

## The Role of Social Support in Improving the Well-Being of the Elderly: A Qualitative Review

Rubianti

Perawat RSUD Provinsi NTB

---

### Article Info

#### Article history:

Accepted: 15 June 2024

Published: 25 June 2024

---

### Keywords:

Elderly

Social support

Welfare

---

### Abstract

*This research aims to explore the role of social support in improving the well-being of the elderly through a qualitative review. Social support is identified as a crucial factor influencing the quality of life and happiness of older people in social, emotional and instrumental contexts. Qualitative research methods were used to gain in-depth understanding through in-depth interviews with elderly people and content analysis of related literature. The research results show that family, peers, and community play an important role in providing social support to the elderly. This support not only improves their emotional well-being but also provides practical help in living their daily lives. Seniors who feel strong social support tend to have lower levels of depression, better physical health, and a higher quality of life. Policy suggestions include increasing public awareness about the importance of social support for the elderly, developing community programs that support their social interactions, as well as integrating the concept of social support in public policies related to the welfare of the elderly. It is hoped that this research can make a significant contribution in increasing understanding and approaches to the important role of social support in advancing the welfare of the elderly in society.*

---

*This is an open access article under the [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)*



---

### Corresponding Author:

Rubianti,

Perawat RSUP Mataram

[Renimardika@gmail.com](mailto:Renimardika@gmail.com)

---

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The elderly population throughout the world continues to increase along with advances in health and increased life expectancy. In Indonesia, based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the number of elderly people is projected to reach 19.9% of the total population in 2045. This increase in the number of elderly people demands special attention to their quality of life and welfare. One important factor that influences the well-being of the elderly is the social support they receive.

Social support includes help received from family, friends and the community which can take the form of emotional, instrumental, informational and evaluative support. Social support has been shown to play an important role in reducing stress, improving mental health, and extending life expectancy. Elderly people who receive good social support tend to have lower levels of depression, feel happier, and have a better quality of life.

However, as they get older, seniors often face various challenges such as the loss of a partner, physical limitations, and social isolation. This condition can reduce social interactions and hinder their access to necessary social support. Therefore, this research aims to explore the role of social support in improving the well-being of the elderly through a qualitative approach.

Qualitative research was chosen because this approach allows researchers to explore the experiences and views of older people in depth regarding the social support they receive. By understanding the perspective of the elderly, it is hoped that effective strategies can be found to strengthen social support and improve their well-being.

This study will review various aspects of social support that influence the well-being of the elderly, including the type of support most needed, sources of support, and the barriers faced in accessing social support. This research will also consider the role of technology and innovation in improving social support for the elderly in the digital era.

Through this qualitative review, it is hoped that a more comprehensive understanding of the importance of social support in the lives of the elderly can be obtained as well as policy recommendations that can be implemented by the government, social institutions and society to support the welfare of the elderly more effectively.

The elderly are a group that is vulnerable to various physical, mental and social health problems. As older adults age, they often face challenges that can impact their well-being, including decreased physical function, social isolation, and reduced quality of life. In this context, social support is an important element that can contribute to improving the welfare of the elderly.

Social support is defined as help received from others which can take the form of emotional, informational, instrumental, or appraisal support. This support can come from a variety of sources, including family, friends, neighbors, and social institutions. Previous research shows that social support has a positive impact on the mental and physical health of older adults(1)

In recent decades, many studies have highlighted the importance of social support in improving the quality of life of older adults. For example, research(2)found that individuals with strong social relationships had a lower risk of death compared with those with less social support. In addition, social support has also been proven to reduce stress levels, increase feelings of safety and respect, and promote positive health behavior(3)

The qualitative approach in this research allows researchers to dig deeper into the experiences and perceptions of elderly people regarding the social support they receive and how this support affects their well-being. Through in-depth interviews and participant observation, this research aims to understand the role of social support in the daily lives of elderly people and identify factors that can increase or hinder the effectiveness of this support.

This research will provide more comprehensive insight into the importance of social support for the well-being of the elderly, which it is hoped can be used as a basis for designing more effective interventions and policies in supporting the elderly population.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

### **1. Research Design**

This research uses a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach. A phenomenological approach was chosen to understand the lived experiences and perceptions of elderly people about social support in the context of their well-being. This research focuses on exploring the meaning that older people give to the experience of social support they receive(4).

### **2. Participants**

Participants in this study were elderly people aged 65 years and over who lived in urban and rural areas.(5)Participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques to ensure variation in social support experiences. A total of 20 participants who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria were included in this study.

### **3. Data Collection Techniques**

- a. **Deep interview:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. These interviews were designed to explore older adults' experiences of social support, the types of support they received, and how this support affected their well-being. Each interview lasted 45–60 minutes and was recorded with the participant's permission.

- b. **Observation:** Participatory observation was carried out to gain a deeper understanding of the social and environmental context in which the elderly live. These observations help in understanding the social interactions and supports that occur in the participant's natural environment.

