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## The Impact of Loneliness on the Psychological Well-Being of Elderly People in Bakung Kidul Village

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### Abstract

This study examines the impact of loneliness on the psychological well-being of elderly people living alone in Bakung Kidul Village. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving elderly participants and supporting informants, including family members, neighbors, and elderly posyandu cadres. The findings show that loneliness among elderly people varies according to family support, physical condition, social interaction, and meaningful daily activities. Informant TA experienced mild loneliness because she still received support from family and neighbors, while HAZ experienced loneliness related to physical limitations. AY felt lonely due to the absence of meaningful activities, whereas WS showed the most severe loneliness because of emotional distance from her children. Loneliness was found to affect psychological well-being through feelings of sadness, anxiety, low self-esteem, and withdrawal from the social environment. Elderly people who received strong social support tended to have more stable psychological well-being, while those facing family conflict or limited social interaction were more vulnerable to emotional distress. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of loneliness as a psychosocial issue among elderly people in rural communities. The findings also highlight the importance of family assistance, supportive counseling, and social activities through elderly posyandu as potential efforts to reduce loneliness and improve psychological well-being among the elderly.

**Keywords:** loneliness; psychological; elderly people; mental health; rural community;

### 1. Introduction

Human development takes place throughout life, from conception to old age. Individuals aged 60 years and above enter the late adulthood or elderly phase. At this stage, elderly people have developmental tasks in the form of adjusting themselves to personal conditions, social environments, work, and family. However, various changes that occur in old age, such as declining physical abilities, the loss of a spouse, and reduced social interaction, often become quite serious challenges.



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The aging process is marked by biological, physiological, and psychological changes that can affect the physical and mental condition of elderly people. In the Islamic perspective, this process is also explained in the Qur'an, Surah Yasin verse 68, which describes that human beings who are granted a long life will experience a decline from a strong condition toward weakness. These changes can affect the physical and psychological health of elderly people, thereby influencing their activities and independence in daily life.

Under these conditions, psychological well-being becomes an important aspect for elderly people in living a meaningful life. According to Santrock (2018) psychological well-being is a condition in which individuals are able to live optimally, accept themselves, establish positive relationships with others, and continue developing their potential. Ryff (1989) also states that good psychological well-being can improve the quality of life of elderly people and help them face various challenges in old age.

Nevertheless, various social changes experienced by elderly people often give rise to feelings of loneliness. Loneliness does not only mean being physically alone; it is a subjective feeling in which individuals feel that they lack meaningful social relationships. According to Rokach (2004) loneliness is an unpleasant emotional experience characterized by feelings of alienation, loss of closeness, and emotional suffering.

Loneliness among elderly people can have a negative impact on psychological well-being, such as the emergence of sadness, anxiety, and decreased cognitive function. Santrock's (2018) research shows that prolonged loneliness can increase the risk of depression and declining physical health. In fact, Holt-Lunstad (2017) states that social isolation carries a risk of mortality comparable to heavy smoking. Therefore, efforts to reduce loneliness are important in maintaining the psychological well-being of elderly people.

One factor that can help reduce loneliness is social support from family and the surrounding environment. Social support can provide a sense of being valued and loved and can increase the sense of belonging among elderly people. Social activities such as the Elderly Posyandu can also become a means for elderly people to interact, share experiences, and strengthen social relationships with the surrounding environment.

Previous research has also shown a relationship between loneliness and the psychological well-being of elderly people. Ejaz (2019) found that elderly people who experience loneliness tend to have lower levels of happiness and life satisfaction. In addition, research by Valtorta (2016) shows that loneliness among elderly people can increase the risk of premature death.

Based on a preliminary study conducted in Bakung Kidul Village, it was found that several elderly people who live alone experience limited social interaction and show signs of loneliness. One elderly participant who was interviewed stated that what was felt most strongly was not only physical solitude, but also the lack of opportunities to share stories and interact with others. This condition indicates that loneliness is one of the problems that requires attention in the lives of elderly people.



