

## Strengthening The Psychosocial Support of The Elderly Through Empathic Communication Training for Young Volunteers at The KG Elderly Home, Kediri Regency

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### ABSTRACT

The elderly population in Indonesia has experienced a significant increase that has complex consequences for psychosocial well-being, especially for the displaced elderly who experience disconnection from family relationships and lack of emotional support. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of empathic communication training for young volunteers in improving psychosocial support for the abandoned elderly at the KG Elderly House, Kediri Regency. Data collection was carried out through naturalistic observation for one week, semi-structured interviews, and *Focus Group Discussions* involving the elderly, young volunteers, administrators, and active volunteers. The results of the study showed that the elderly experienced loneliness, prolonged sadness, social withdrawal, and difficulty achieving *ego integrity* which was aggravated by the limitations of psychosocial support. Empathetic communication training for 18 young volunteers was shown to improve the quality of emotional interaction, social engagement of the elderly, and feelings of being valued and cared for. The findings integrate Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, *Lazarus and Folkman's theory of stress and coping stress*, and Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecology in understanding problems holistically. This study recommends the development of sustainable psychosocial mentoring programs, strengthening the capacity of volunteers, and cross-sectoral collaboration to improve the welfare of the marginalized elderly.

**Keywords:** *Empathetic Communication, Psychosocial Support, Abandoned Elderly.*

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### INTRODUCTION

The elderly population in Indonesia has increased significantly in line with the demographic transition that is taking place globally. This phenomenon of population aging has complex consequences for various aspects of life, especially related to the psychosocial welfare of the elderly. According to the theory of psychosocial development put forward by Erikson, individuals in the elderly stage are in a phase of *Ego Integrity versus Despair*, where the primary developmental task is to achieve ego integrity through acceptance of the journey of life that has been (Santrock, 2002). Achievements *Ego Integrity* allowing the elderly to feel the feelings *enduring wholesome* or an eternal wholeness that contributes to

well-being and happiness in the final days of life (Westerhof et al., 2017). However, the process of achieving ego integrity is greatly influenced by the quality of social support, emotional relationships, and opportunities to express and interpret life experiences (Irwanto, 2006). When psychosocial support is inadequate, the elderly are at risk of experiencing *Despair* which is characterized by difficulty integrating past experiences, present conditions, and views of the future, thus giving rise to feelings of rejection of the life that has been lived (D. K. Putri et al., 2019).

Psychosocial problems in the elderly become more complex when they experience social neglect and disconnection from family relationships. Research shows that the elderly who experience *adverse life events* such as losing loved ones, living alone, having chronic illnesses, and being abandoned by family members have a high risk of experiencing mental health disorders (Kusuma et al., 2024). Lazarus & Folkman (1984) explains that unpleasant life events can be stressors when individuals judge the event as a loss and lack of resources *Coping* adequate. Prolonged stressful conditions without adequate external support can develop into depression and other psychological disorders. Loneliness is one of the main psychological impacts experienced by the elderly in *Despair*, which affects not only the well-being of individuals but also the dynamics of social relations within the community (Sessiani, 2018). This phenomenon is relevant to the context of displaced elderly people living in orphanages or halfway houses, where the lack of meaningful emotional interaction can reinforce feelings of isolation and hopelessness (Khanthavudh et al., 2025; Tetui et al., 2023).

Empathetic communication has been identified as one of the effective strategies in improving the psychological well-being of the elderly through responsive and meaningful mentoring. D. L. Putri & Suciati (2023) It was found that empathic communication in the context of elderly care is characterized by personal attention, real care, and an attitude of patience and respect for the elderly in every interaction. Empathetic communication includes the ability to understand the verbal and nonverbal language of the elderly, provide appropriate emotional responses, and create a safe and compassionate communication atmosphere. Further, Lazarus & Folkman (1984) Explains that empathic communication techniques that involve an assertive, responsive, supportive, focused, and clarifying approach to messages in simple language have been proven to improve the quality of interpersonal relationships, sense of security, and quality of life of the elderly (Boulougari et al., 2025). However, previous research has focused more on empathic communication in the context of health professionals, while studies on empathic communication training for young volunteers as companions for the displaced elderly are still limited. This gap is important to bridge considering that young volunteers have a strategic role in providing ongoing psychosocial support, especially in the context of communities with limited professional resources.

