional support—including financial, instrumental, emotional, healthcare-related, technological, and social preference support—has been shown to improve elderly well-being. Thus, family involvement is essential in planning and delivering effective eldercare.

The findings of this study demonstrate a direct positive correlation between family support and the quality of life in older adults. Strong family support contributes to greater social interaction, emotional security, and a sense of purpose, ultimately enhancing their overall well-being.

LIMITATIONS

This study required a considerable amount of time due to the limited ability of some elderly participants to comprehend the questions, necessitating researcher assistance to help them understand the format and content of the questionnaire.

RESEARCH ETHIC

The research was conducted following ethical approval from the Ethics Committee and the Community Service Institute of Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng, under approval letter number 90b/USP/L02/K/03/2023. Throughout the research process, ethical principles were upheld, including beneficence, respect for human dignity, and justice to

protect the rights and welfare of the participants. Respondent confidentiality was strictly maintained, as outlined in the informed consent form, which was signed by participants who voluntarily agreed to partake in the study.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest related to this study.

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CONCLUSION

The Chi-Square test analysis revealed a significant relationship between family support and the quality of life among elderly individuals experiencing loneliness, with a p-value of 0.002 and a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.391. These findings indicate that greater family support is associated with better quality of life in this population.

It is therefore essential for families and communities to provide consistent attention and care for elderly individuals, ensuring they do not feel neglected or abandoned in their later years. Support and engagement from family members, along with a supportive community environment, can play a crucial role in enhancing the overall well-being and quality of life of the elderly.

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