

# Psychological Health Of Elderly People In The Covid-19 Pandemic

Mierrina<sup>1</sup>, Charis Rizki Pradana<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Psychology, Sunan Ampel State Islamic University, Surabaya, Indonesia*

<sup>2</sup>*Department of Islamic Counseling Guidance, Sunan Ampel State Islamic University, Surabaya, Indonesia*  
*mierrina@uinsby.ac.id; charis.rizki.pradana.s.sos.i.m.pd@dlb.uinsby.ac.id*

**Keywords:** psychological health, the elderly, the Covid-19 pandemic

**Abstract:** The pandemic has hit the world which has implications for all aspects of life, including the lives of the elderly. During the Covid-19 pandemic, this has also become an extraordinary adaptation process for other elderly people, which has an impact on their psychological health. This study aims to provide an overview of the psychological health of elderly people related to their psychological problems, during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is a descriptive study with quantitative methods, using a questionnaire as a data mining tool. Conducted on a sample of 96 elderly people in the age range 55-75 years. The results of the study in general that the elderly who experience psychological problems in general show that 15% are very suitable, 66% are suitable, 18% are not suitable and 1% are not very suitable. The problem with the largest percentage is the increase in negative emotions and death anxiety, which are 75% and 69%, respectively.

## INTRODUCTION

Pandemics have swept the world, infecting people, causing death, focusing hospital capacities to care for the sick, and significantly disrupting many domains of human activity. This has implications for public health authorities regarding social distancing arrangements in an effort to slow the speed of transmission of the virus. This condition has changed the entire life of all mankind, including the elderly. This makes the elderly feel isolated and confined, which also has implications for the psychological health of the elderly, because they cannot function and interact normally as before.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the elderly group (> 60%) was still the group that contributed the most deaths due to Covid-19 (50%) even though only 11.3% of all positive cases existed. The case fatality ratio of the elderly group is also the highest (12%) compared to other age groups, even 4 times the national figure. According to the analysis of mortality by age and history of comorbidities, the elderly have a 19.5-fold higher risk than other age groups (<https://promkes.kemkes.go.id/tetap-sehatkan-lansia-di-masa-pandemi-covid-19>).

The pandemic has a significant psychosocial impact on the elderly, including health anxiety, panic, adjustment disorders, chronic stress. All of this stems from a sense of loneliness as a result of social distancing restrictions during the Covid-19

pandemic. It also raises cognitive and emotional disturbances, which makes the elderly become irritable and irritable (Banerjee, 2020). The current Covid-19 crisis can be expected to cause psychological trauma (Lange, 2021).

Older people experience increased clinical susceptibility, among them addiction and/or death when exposed to stressors. Elderly people who are easily sick with only mild stressors, the illness can become severe and are at risk of death. Vulnerability/frailty is a process that is in line with the decreasing capacity of body functions in the aging process (<https://promkes.kemkes.go.id/tetap-sehatkan-lansia-di-masa-pandemi-covid-19>).

When you get older, your physical and mental strength decreases a lot, not only your endurance is getting weaker but your memory is also getting weaker. Not even a few elderly people who experience senility. The strong force turned sluggish. Even a sharp mind becomes dull. Physiological decline with psychological and mental decline that accompanies the elderly, is closely related to the slowing down of the regeneration process of body cells, which are also nerve cells or neurons in the elderly (AC Rosen et al., 2002; Rossi et al., 2004, in Kalat, 2010).

The age limit for the elderly according to the World Health Organization (WHO) for the elderly includes: (1) Middle age, namely the age group of 45 to 59

years; (2) Elderly = between 60 to 74 years; (3) Elderly (old) = between 75 to 90 years; (4) Very old = above 90 years (Nugroho, 2012)

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many efforts were made to maintain and optimize the quality of life of the elderly. Efforts are made not only from the aspect of nutritional intake and physical health, but also psychological health. It's just a fact on the ground that psychologically, the elderly are the most vulnerable individuals to be exposed to the Covid-19 virus. This phenomenon causes them to experience deep anxiety.