Bronfenbrenner's developmental ecological perspective offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how the well-being of the elderly is affected by the interactions between individuals and the various environmental systems that surround them. Bronfenbrenner (1986) explains that human development is the result of complex

mutual interactions between individuals and objects and symbols in their environment, which are divided into five layered systems, namely microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems. In the context of displaced seniors, microsystems that include volunteers, caregivers, and fellow residents have a direct influence on the emotional state of the elderly, while mesosystems and ecosystems play a role in providing a broader network of support (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The limited functioning of the support system at these various levels can strengthen the psychological vulnerability of the elderly and hinder achievement *Ego Integrity*. Therefore, effective psychosocial interventions need to target not only at the individual level, but also at strengthening the capacity of support systems in the immediate environment of the elderly.

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of empathic communication training for young volunteers in improving the psychosocial support of the displaced elderly in the KG Elderly Home in Kediri Regency. Specifically, this study explores how improving the empathic communication skills of volunteers can contribute to reducing feelings of loneliness, improving the quality of social interactions, and strengthening the process of achieving *ego integrity* in the elderly. This research makes a theoretical contribution by integrating Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, Lazarus and Folkman's theory of stress and *coping* stress, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory in understanding the psychological dynamics of the abandoned elderly holistically. Practically, this study offers a community-based intervention model that can be adapted in the context of orphanages or nursing homes for the elderly with limited resources, through the empowerment of young volunteers as sustainable psychosocial support agents. Thus, this study is expected to enrich the literature on community psychology interventions for the displaced elderly and provide practical recommendations for the development of elderly assistance programs that are more responsive to their psychosocial needs.

## **METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative approach with *a community-based participatory research design* that is oriented towards community capacity development in providing psychosocial support for the marginalized elderly. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of subjective experiences, relationship dynamics, and the process of psychological change that occurs in the elderly and accompanying volunteers (Creswell, 2016). This method is in accordance with the characteristics of the phenomenon being studied, where the psychosocial problems of the elderly cannot be understood in isolation from the context of communal life and the social support system that surrounds it. The research was carried out at the KG Elderly House (RKG), Kampung K, P District, Kediri Regency, East Java Province, in the period from October to November 2025. This location was chosen because RKG is a humanitarian community that accommodates around 50 displaced elderly people with diverse backgrounds of life experiences, and faces limited resources in providing psychosocial support.

The research subjects consisted of three main groups involved in the elderly assistance ecosystem in RKG. The first group is elderly residents of RKG who still have

adequate verbal communication skills, selected based on criteria of being able to interact actively and able to convey their experiences and feelings. The second group is 18 young volunteers to accompany the elderly, consisting of students of the Sufism and Psychotherapy Study Program at University X who are willing to take part in empathic communication training and direct mentoring practices. The third group includes RKG administrators and active volunteers who act as *key informants* in providing information about daily dynamics, mentoring challenges, and the need for psychosocial program development. The selection of research subjects used *purposive sampling* techniques by considering active involvement in community life and the ability to provide information relevant to the research objectives.

The data collection procedure was carried out through three main complementary methods to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the psychosocial conditions of the elderly and the effectiveness of the intervention. First, naturalistic observation was carried out for one week in a row with a duration of four hours per day, observing the behavior of the elderly in the context of daily life such as interaction patterns, emotional expression, and involvement in joint activities (Creswell, 2016). Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the elderly, administrators, and volunteers to explore life experiences, feelings of family separation, the meaning of life, and challenges in mentoring (Poerwandari, 2017). Third, *Focus Group Discussion* (FGD) was carried out by involving RKG administrators and volunteers to identify group dynamics, shared perceptions of the psychosocial needs of the elderly, and community-based intervention planning (Krueger, 2014). The intervention in the form of empathic communication training was carried out in two stages, namely the provision of material on the development of the elderly and empathic communication techniques on the first day, followed by direct mentoring practices and group activity therapy in the form of coloring on the second day. Evaluation was carried out through observation of behavior changes, brief post-intervention interviews, and reflection with volunteers to identify learnings and experiences gained during the mentoring process, with a focus on improving the quality of emotional interaction between volunteers and the elderly and changes in the psychosocial conditions of the elderly after the intervention was implemented.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **RESEARCH RESULTS**

#### **Assessment Implementation**

The assessment is carried out on the elderly residents of the KG Elderly Home (RKG) by considering the diversity of physical, psychological, and social conditions possessed by each individual. The focus of the assessment was directed at the elderly who still have the ability to communicate verbally, without ignoring the general picture of the dynamics that occur in the overall population. The assessment process was carried out through a combination of observation methods, semi-structured interviews, and *Focus Group Discussions* (FGD) which took place comprehensively. Observation was carried out for one consecutive week with a duration of four hours every day, where practitioners were present

and mingled in the daily activities of the elderly to observe the apparent behaviors, patterns of social interactions, and emotional expressions that arise naturally in their daily lives. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to RKG administrators, active volunteers, young volunteers, and several elderly people who were still able to convey their experiences and feelings well. The interview took place in a relaxed but respectful atmosphere so that the elderly felt safe to tell about their life experiences, family relationships, and the meaning of living at RKG for themselves. The FGD was held with caregivers and active volunteers as a space for reflection together to discuss the condition of the elderly, mentoring challenges, and hopes for the development of psychosocial services at RKG with an open and participatory discussion atmosphere.

