



## A Phenomenological Study in the Spirituality of the Elderly due to the restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Restrictions on activities around the world are carried out because the COVID-19 pandemic has a significant impact, as well on the elderly. The restrictions on worship have an impact because worship is an effort for the elderly to improve their quality of life in their old age.

**Study Design:** This research used a qualitative design with a phenomenological approach to see the spiritual activities of the elderly in a more holistic way. The research was conducted from November 2020 to February 2021.

**Research Subject:** Elderly with the age above 60 years living in Malang Raya with a total of 10 participants: 7 females and 3 males. Research with a qualitative design with respondents as an instrument.

**Results:** The qualitative study conducted resulted in two major themes, namely (1) Changes in worship: (a) Using health protocols, (b) There are differences in worship between before and after the pandemic, (2) Dissatisfaction with online worship with sub-themes: ( a) Feelings of uncomfortable worship at home; (b) Dissatisfaction with online worship; (c) Feelings of dissatisfaction with the pandemic. (3) Fatalistic to God with sub-themes: (a) Get closer to God; (b) Desire to worship in places of worship (4) Spiritual Improvement of Elderly: (a) Increased frequency of prayer,

**Conclusion:** Changes in the pattern of worship of the elderly cause dissatisfaction, resignation to spiritual improvement. This attitude can be an illustration in the management of the elderly in terms of their spirituality for the community. Education for the elderly regarding the procedures for worship and the arrangement of worship methods need to be done even better, so as to improve the adaptation of the elderly to face the COVID-19 pandemic.

**KEYWORDS** *Spirituality; Elderly; COVID-19 Pandemic*



## INTRODUCTION

### BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in early 2020, has had many impacts on all aspects of human life, especially the life of the elderly. There were restrictions on their activities in both community and religious life. This restriction had a significant effect on the lives of the elderly because the psychological dimensions have a major influence on their lives<sup>1-3</sup>.

For the elderly, the psychological dimension has a very important role in bringing someone to success and making someone a good leader so that they can improve the quality of life. The fulfillment of spiritual needs for the elderly cannot be ignored because it can affect a person's healing process and improve the quality of life of the elderly<sup>4</sup>. Paying attention to the spiritual needs at the end of the lives of healthy and sick people is the basis for quality care. A person with unmet spiritual needs is at increased risk of poorer psychological outcomes, reduced quality of life, reduced spiritual peace, and increased risk of depression. Spiritual needs are a need that is a source of strength to face everything and is the main key in physical, mental, emotional, and relational well-being<sup>5</sup>. There was a change in spiritual patterns in the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in the elderly having to worship at home with different health protocols and worship procedures<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand, the 'essential' and emotional values possessed by the elderly believe that worshipping in a house of worship has its own 'essential' and emotional value<sup>7</sup>. These differences give rise to different perceptions for the elderly and are very interesting to study, so researchers want to take a deeper look at the picture of the spirituality of the elderly in the COVID-19 pandemic.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

A qualitative method was used in this study with a phenomenological approach in capturing the spirituality of the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study looks at the feelings, readiness, hopes, challenges experienced by participants in meeting the spiritual needs of the elderly in a pandemic. The experiences of participants who are complex and interrelated can produce knowledge that can be understood<sup>8</sup>.

Research with a qualitative approach using purposive sampling in selecting participants found 10 elderly people who are over 60 years old. These ten elderly consist of 7 women and 3 men who live



in the area of Malang Raya (Malang City, Batu City, Malang Regency). The age range of participants is between 60 years to 87 years with religious backgrounds, namely two Muslims, four Christians, and four Catholics with an average of retirees.

Researchers are the main instrument in qualitative research to exploit all conversations and generate keywords and themes<sup>9</sup>. Additional instruments are PC, media zoom, notes, and voice recorder.

The data collection process begins with a time contract and providing informed consent online. The researcher prepared all the infrastructure before the in-depth interview process began. Selection of online media because it minimizes the spread of COVID-19 for the elderly. The next method is to convert all interview recordings and field notes into transcripts and analyze them. Researchers focused on looking at participants' views on the spiritual needs of the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the study were triangulated with data read by experts to reduce errors in concluding<sup>9</sup>.

## **FINDINGS**

The ten participants had information obtained through in-depth interviews regarding the spiritual picture of the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic and produced several themes such as the following:

### **Theme 1: Changing Patterns in Worship**

The first theme found in this study was a change in patterns of worship with sub-themes: (1) Using health protocols (2) There are differences in worship between before and after the pandemic.

#### **Sub-theme: Using health protocol**

The changes that were felt by the elderly while worshipping was the application of health protocols, to those elderly, who were allowed to worship like washing hands and wearing masks: "I want to start church worship by implementing health protocol such as washing hands then eee...that's all we think worship also wears masks".