The aging process is also known as "senescence". This word is taken from the Latin "senescere" which means to grow old. The aging process is a life cycle characterized by the stages of decline in various organ functions, for example in the cardiovascular system and blood vessels, respiration, digestion, endocrine and so on. Various functions of organs in an elderly person are not the same, and from one elderly person to another the aging process is also not the same (Kaplan, et al., 2006).

Aging is a cumulative change in living things, including the body, tissues and cells, which experience a decrease in functional capacity. In humans, aging is associated with degenerative changes in the skin, bones, heart, blood vessels, lungs, nerves and other body tissues. With limited regenerative abilities, they are more susceptible to various diseases, syndromes and illnesses than other adults.

This decrease is mainly a decrease in the ability of the brain. As Allah says: "Allah created you, then died you; And some of you have been brought back to the age of the weakest (senile), so that He may no longer know anything that he once knew. Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Powerful (Surah An-Nahl: 70.)

According to Safitri, 2018 (in <http://yankes.kemkes.go.id/read-problem-kesehatan-pada-lansia-4884.html>) that health problems that often occur in the elderly are different from adults, which is often called the syndrome Geriatrics is a collection of symptoms regarding health that are often complained of by the elderly and or their families, namely:

Immobility (less moving); Instability (easy to fall); Incontinence; Intellectual impairment (intellectual impairment/dementia); Infection (infection); Impairment of hearing, vision and smell (impaired hearing, vision and smell); Isolation (Depression); Inanition (malnutrition); Impecunity (poverty); Iatrogenic (suffering from drug-induced illness); Insomnia (difficulty sleeping); Immuno-deficiency

(decreased immune system); Impotence (Sexual disorders); Impaction (difficult bowel movements).

The psychological problems in the elderly are seen as a result of the changes they experience that accompany the aging process and the reactions to these changes also vary depending on the personality of the individual concerned. The increased emotional tendency makes them experience these changes as a problem, resulting in the emergence of mental health disorders which include anxiety, fear in dealing with it (Kaplan, et al., 2006).

In general, there are several forms of psychological problems that exist in the elderly, including:

(1) The problem of work, with its slowness, elderly people feel less appreciated and not needed in work; (2) Interest problems, elderly people feel apathetic and bored more quickly in trying new things; (3) Isolation and loneliness, with the decline in intellectual qualities make it difficult for elderly people to adapt to new ways of thinking and new styles of the younger generation, and vice versa. This includes the loosening of family ties and the family's indifference to the elderly, which forced them to be isolated in a nursing home; (4) Disinhibition, the older a person gets, the less capable they are in controlling their feelings and less able to restrain themselves in their actions, so that small things that shouldn't be a problem, but for them can evoke emotional outbursts and even outbursts of anger; (5) Mood changes, due to physiological changes in the brain and nervous system that occur in the elderly are one of the causes of mood swings and changes in some aspects of behavior (McGhie, 1996).

Examining the data on the problems of the elderly above, which is related to the condition of the Covid-19 pandemic, the elderly group (> 60%) is still the group that contributes the most deaths due to Covid-19. Also policies related to social distancing restrictions in the community, of course, will raise anxiety that affects psychological health which has implications for the physical health of the elderly. So for now it is necessary to conduct research to find out the real picture of the psychological health of the elderly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## METHOD

The research design is descriptive and uses quantitative methods. Quantitative data were obtained from questionnaires filled out by 96 elderly people in the age range of 55-75 years. The selection of participants by purposive sampling method. That purposive sampling is a sampling technique for data sources with certain considerations, so that it will

make it easier for researchers to explain the object/social situation under study (Sugiyono, 2018). The data collection technique used in this study was through filling out questionnaires by the elderly. The mechanism for filling out questionnaires by the elderly is carried out individually with assistance, because the elderly have several limitations due to the decline in their body, memory and intellectual functions.