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## 2. Literature Review

The literature on elderly loneliness and psychological well-being shows that loneliness is not simply a condition of living alone, but a subjective experience that emerges when meaningful social relationships are perceived as insufficient. Rokach (2004) describes loneliness as an unpleasant emotional experience marked by alienation, loss of closeness, and emotional distress. Similarly, Ejaz (2019) explain that loneliness occurs when there is a gap between the social relationships individuals expect and the relationships they actually have. In the context of late adulthood, this gap becomes more visible because elderly people often experience physical decline, the loss of a spouse, reduced mobility, and changes in family roles. Santrock (2018) emphasize that old age is a developmental stage that requires adjustment to physical, psychological, and social changes. Therefore, loneliness among elderly people must be understood as a multidimensional experience involving emotional, social, and developmental factors.

Loneliness among elderly people can be explained through social and emotional dimensions. Weiss (1973) distinguishes between social loneliness, which is related to limited social networks, and emotional loneliness, which is related to the absence of close attachment figures. This distinction is relevant to elderly people who may still interact with neighbors or community members but continue to feel emotionally distant from family or children. Russell (1996) through the UCLA Loneliness Scale, also highlights that loneliness is closely associated with perceived deficiencies in social connectedness rather than the number of interactions alone. In this sense, elderly people who live alone are not automatically lonely, but they become more vulnerable when social contact lacks warmth, emotional support, and continuity.

Psychological well-being is an important concept in understanding the quality of life of elderly people. Ryff (1989) explains that psychological well-being consists of several dimensions, including self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. These dimensions are especially important in old age because elderly people are required to accept physical changes, maintain meaningful relationships, and continue finding purpose in daily life. Maslow (1954) also states that human well-being is influenced by the fulfillment of basic needs, including safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. For elderly people, the need for belonging and emotional security becomes central because family support and social recognition can strengthen their sense of dignity and life satisfaction.

Previous studies show that loneliness has a negative relationship with psychological well-being among elderly people. Ejaz et al. (2019) found that older adults who experience loneliness tend to report lower happiness and lower life satisfaction. Longoria et al., (2021) also found that social isolation is associated with reduced psychological well-being in community-dwelling older adults. These findings indicate that loneliness does not only affect emotional states, but also shapes how elderly people



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evaluate their lives. Prolonged loneliness can produce sadness, anxiety, low self-esteem, and withdrawal from the social environment. Santrock (2018) further notes that long-term loneliness may increase the risk of depression and declining physical health, showing that psychological and physical well-being are closely connected in old age.

The health consequences of loneliness and social isolation have also been widely discussed. Valtorta et al., (2016) found that loneliness and social isolation are risk factors for coronary heart disease and stroke, while Holt-Lunstad (2017) argues that social isolation is a significant risk factor for mortality. These findings strengthen the view that loneliness among elderly people is not only a psychological issue, but also a public health concern. National Sleep Foundation (2019) also explains that sleep quality is important for older adults, while poor emotional conditions may disturb rest and reduce daily functioning. Thus, elderly loneliness can affect emotional stability, physical health, cognitive stimulation, and the ability to participate in social life.

Social support is one of the most important protective factors against loneliness. Aryono (2019) explains that social relationships provide individuals with emotional support, recognition, and a sense of belonging. In elderly life, support from family, neighbors, and community institutions can reduce feelings of isolation and help elderly people feel valued. Fauziah (2021) highlights the role of Elderly Posyandu as a community-based service that supports the health and social needs of older adults. Through health checks, elderly exercise, informal counseling, and social activities, Elderly Posyandu can become a space where elderly people maintain interaction, receive attention, and strengthen social bonds.