## **Data Presentation**

### ***Observation Results***

Based on observations carried out thoroughly on the elderly residents of RKG for one week, it was found that there were no routine activities carried out jointly by all residents. The elderly are given the freedom to carry out activities according to their abilities and needs, including determining the rest time they feel is sufficient. Elderly people who are in relatively healthy physical condition are still able to do activities independently such as walking, eating, or cleaning themselves, while the elderly who experience a decline in health conditions such as paralysis or other physical limitations tend to spend more time in the room and rely on the help of volunteers and fellow elderly. The results of observations show that some elderly people spend time sitting still without activity for a long time, seen sitting on chairs or couches without doing activities such as talking, reading, or participating in activities together. Some elderly people seem to stare in one direction for a long time, such as at a wall or yard without showing a response to the situation around them. In the context of participation in activities, when there are joint activities such as eating or light activities, there are elderly people who do not participate in these activities and choose to stay in bed or sit alone. Socially, some elderly people are seen sitting apart from other residents even though the common space allows for gatherings, with this pattern appearing consistently during the observation period. In the aspect of verbal communication, the elderly often mention the names of family members and tell about family-related things such as children's activities or life experiences with their families. Some elderly people also say sentences related to death, for example by mentioning the condition if one day they die, even on some occasions the elderly directly express their desire not to live long or want to die soon which is generally accompanied by complaints about physical conditions or pain experienced. From the visible emotional aspect, some elderly people were seen crying or showing tears in their eyes both when sitting alone and when talking to volunteers, with tense or moody facial expressions marked by faces without smiles and wrinkled eyebrows looking quite dominant and appearing almost every day during the observation period.

### ***Interview Results***

Based on the results of interviews with administrators, young volunteers, and elderly residents of RKG, it was found that RKG plays a role as a place to live that seeks to

provide a sense of security and respect for the dignity of the elderly. The management of RKG is based on human values, namely treating the elderly as individuals who are still worthy of respect, which can be seen from the culture of polite communication, efforts to avoid labeling "nursing homes", and efforts to create a warmer home atmosphere with the aim that the elderly feel at home without being burdened. Despite this, the RKG still faces various limitations, especially in terms of external resources and support. Until now, the management and assistance activities of the elderly are still carried out independently with a limited number of volunteers and no permanent donors, so that the services provided focus more on fulfilling basic needs such as shelter and food, while psychosocial assistance cannot be carried out optimally and in a structured manner. From the volunteer side, it can be seen that involvement in assisting the elderly is still limited not because of lack of care, but because of limited time, dual roles as students or workers, and the absence of a clear and sustainable mentoring system, so that mentoring activities that touch the emotional and social needs of the elderly have not become a top priority. The results of interviews with the elderly show that even though their physical needs are relatively met, many elderly people still experience emotional difficulties by expressing feelings of sadness, longing for family, disappointment with children, regretting past life decisions, and confusion in living their days. Some elderly people also question the meaning of life and death which shows the need to be heard, understood, and accompanied emotionally.

#### **FGD Results**

The FGD was carried out in a participatory manner by involving administrators, active volunteers, young volunteers, intern students, and members of the G community of the J City branch, with discussions that ran dynamically and complemented each other's experiences between participants, especially related to the condition of the elderly and the limitations of psychosocial assistance in RKG. FGD participants expressed the lack of attention and support from the local government, where so far the management and operation of RKG has been more dependent on the initiative of self-help management, volunteers, and the support of the surrounding community. Participants assessed that there has been no continuous attention from related agencies either in the form of social assistance, *caregiver* training, health support, and strengthening human resources, so that administrators and volunteers must work with limited facilities and existing capacity. The limited number of volunteers was also the main concern in the discussion, where the FGD participants said that some volunteers had personal busyness, work, and academic obligations so that involvement in assisting the elderly could not be done consistently. The management recognizes the need for additional *caregivers* as well as the improvement of empathic communication skills, because in daily practice administrators and volunteers often face the elderly who show intense emotions such as often crying, irritability, refusing to eat, refusing treatment, or showing other protesting behaviors. The FGD is also a space for reflection to discuss development plans and solutions for the future, where participants agree on the need for strategic steps to strengthen psychosocial support for the elderly through more structured and sustainable recruitment of volunteers, cooperation with schools in sub-districts and districts, strengthening collaboration with surrounding

communities, and audiences with relevant government agencies to obtain attention and policy support more adequate.