The development of the instrument in the research was developed from the theoretical construct, the main indicators and realized in the research instrument in the form of a questionnaire, using a Likert scale. This questionnaire was given 4 answer choices, namely for the favorable statement, 1 (very unsuitable), 2 (not appropriate), 3 (appropriate), and 4 (very appropriate). Meanwhile, the unfavorable statements are 4 (very inappropriate), 3 (not appropriate), 2 (appropriate) and 1 (very appropriate). The scale is used as an answer to the statement instrument. This research questionnaire consists of 15 statement items about the psychological problems of the elderly that have implications for the psychological health of the elderly, with indicators of interaction with family, interaction with friends, unhappiness, negative emotions and death anxiety.

The data that has been obtained is then analyzed using descriptive statistics. In this case the researcher will present the data obtained from the questionnaires filled out by the elderly. Then the data will be used to describe the object under study, which is to provide an overview of the real psychological health of the elderly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## RESULT

The results of the study using descriptive statistics that 96 elderly who experienced psychological problems during the Covid-19 pandemic showed 15% very suitable, 66% suitable, 18% not suitable and 1% very inappropriate. For research results related to indicators of family interaction problems, the elderly who experienced it during the Covid-19 pandemic showed 18% very suitable, 37% suitable, 36% inappropriate and 9% very inappropriate.

While the results of research related to indicators of interaction problems with friends, the elderly who experienced it during the Covid-19 pandemic, showed that 11% was very suitable, 3% was suitable, 76% was not suitable and 10% was very inappropriate. The results of research related to indicators of the problem of unhappiness, the elderly who experienced it during the Covid-19 pandemic

showed 11% very suitable, 52% suitable, 18% inappropriate and 19% very inappropriate.

Furthermore, the results of research related to indicators of negative emotional problems, the elderly who experienced it during the Covid-19 pandemic showed 14% very suitable, 75% suitable, 7% inappropriate and 4% very inappropriate. And on the indicator of the problem of death anxiety, the elderly who experienced it during the Covid-19 pandemic showed 11% very suitable, 69% suitable, 18% inappropriate and 2% very inappropriate.

## DISCUSSION

After obtaining the results of a descriptive study to examine the psychological health picture of the elderly during the Covid-19 pandemic, it turned out that the percentage of psychological problems felt by the elderly was relatively high. Mainly on the emergence of negative emotions and anxiety about death. This is related to the psychological problems of the elderly in disinhibition and mood swings. The older a person gets, the less able they are to control their feelings and less able to restrain themselves in doing so, so that small things that shouldn't be a problem for them can evoke emotional outbursts and even outbursts of anger and irritation.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the policy of limiting social activities prevented the elderly from being able to carry out normal activities as they usually do, which in turn made them feel bored, resulting in angry and irritable behavior. This symptom arises because of the emotional pain associated with sadness and boredom that gives rise to feelings of being excluded, isolated from others, because they feel different from others (Probosuseno, 2007).

Likewise, the number of comorbid cases experienced by the elderly will decrease their immunity, so that even when they feel mild pain, the elderly consider it a serious disease that accelerates death (Fang, 2020). These two indicators are interrelated which in turn results in a decline in the level of psychological health of the elderly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Restrictions on activities in all aspects of life make the elderly interact more at home with their families. The results of the research on indicators of interaction problems with families, showed that some felt a problem and others with approximately the same percentage did not feel there was a problem. If the elderly are in a harmonious family and positive family ties, they will not feel any problems in family ties. On the other hand, for the elderly who are in families with weak emotional ties