Counseling interventions are also relevant in addressing loneliness and improving psychological well-being among elderly people. Anderson et al., (2023) show that group counseling can reduce loneliness among older adults by strengthening interpersonal interaction and shared emotional support. Hsieh et al., (2022), emphasize that empathy-based counseling can improve psychological well-being because it helps elderly people feel heard and understood. Rahman & Chan (2021) also explain that cognitive restructuring therapy can help older adults reduce negative thoughts related to loneliness. In addition, spiritual counseling may be useful because religious activities often provide meaning, acceptance, and inner peace. Pargament (2002) explains that religion can function as a coping resource, while Wijaya & Santoso (2024) found that spiritual counseling may help reduce elderly loneliness.

Based on the reviewed literature, the present study is positioned within the discussion of how loneliness affects the psychological well-being of elderly people who live alone in a rural community setting. Previous studies have generally shown that loneliness is related to lower life satisfaction, weaker social functioning, emotional distress, and health risks. However, this study focuses specifically on elderly people in Bakung Kidul Village and examines how family support, social interaction, Elderly Posyandu activities, and counseling support influence their psychological well-being. Therefore, this study contributes to a contextual understanding of elderly loneliness by



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connecting theoretical perspectives on loneliness and psychological well-being with the lived experiences of elderly people in a local community.

### **3. Research Method**

This study used a qualitative method with a case study approach to understand in depth the phenomenon of loneliness and its impact on the psychological well-being of elderly people. The qualitative method was chosen because it allows researchers to explore experiences, perceptions, and meanings felt by individuals more comprehensively within real-life contexts. According to Creswell (2017), qualitative research aims to explore and understand the meanings that individuals or groups assign to a social or human problem. The case study approach was used because this study focuses on a specific phenomenon occurring within a particular social environment, enabling the researchers to understand the conditions, experiences, and social dynamics experienced by elderly people in greater depth.

This research was conducted in Bakung Kidul Village, Jamblang District, Cirebon Regency, from October to December 2024. The research location was selected based on the presence of the phenomenon of elderly people living alone, which makes them potentially vulnerable to loneliness that can affect their psychological condition. Informants in this study were selected using purposive sampling, namely a technique for selecting informants based on certain criteria considered most relevant to understanding the problem under study. According to Sugiyono (2019), purposive sampling is a sampling technique based on particular considerations so that the data obtained are deeper and more relevant to the research objectives. The informants in this study consisted of four elderly women aged between 65 and 70 years who lived alone, as well as one Elderly Posyandu cadre as a supporting informant who had knowledge of the social and health conditions of elderly people in the village.

The data sources in this study consisted of primary data and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from informants through observation and in-depth interviews. Observation was carried out to determine the social conditions of elderly people, their patterns of interaction with the surrounding environment, and indications of loneliness that appeared in their daily lives. Meanwhile, interviews were conducted in a structured manner using prepared interview guidelines in order to obtain more detailed information about the experiences of elderly people related to loneliness and its influence on their psychological well-being. In addition, this study also used secondary data obtained from documents, books, scientific journals, and other data relevant to the research topic (Sugiyono, 2019).

The data collection techniques used in this study included observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was carried out to directly examine the social situations and daily activities of elderly people, while interviews were used to explore their experiences and views regarding the psychological conditions they felt. Documentation



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was used as supporting data in the form of interview recordings, photos of research activities, and other documents that could strengthen the research findings. Data analysis in this study used the analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data reduction was carried out by selecting and focusing on data relevant to the research; the data were then presented systematically so that they could be easily understood before conclusions were drawn based on the research findings (Sugiyono, 2019).

To maintain data validity, this study used triangulation, namely comparing data obtained from various sources and different data collection techniques. Triangulation was conducted so that the data obtained would have a higher level of trustworthiness and would be able to describe the phenomenon under study more objectively (Sugiyono, 2019).