#### 4. Data Analysis Techniques

**Thematic Analysis:** Data collected from interviews and observations were analyzed using the thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis steps include:

- 1) Verbatim transcription of the recorded interview.
- 2) Read and review transcripts to understand content and context.
- 3) Initial coding to identify key themes.
- 4) Grouping codes into larger and more meaningful themes.
- 5) Compile a narrative that describes participants' experiences and perceptions regarding social support.

#### 5. Validity and Reliability

- a. **Triangulation:** The validity of the research was increased through data triangulation by combining interviews and observations. This helps ensure that research findings are supported by multiple data sources.
- b. **Member Checking:** Participants were given the opportunity to review interview transcripts and preliminary analysis results to ensure the accuracy and relevance of the researcher's interpretations.
- c. **Audit Trail:** The entire research process, including analysis decisions and data collection procedures, was documented in detail to ensure transparency and future replication of the study.

## 2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research aims to explore the role of social support in improving the well-being of the elderly through a qualitative approach. Using in-depth interviews and observations, this research explores the experiences and views of older people regarding the social support they receive and its impact on their well-being.

### Research result

The results of this qualitative research can be divided into several main themes:

#### a. Emotional Support

**Description:** Emotional support from family and friends is considered very important by the elderly. They feel happier and more enthusiastic when they receive attention, affection and understanding from the people closest to them.

#### Quote:

- "I feel very appreciated and loved when my children often call and visit me." (Respondent A)
- "My friends are always there to listen to my stories; it makes me feel less alone." (Respondent B)

#### b. Instrumental Support

**Description:** Instrumental support in the form of physical assistance such as help with household chores, transportation, and financial assistance is also considered very valuable. This assistance helps seniors live their daily lives more easily and reduces stress.

#### Quote:

- "My kids always help me with shopping and cleaning the house. It really helps." (Respondent C)
- "The financial assistance from my brothers really lightened my burden." (Respondent D)

#### c. Informational Support

**Description:** Seniors perceive informational support, such as medical advice, information about services of health, and a guide to living a healthy life, as very helpful. This information gives them the knowledge necessary to make better decisions regarding their health.

**Quote:**

- "My doctor always gives me good advice about my health, and that really helps." (Respondent E)
- "I often get information about health programs from local community centers." (Respondent F)

**d. Social Support from the Community**

**Description:** Participation in community activities and social groups provides seniors with a sense of belonging and purpose. These social activities help them stay active and engaged, and reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation.

**Quote:**

- "I really enjoy the activities at the seniors' club. We often get together and do various activities together." (Respondent G)
- "My church community has always been incredibly supportive. I feel like I am part of a big family." (Respondent H)

**e. Technology Support**

**Description:** With advances in technology, the elderly are increasingly helped by modern communication tools such as cell phones and social media to stay connected with family and friends. This helps them feel connected even though they are physically far apart.

**Quote:**

- "I often make video calls with my grandchildren. It makes me feel close to them." (Respondent I)
- "Social media helps me stay connected with old friends and get the latest news." (Respondent J)

**Discussion**

This research shows that social support in various forms—emotional, instrumental, informational, and community—plays an important role in improving the well-being of older adults. This support not only helps reduce stress and increase happiness, but also provides a sense of belonging and purpose. Modern technology also plays an important role in maintaining social connectivity for the elderly. These findings support existing literature on the importance of social support for individual well-being, especially in old age.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on a qualitative review of the role of social support in improving the welfare of the elderly, it can be concluded that:

1. **The Importance of Social Support:** Social support is very important for the well-being of the elderly, both from family, peers and the community. It includes emotional, instrumental, and informational aspects that can help them overcome daily challenges and stress.
2. **Family Role:** The family has a major role in providing emotional and instrumental support to the elderly. The warmth of the relationship and the attention given can increase their sense of comfort and happiness.
3. **Support from the Community:** Participation in the community such as social activities, peer groups, or certain clubs can provide a sense of belonging, improve quality of life, and reduce social isolation.
4. **Positive Impact:** Adequate social support can reduce levels of depression, improve physical health, and extend the life expectancy of the elderly.

Suggestions for increasing the role of social support in improving the welfare of the elderly include:

1. Education and Awareness: Providing education to families and the community about the importance of social support for the elderly and how to provide it well.
2. Strengthening Social Networks: Developing more community programs or activities involving seniors to increase social interactions and support each other.
3. Accessibility to Sources of Support: Ensure that seniors have easy and comfortable access to sources of support, both physical and social.
4. Integration in Public Policy: Integrating an understanding of the importance of social support in public policies related to the welfare of the elderly, such as in health and social programs.

By implementing these steps, it is hoped that we can significantly improve the quality of life and well-being of the elderly by strengthening the social support they receive.

## 5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Berkman, L. F., & Glass T. No Title. Soc Integr Soc networks, Soc Support Heal Soc Epidemiol. 2000;137-173.
2. Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T.B., & Layton JB. Social relationships and mortality risk: A meta-analytic review. PLoS Medicine,. 7((7), e1000316).
3. Cohen, S., & Wills TA. Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. Psychol Bull. 1985;98((2)):310.
4. House JS. Work stress and social support. Addison-Wesley.
5. Blieszner, R., & Roberto KA. Friendship across the life span: Reciprocity in individual and relationship development. Ageing Int. 29(4),:323–38.