In addition, preparation with health protocols when carrying out worship directly, as said by the 10th participant:

“Yes, the preparation, yes, with the health protocols, it's definitely... if it's mental preparation, it's mental, but it seems like there's still something lacking”.

#### **Sub-theme: There is a difference in worship between before and after the pandemic**



During the pandemic, the elderly felt a lot of restrictions, as stated by participant 4: “Before covid, it was clear that we were together .... kiss on the cheek, I can say, but after the pandemic there are limitations; must wear a mask, keep your distance or wash your hands”

This difference causes many elderly people to feel that worship is less meaningful, as stated by participant 6: "After this pandemic, it seems because there are restrictions so that it is for intimacy and for what (the voice of a small child crying) is for his worship. for the worship itself, it's also not that bad...because it's limited... something is lacking in worship”.

## **Theme 2: Dissatisfaction RemotePrayer**

The second theme in this study is dissatisfaction with the implementation of online worship. This worship is carried out by the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic, because of government regulations regarding activity restrictions, the elderly are considered a vulnerable group, so worship at home is an obligation of the elderly<sup>10</sup>. The theme of dissatisfaction with online worship has three sub-themes, namely: (1) Feelings of discomfort when worshipping at home, (2) Feelings of dissatisfaction with worshipping online (3) Feelings of dissatisfaction with the pandemic.

### **Sub-theme: Feelings of discomfort when worshipping at home**

Feelings of discomfort when worshipping at home arise in the elderly. The elderly think that praying at home has many limitations. Participants believed that the implementation of worship at home caused a feeling of not being able to concentrate. This is as expressed by participants 9 as follows:

“...The obstacle is concentration, there is a sudden visitor. Sometimes there is an incoming call. Sometimes if there is CCTV, who is it...”.

Feelings of dissatisfaction also appeared in participants when performing worship at home, such as the following:

“...Feeling unsatisfied...I miss my friends especially...”.

Participants also felt uncomfortable and afraid when doing worship at home with all their limitations, as follows:

"...yes at home, afraid to worship in person...”.

### **Sub-theme: Feelings of Dissatisfaction with Online Worship**

The implementation of online worship carried out by elderly participants has various limitations. One of the obstacles is the lack of concentration due to online worship such as the following:



"..The obstacle is concentration, there is a sudden guest. Sometimes there is an incoming call. Sometimes if there is CCTV, who is it...".

Participants feel uncomfortable because they have to worship alone and do not participate in activities carried out at places of worship, as stated by participants as follows:

"..if you don't feel well then your body doesn't feel good, you don't have to go to church. Coordination activities are also now limited, right...".

Participants feel dissatisfied with the implementation of online worship because of the short time as follows:

"..yes, the obstacle is clear because the time is very limited, if in the past the exam, for example, was a bit long, now it's a bit shorter and the characters are shortened, the characters are also e.. it's not that long, e. also less, less free...".

Participants feel uncomfortable with the implementation of online worship such as the following:

"... so it is blocked by e.. and then online is not enough, it's still not comfortable...".

### **Sub-theme: Feelings of dissatisfaction due to the pandemic**

The uncomfortable feelings felt by the participants because many people did not comply with the health protocols made the participants feel restless, as follows:

"...the implementation of the protocol worship is not fully implemented, so it can disturb our feelings, so we finally have our feelings or appreciation or what, eee... what can be called eee... if people worship, it's eee wisdom...".

Participants also feel uncomfortable because of the COVID-19 pandemic as follows:

"...feeling a bit disturbed by this corona outbreak...".

The prolongation of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused the elderly to feel worried as follows:

"...is this God's will or nature's will or something...".

### **Theme 3: Fatalistic to God**

Feeling fatalistic to God is a theme found in the study of the spiritual description of the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic. This theme consists of two sub-themes, namely (1) Getting closer to God, (2) the desire to worship in places of worship.

#### **Sub-theme: Getting closer to God**

The feeling of fatalistic to God is an attitude that the elderly have because they see the state of the COVID-19 pandemic so it requires the elderly to worship at home with all their limitations. These



limitations make the elderly closer to God. Elderly said to repent and to get closer to God as follows:

"We must repent..... During this pandemic, we are getting closer to God.... Yes, it's uncomfortable, yes, I surrender to God..".

The participant admitted that he was uncomfortable with the implementation of online worship at home during the pandemic, but he could only surrender and draw closer to God.

### **Sub Theme: Desire to worship in a place of worship**

Worshipping at home online with its various limitations causes a different feeling, a feeling of emptiness felt by the elderly:

"...it feels like empty, it feels like that person isn't that close to God..".

The elderly feel unable to focus their minds, feel uncomfortable when worshipping at home, as stated by the following participants:

"...but if you're at home sometimes" your mind can be fine, so it's not like it's concentrated..".