#### **4. Result**

The results of the study show that the level of loneliness among elderly people in Bakung Kidul Village varied among the informants. In terms of the gap between social reality and social expectations, some elderly people, such as informants TA, HAZ, and AY, still had social relationships with family and neighbors, so they still felt cared for and valued. However, informant WS showed a more limited condition because she had a smaller social network and felt less important within her social environment. This indicates that elderly people who still have social support tend to experience lower levels of loneliness than elderly people who experience limited social interaction. This condition is in line with Weiss (1973) theory, which distinguishes between social loneliness and emotional loneliness, where limited social networks and a lack of emotional closeness can increase feelings of loneliness among elderly people.

In the aspect of social desire, all informants showed a longing for warm social relationships such as those experienced in youth. They still desired togetherness with family and friends, although health conditions and family activities often became obstacles. Informant WS showed the strongest longing for the family togetherness she had previously experienced. This indicates that the need for social relationships remains important for elderly people, even though the intensity of their social interactions has decreased.

In the aspect of personality, most informants admitted feeling awkward when they had to start conversations with new people. In addition, some elderly people also felt easily tired when they were in environments that were too crowded, so they preferred to return home. This condition shows that age, health, and changing social conditions can affect the confidence of elderly people in establishing new social interactions.

Furthermore, the results of the study also show that the psychological well-being of elderly people in Bakung Kidul Village remained relatively good even though they faced various life changes. Based on Ryff (1989) dimensions of psychological well-being, the



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informants demonstrated the ability to accept themselves in relation to their physical conditions and the life changes they experienced. Most elderly people tried to accept the aging process with patience and sincerity. In the aspect of social relations, some elderly people still received emotional support from family and the surrounding environment, although some felt the loss of a life partner. In terms of autonomy, the elderly still had control over several decisions in daily life, such as maintaining their health and determining the activities they carried out. In the aspect of environmental mastery, some informants were still able to carry out simple activities such as reading, writing notes, or participating in religious activities. Their life goals in old age also tended to be simple, namely maintaining health, living peacefully, and seeing their children and grandchildren live happily. In addition, personal growth was also reflected in increased patience and spiritual closeness, which provided inner peace.

The results of the study also show that loneliness has an impact on the psychological well-being of elderly people, particularly in emotional, social, and cognitive aspects. Most informants still felt quite satisfied with their lives, but several elderly people continued to experience loneliness in certain situations. This is consistent with the view of Cacioppo and Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011), who state that loneliness can affect life satisfaction, increase stress, and give rise to negative emotions. In the social aspect, elderly people who experience loneliness tend to have difficulty building or maintaining new friendships because of limited activities and feelings of awkwardness. Meanwhile, in the cognitive aspect, some elderly people viewed loneliness as a consequence of life circumstances, while others tended to blame themselves when they felt lonely.

Efforts to address loneliness among elderly people in Bakung Kidul Village were also carried out through Elderly Posyandu activities, which focused not only on physical health checks but also on social and psychological support. Based on interviews with Posyandu officers, Posyandu activities served as a gathering place for elderly people to maintain their health while also reducing feelings of loneliness. The activities included health checks such as blood pressure measurement, as well as social activities such as elderly exercise and recreational activities intended to increase social interaction among elderly people. In addition, Posyandu officers also provided informal counseling for elderly people who appeared gloomy or often isolated themselves by engaging in personal conversations to provide emotional support. This approach was carried out casually through light conversation so that elderly people would feel comfortable. These social activities proved helpful in making elderly people more cheerful, strengthening relationships among elderly peers, and reducing feelings of loneliness. This shows that the Elderly Posyandu plays a role as a center of physical health support as well as social support for elderly people in improving their quality of life (Fauziah, 2021).



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## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Description of Loneliness among Elderly People in Bakung Kidul Village

The results of the study show that the level of loneliness among elderly people in Bakung Kidul Village differed for each informant. In the aspect of the gap between social reality and social expectations, informants TA, HAZ, and AY still had social relationships with family and neighbors, so the social gap they felt was not too large. In contrast, informant WS had a more limited social network and therefore felt a greater gap between the social relationships she expected and the reality she experienced. This condition is consistent with Santrock's (2018) theory, which explains that loneliness arises from a mismatch between expected social relationships and the relationships one actually has.