between family members and indifference to the elderly, they will feel the problem of family ties. Associated with the problem of loneliness or isolation in the elderly, making them feel unhappiness in their lives, especially during this Covid-19 pandemic. However, this study still shows positive things related to the psychological health of the elderly, namely the interaction indicator with friends which shows that the elderly do not feel a problem in terms of interaction with friends. This is possible with the help of technological tools, namely cellular phones, so it is still possible for the elderly to still be able to interact with friends. In addition, emotional ties with friends are relatively closer and less likely to cause conflict, because among them the elderly will have a dialogue with the same topic.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Reviewing the results of this study, it was concluded that the Covid-19 pandemic had a tremendous influence on the psychological health of the elderly. Along with the aging process and the decline in cell function, the elderly experience physical and psychological health problems. So the various psychological problems felt by the elderly ranging from interactions with family, unhappiness, anxiety about illness and death, to the biggest problem, namely the increasing emergence of negative emotions.

The negative response of the elderly to the psychological problems they face should not be ignored. This is because failure to address the psychological health problems stemming from the pandemic is likely to prolong its impact. For this reason, it is necessary to design steps to deal with this problem proactively.

There are several things that can be done to help the elderly in overcoming their psychological problems in order to promote the psychological health of the elderly, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, which until now has not known the total expiration date. Timely preventive and therapeutic psychological health care for the elderly is very important. Increase family support by educating families at the lowest organizational level, namely the RT level, by providing awareness of the nature of parents in the family.

Activate elderly posyandu cadres to conduct home visits to the elderly. It aims to reduce the loneliness felt by the elderly, as well as to check the physical health condition of the elderly. In addition, because the elderly are currently also living in the era of technology, it is possible to use digital technology to

increase social support for the elderly. All of these efforts aim to facilitate the resilience of the elderly to the adverse psychological health effects during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## REFERENCES

- Banerjee, D., 2020. The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Elderly Mental Health. *Int J Geriatr Psychiatry*. doi: [10.1002/gps.5320](https://doi.org/10.1002/gps.5320)
- Lange, K.W., Zhang, J., 2021. Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and global mental health. *Glob Health J*. doi: [10.1016/j.glohj.2021.02.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.glohj.2021.02.004)
- Depression in the Elderly. in <http://lansiafood.net>.
- Fang, L., Karakiulakis, G., & Roth, M., 2020. Are patients with hypertension and diabetes mellitus at increased risk for COVID-19 infection?. *The Lancet Respiratory Medicine*, 8(4), e21. doi: 10.1016/s2213-2600(20)30116-8
- Hawari, D., 1996. *The Qur'an of Psychiatric Medicine and Mental Health*. Yogyakarta: Fund Bhakti Prima Yasa
- Huda, N.C., 2013. *Making peace with old age*. Surabaya: Wisdom Press.
- Kalat, J.W., 2010. *Biopsychology*. Jakarta: Salemba Humanics.
- Kaplan, H.L, Sadock, B.J and Grebb, J.A., 2006. *Synopsis of Psychiatry, Behavioral Science of Clinical Psychiatry*. Issue 7. Volume II. Jakarta: Binaputra Aksara.
- Health Problems in the Elderly*. in <http://yankes.kemkes.go.id/read-problem-kesehatan-pada-lansia-4884.html>, accessed on July 31, 2019.
- McGhie, A., 1996. *Application of Psychology in Maintenance*. Translation of Ika Pattinasarany. Yogyakarta: Andi Offset.
- Understanding the Personality of the Elderly*. in <http://singgihpanduwicaksono.blogspot.com/>.
- Nugroho., 2012. *Gerontic & geriatric nursing, 3rd edition*. Jakarta : EGC
- Probosuseno., 2007. *Overcoming Isolation in Advanced Age*. in <http://www.medicalzone.org>
- Keep the Elderly Healthy during the Covid-19 Pandemic*. In <https://promkes.kemkes.go.id/tetap-sehatkan-lansia-di-masa-pandemi-covid-19>
- Supriadi. 2015. Elderly and its Problems. *Journal PPKn & Law*. Vol. 10 No. October 2, 2015.