### **Data Interpretation**

Based on the results of the assessment obtained through observations, interviews, and FGDs, it can be understood that elderly residents of RKG face various psychological and psychosocial challenges that are interrelated and influenced by the life experiences of the elderly, family problems, social relationships, and limitations of support systems in their living environment. In general, the basic needs of the elderly such as shelter, food, and physical care have been met quite well, but the fulfillment of these needs has not been fully balanced with adequate psychosocial support. This can be seen from the emergence of passive behavior patterns, the lack of social interaction that can provide a sense of self-esteem, and the expression of negative emotions that appear consistently in the daily lives of the elderly. From the observation results, the elderly showed symptoms of withdrawal and decreased social involvement which were seen through the behavior of sitting quietly without activity for a long time, choosing to be alone even though they were in a common space, and not participating in existing joint activities, with blank gazes in one direction and spending time in silence indicating a low psychosocial involvement condition that can indicate feelings of emptiness, boredom, or loss of meaning of daily activities.

### **Description of Group Psychological Problems**

Based on the results of data interpretation, it can be concluded that elderly residents of RKG experience major psychological problems in the form of loneliness, prolonged sadness, and difficulties in achieving self-acceptance or *ego integrity* in the elderly life phase. This problem is reflected in withdrawal from social activities, lack of involvement in meaningful activities, and frequent expressions of longing and disappointment for family. In addition, the elderly also show emotional *distress* that appears in the form of crying behavior, moody expressions, interpersonal conflicts, as well as expressions of life fatigue and a desire to die soon. This condition shows that the elderly have difficulty in integrating past life experiences, current conditions, and hopes for the future, so they are more vulnerable to being in the *despair* phase than *ego integrity*. This psychological problem is aggravated by the limitations of psychosocial support, the lack of meaningful joint activities, and the limited resources of volunteers in providing emotional assistance consistently, so that even though the physical needs of the elderly are relatively met, the need for emotional presence, a sense of appreciation, acceptance, and strengthening the meaning of life has not been fully met.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The results of the study showed that empathic communication training for young volunteers had a positive impact on improving the quality of psychosocial support for the elderly at the KG Elderly House. The main findings indicate that elderly residents of RKG

experience complex psychological problems rooted in failure to achieve *Ego Integrity* as conceptualized in Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. Conditions *Despair* The experience of the elderly is reflected in withdrawing behavior, prolonged sadness, interpersonal conflict, and expressions of a desire to die soon, all of which indicate significant psychological distress. This interpretation is in line with the view D. K. Putri, Krisnatuti, & Puspitawati (2019) which explains that *Despair* It occurs when the elderly have difficulty integrating past experiences, current conditions, and views of the future, resulting in feelings of rejection of the life they have lived. The importance of these findings lies in the identification that the psychological problems of the elderly are not solely individual phenomena, but rather the result of complex interactions between developmental factors, traumatic life experiences, and the limitations of psychosocial support systems in the environment in which they live. Observational results showing passive behavior patterns, limited social participation, and verbal communication often related to family and death confirm the urgency of structured and sustainable psychosocial interventions. Furthermore, findings regarding the effectiveness of empathic communication training in improving the quality of interaction between volunteers and the elderly provide empirical evidence that community-based approaches can be an alternative solution in the context of limited professional resources.

### **Relationship with Literature**

The findings of this study show consistency with previous literature on the importance of empathic communication in elderly assistance. D. L. Putri & Suciati (2023) It was found that empathic communication with the elderly is characterized by personal attention, real concern, and an attitude of patience and respect for the elderly in every interaction, which involves the ability to understand the verbal and nonverbal language of the elderly, provide appropriate emotional responses, and create a safe and compassionate communication atmosphere. The results of this study reinforce these findings by showing that young volunteers who have received empathic communication training show improved active listening skills, emotional validation, and more sensitive responses to the emotional needs of the elderly. Furthermore, the findings of this study are also in line with the D. L. Putri & Suciati (2023) Which explains that empathic communication in elderly companions involves assertive, responsive, supportive, focused, and clarifying message techniques with simple language, which has been proven to improve the quality of interpersonal relationships, sense of security, and quality of life of the elderly. Nevertheless, this study makes a unique contribution by exploring the implementation of empathic communication training in the context of non-professional young volunteers accompanying the marginalized elderly, whereas previous research focused more on empathic communication in the context of health professionals. Findings on the psychosocial problems of the elderly are also consistent with the view Kusuma, Darmini, Kartiningsih, & Yasa (2024) which states that the elderly who experience *adverse life events* Such as losing a loved one, living alone, having a chronic illness, and being abandoned by a family have a high risk of experiencing mental health disorders. This research expands this understanding by integrating

Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective which shows that the psychological well-being of the elderly cannot be separated from the interaction between individuals and the various environmental systems that surround them, ranging from microsystems that include volunteers and caregivers, mesosystems that connect KRGs with families and communities, to ecosystems in the form of policies and institutional support (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). This theoretical integration provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the psychological dynamics of the elderly holistically and identifying strategic intervention points at various levels of the system.

### **Research Limitations**

This study has several limitations that need to be considered in the interpretation of the results. First, the relatively short duration of the intervention, which is two days of meetings, has not made it possible to measure the long-term impact of empathic communication training on changes in the psychological condition of the elderly comprehensively. Although observations show positive changes in the quality of interaction and social engagement of the elderly, psychosocial problems such as loneliness and *despair* are chronic and require ongoing mentoring to demonstrate more substantive changes. Second, the number of young volunteers involved in this study was limited to 18 students from one educational institution, so the generalization of the results of the study needs to be done carefully in the context of volunteers from different backgrounds. Third, the evaluation of the effectiveness of interventions relies more on qualitative methods through observation and interviews without using standardized measurement instruments to objectively measure changes in the psychological condition of the elderly. Fourth, this research was conducted in one specific location, namely the KG Elderly House with unique community and elderly characteristics, so that the contextualization of the research results needs to consider the differences in the characteristics of other nursing homes or nursing homes. Fifth, the limited resources and institutional support experienced by RKG can affect the sustainability of the implementation of interventions after the study ends, so a more structured support system strengthening strategy is needed to ensure the continuity of psychosocial assistance for the elderly.

### **Implications**

The results of this study have significant theoretical and practical implications for the development of community-based psychosocial interventions for the marginalized elderly. Theoretically, this study contributes to the integration of Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, *Lazarus and Folkman's theory of stress and coping stress*, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory in understanding the psychological dynamics of the elderly holistically, which can serve as a conceptual framework for further research on the psychological well-being of the elderly in various community contexts. Practically, the findings of this study suggest that empathic communication training can be an effective and efficient intervention strategy in the context of limited professional resources, by empowering young volunteers as agents of ongoing psychosocial support. The policy

implications of this study include the need for local government attention in developing community-based elderly assistance programs supported by regular training for *caregivers* and volunteers, as well as strengthening collaborative networks between nursing homes, educational institutions, and local communities. For further research, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies that measure the long-term impact of empathic communication training on changes in the psychological condition of the elderly using standardized measurement instruments, explore the factors that affect the sustainability of young volunteers' involvement in elderly assistance, as well as develop models of community-based psychosocial interventions that can be adapted in various contexts of nursing homes or nursing homes taking into account the diversity of characteristics and specific needs of the abandoned elderly population.

## CONCLUSION

This study identified complex psychosocial problems experienced by the elderly in the KG Nursing Home, which are characterized by loneliness, prolonged sadness, social withdrawal, and difficulty in achieving *ego integrity* in the elderly life phase. The findings show that the psychological problems of the elderly are the result of an interaction between developmental factors, the experience of significant loss, and the limitations of the psychosocial support system in the residential environment. Interventions through empathic communication training for young volunteers have been shown to be effective in improving the quality of emotional interaction between volunteers and the elderly, which is reflected in increased social engagement of the elderly, more open expression of emotions, and the emergence of feelings of being valued and cared for. A community-based approach by empowering young volunteers as psychosocial support agents shows the potential for sustainability in the context of limited professional resources.

The practical implications of this research include the need to develop psychosocial assistance programs for the elderly in a structured and sustainable manner, strengthening the capacity of volunteers through advanced training, and strengthening collaborative networks between nursing homes, educational institutions, local communities, and related government agencies. Further research is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies to measure the long-term impact of empathic communication training on changes in the psychological condition of the elderly using standardized measurement instruments. In addition, the exploration of factors that affect the sustainability of young volunteer involvement and the development of community-based psychosocial intervention models that can be adapted in various contexts of orphanages or nursing homes by considering the diversity of characteristics of the abandoned elderly population are also important agendas for future research.

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