In the aspect of social desire, all informants showed a longing for warm social interaction like that experienced in youth. However, TA, HAZ, and AY were able to accept changing social conditions more adaptively, while informant WS showed a stronger social longing that intensified her feelings of loneliness. This is in line with Russell's (1996) concept, which states that loneliness arises when the need for social relationships is not optimally fulfilled.

In the aspect of personality, most informants admitted feeling awkward when initiating new interactions. This awkwardness made them tend to be passive in expanding their social relationships. According to Santrock (2018), individual factors such as self-confidence and social anxiety can affect a person's ability to build meaningful social relationships.

### 5.2. Description of Psychological Well-Being among Elderly People

The psychological well-being of elderly people in this study can be seen through several aspects. In the aspect of emotional well-being, informants TA, HAZ, and AY were able to manage emotions more stably than informant WS, who more easily felt sad and lonely. In the aspect of mental well-being, some elderly people remained active in cognitive stimulation, such as reading or following information, which helped maintain their mental resilience.

In terms of social relationships, support from family and the surrounding environment became an important factor in maintaining the psychological well-being of elderly people. Elderly people who had good social relationships tended to feel more valued and had a stronger enthusiasm for life. In addition, the aspect of self-acceptance was also visible in most informants, who were able to accept the aging process as part of life.

Spirituality became one of the most stable dimensions of well-being because all informants still routinely carried out religious activities, which provided inner peace. In addition, independence in carrying out daily activities, quality of rest, and relatively stable economic conditions also supported the psychological well-being of elderly people.



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This is in line with Ryff's (1989) concept of psychological well-being and (Maslow, 1954) theory of basic needs.

### 5.3. The Impact of Loneliness on Psychological Well-Being

Loneliness has an impact on the psychological, social, and cognitive conditions of elderly people. Psychologically, elderly people who experience loneliness are more vulnerable to negative emotions such as sadness, anxiety, and feelings of meaninglessness. This condition was seen in informant WS, who showed a higher level of loneliness than the other informants.

Socially, loneliness can lead to reduced involvement in social interaction, so elderly people tend to withdraw from the environment. In addition, loneliness can also affect cognitive activity because elderly people who rarely interact receive lower levels of mental stimulation. According to Ryff's (1989), loneliness arises from the gap between expected and actual social relationships, thereby affecting an individual's psychological well-being.

### 5.4. Counseling Services for Elderly People Experiencing Loneliness

The results of the study show that counseling services can be one effort to help elderly people overcome loneliness. Individual counseling can help elderly people express emotions and obtain psychological support, while group counseling can strengthen social relationships among elderly people through shared activities.

In addition, cognitive-based counseling can help elderly people change negative perspectives about themselves and their lives, while a spiritual approach can provide inner peace and improve self-acceptance. Counseling services that are carried out continuously and involve families and the community are considered more effective in improving the psychological well-being of elderly people in Bakung Kidul Village.

## 6. Conclusion

The study shows that the level of loneliness among elderly people in Bakung Kidul Village varies depending on the quality of social relationships, family support, and involvement in social activities. Elderly people who still receive attention and interaction from family and the environment tend to experience lower levels of loneliness, while elderly people with limited social relationships are more vulnerable to loneliness. The psychological well-being of elderly people is influenced by various aspects, such as emotional stability, positive social relationships, self-acceptance, independence, and spiritual life. The results of the study also show that loneliness has a negative impact on psychological well-being, such as the emergence of sadness, low self-confidence, and a tendency to withdraw from the social environment. Therefore, counseling services that integrate emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual approaches and are supported by



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family and community are considered important in helping elderly people overcome loneliness and improve their psychological well-being.

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