The emergence of feelings of discomfort when worshipping at home results in a longing to worship in a place of worship, such as the following:

"... we go to church, we need to miss being able to meet the Lord Jesus..".

Participants also felt more solemn when worshipping in places of worship such as the following:

"...the feeling is different, the feeling is disturbed, if at home, for example, the person is less intimate with God, but at church, it is 100% solemn..".

### **Theme 4: Spiritual Improvement of the Elderly**

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has also increased the overall spirituality of the elderly. This increase can be measured by increasing the frequency of prayer and feeling closer to God.

#### **Sub-theme: Prayer Frequency Increase**

The increase can be measured by the number of worships performed, such as the implementation of obligatory prayers such as the second participatory:

"if that night pray tahajjud, at 1 o'clock wake up tahajjud at a friend's house then at 9 o'clock prayer.. dhuhr prayer ..".

Participants felt that they prioritized time for worship over other activities, so the frequency of prayer time was longer, as said participant 3:

"Sometimes, I lock the door, Ms Frankly, yes, I usually like soap operas, usually it ends at 11 so I pray, now I reduce soap operas, pray a lot".



## DISCUSSION

For the elderly, spiritual aspects are very important because it directly affects their mental and psychological state<sup>11</sup>. An assessment of the spirituality of the elderly needs to be carried out in order to provide spiritual intervention in addition to changes in worship patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>12,13</sup>. Changes in worship patterns make the elderly have to worship at home with many restrictions including the use of health protocols which resulted in a pattern of worship before the pandemic.

Changes in worship patterns create feelings of discomfort when worshipping at home. Inconvenience due to the limitations of technological equipment in performing worship<sup>14</sup>. The limitation of accessing this technology makes the elderly feel dissatisfied. On the other hand, limitations result in decreased concentration in worship and can increase the stress of the elderly<sup>15</sup>. The feeling of discomfort experienced by the elderly results in a resigned attitude. This resignation is experienced by the elderly because they feel dissatisfied with the existence of online worship. The elderly also have a desire to be able to immediately perform worship directly. Even the elderly feel dissatisfied and even disappointed with the COVID-19 pandemic. This happens because the elderly experience a reluctance to have actual relationships with people, and prefer to relate to God through a spiritual aspect<sup>16</sup>.

Clients also feel a sense of dissatisfaction due to the emergence of the pandemic. This feeling is experienced by clients because many of the general public do not comply with health protocols, on the other hand, the elderly are a group of people with high risk, so they are more easily infected<sup>17</sup>. Many of the participants' activities have been disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which triggers feelings of discontent in the elderly. Until participants think that this COVID-19 pandemic is God's will.

Bonab and Namini argue that in terms of religious relationships, between humans and God there is an interactive relationship that has a positive relationship with coping mechanisms<sup>18</sup>. This coping mechanism is very important for the elderly to have, during this pandemic period they need relationships to improve the health of the elderly. The results of this study show that the elderly are quite aware and understand the COVID-19 pandemic and even the elderly associate this pandemic with sin. human. The elderly have a desire to be closer to God and have a religious relationship. This relationship can indirectly improve emotional care and spiritual support for the elderly<sup>7</sup>.



It is undeniable that the things above can cause stress in the elderly. The results of research on online worship experiences reveal that the tendency of someone who is diligent in worshipping in places of worship during the pandemic and the existence of a lockdown policy in several places results in a sense of incompleteness in worship which will eventually cause a sense of situational stress<sup>19</sup>. This condition requires stress management that comes from the client himself as well as maintaining health as an effort to reduce stress for the client<sup>20-22</sup>.

The attitude of surrender to God is the last choice for the elderly to get inner peace. This attitude is a form of piety to God which is expected to increase acceptance of the elderly and can improve health status. On the other hand, considering the creator is a form of self-control to reduce anxiety<sup>23</sup>. This feeling of resignation in the elderly is caused by feelings of dissatisfaction during the pandemic and feelings of dissatisfaction with the pandemic. Directly or indirectly, this feeling of dissatisfaction can increase the spirituality of the elderly.

Increased spirituality in the elderly is one of the predictors of life satisfaction during a pandemic<sup>24</sup>. The spiritual improvement of the elderly can be measured by the increasing frequency of prayer. This is because the elderly can directly perform worship at home, without being hindered by space and time. This spiritual elevation has the benefit of overcoming a person's illness<sup>25</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

The occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic in various regions has had a significant impact on the spiritual pattern of the elderly. Changes in worship patterns have an impact on dissatisfaction with the implementation of online worship, an attitude of surrender to God. The fulfillment of the spiritual needs of the elderly can be improved because it directly or indirectly affects the quality of life of the elderly who are getting better. Education for the elderly regarding the procedures and methods of worship can be provided to help fulfill the spiritual needs of the elderly.



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