

The Lives of Elderly Residents in Nursing Homes (*Panti Jompo*): Social Dynamics, Well-Being, and Challenges in Later Life

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Abstract. This study aims to examine the social dynamics, well-being, and challenges faced by elderly residents living in nursing homes. Using a qualitative approach, it explores the daily experiences of the elderly within the nursing home environment, including their social interactions with fellow residents, staff, and family members. The focus of this research is to understand how the elderly adapt to significant changes in their living environment and how social factors influence their emotional and physical well-being. The study also highlights the challenges faced by the elderly, such as feelings of loneliness, loss of independence, and limited access to healthcare facilities and social support. The findings of this research are expected to provide deeper insights into the needs and expectations of elderly residents in nursing homes and offer recommendations for policymakers and nursing home administrators to enhance the quality of life for the elderly. The conclusions emphasize the importance of creating an environment that fosters positive social interactions and provides holistic services to improve the well-being of the elderly in their later years.

1 Introduction

Elderly represent a vulnerable age group that faces various challenges, including those related to health, social welfare, and psychological well-being. At this stage of life, many individuals experience declines in physical, mental, and social capacities, which often affect their overall quality of life [1]. One common option families choose to ensure proper care for the elderly is to place them in a nursing home. Nursing homes or elderly care facilities provide care services for individuals who are no longer able to independently care for themselves. However, this decision often comes with dilemmas, not only for the families but also for the elderly themselves.

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This study aims to explore the social dynamics, well-being, and challenges faced by elderly individuals living in nursing homes. Life in a nursing home extends beyond issues of physical care and medical treatment; it encompasses social interactions, emotional support, and adaptation to a new environment. Older adults transitioning to nursing homes often face drastic changes, such as a loss of independence, feelings of isolation from family, and the need to adjust to a new community with its own social dynamics. These challenges impact not only their physical well-being but also their psychological and social conditions.

Social well-being refers to an individual's ability to engage in meaningful relationships, feel valued within their community, and have access to the necessary resources to live well [2]. Elderly individuals residing in nursing homes often face limitations in these areas, particularly when they lose contact with family members or close friends [3]. The loss of the social networks that once supported them in their community can lead to feelings of loneliness, depression, and anxiety [4].

In addition to social challenges, elderly individuals in nursing homes also confront physical and health-related issues. Older adults tend to have complex health conditions, often involving multiple chronic illnesses that require intensive care. While nursing homes provide structured access to healthcare services, many elderly individuals still feel their needs are not fully met. Issues such as inadequate healthcare management, a shortage of trained caregiving staff, and limited facilities pose significant barriers to the well-being of the elderly in nursing homes.

Older adults face a range of challenges that significantly impact their quality of life, spanning social, emotional, and physical domains. Social challenges often manifest through diminished social interaction due to isolation, typically resulting from mobility limitations or reduced opportunities to engage in community activities. This isolation can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and a sense of purposelessness. Emotionally, the loss of a spouse, peers, or former social roles further contributes to feelings of depression and anxiety, intensifying emotional strain in this demographic.

On the physical front, challenges primarily involve the gradual decline in bodily functions, including reduced physical strength, vision and hearing impairments, and the onset of chronic diseases. The inability to perform daily tasks independently adds to the burden on the elderly, necessitating increased support from family members or caregivers in nursing homes. Recognizing the distinct nature of these social, emotional, and physical challenges is crucial for this study, as it aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the conditions faced by older adults in care facilities.

The lives of elderly individuals in nursing homes are also shaped by cultural and social factors. In many societies, particularly in Asian countries, caring for aging parents is seen as a significant moral and social responsibility. Consequently, placing parents in a nursing home is often perceived as a decision that does not fully align with social and cultural norms. This stigma can exacerbate feelings of guilt among family members who choose this option, while simultaneously creating feelings of abandonment and devaluation for the elderly themselves.

Social dynamics within nursing homes are highly diverse and can significantly influence the well-being of the elderly. Some residents are able to form new relationships with fellow inhabitants, while others may struggle to adjust to communal living. Interactions among residents in nursing homes can reflect a microcosm of broader society, where social hierarchies, friendships, and conflicts may arise. This social adaptation poses one of the greatest challenges for the elderly, particularly for those who previously lived in more individualistic environments or who were heavily reliant on family relationships.

Furthermore, the involvement of caregiving staff in the daily lives of elderly residents in nursing homes is a crucial factor affecting their well-being. Competent and caring staff can help older adults feel more comfortable and valued. In contrast, poor relationships between caregivers and residents can exacerbate feelings of isolation and loneliness.

This study examines various aspects of elderly life in nursing homes, particularly the social dynamics that develop, their emotional and physical well-being, and the challenges they face in their daily lives. In several countries, government policies regarding the provision of elderly care services significantly influence the quality of life for older adults. Countries with robust welfare systems tend to have better nursing home facilities, offering more comprehensive and structured services [5-9]. Conversely, in countries with weak welfare systems, nursing homes often lack resources and adequate facilities, ultimately having a detrimental impact on the well-being of the elderly.

Meanwhile, from the perspective of the elderly themselves, this study will also explore how they perceive life in nursing homes and how they attempt to adapt to their circumstances. Understanding the meanings they ascribe to their experiences is crucial, as it provides insights into their feelings regarding the life changes they encounter. Some elderly individuals may view life in a nursing home as a form of isolation, while others might see it as an opportunity for better care and improved quality of life.

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of elderly life in nursing homes and offers recommendations for policymakers and social practitioners to develop more effective strategies for enhancing the well-being of older adults. As the global elderly population continues to rise, issues related to elderly care become increasingly relevant and urgent to address [10]. The findings of this study can shed light on the challenges and needs of the elderly, as well as potential solutions to improve their quality of life in nursing homes.

2 Method

This research employs a case study method to explore the social dynamics, well-being, and challenges faced by elderly individuals in nursing homes. The case study approach is chosen for its capacity to facilitate an in-depth analysis of the experiences of individuals and groups within the context of life in nursing homes. This methodology also allows for the exploration of the complexities of social interactions, well-being factors, and the unique challenges encountered in the daily lives of the elderly.

The study is conducted in two distinct nursing homes located in Tanjungpinang City, selected based on variations in their structure and the services they provide. The first nursing home is a government-managed institution, while the second is a private facility. Subjects for the research are selected using purposive sampling, focusing on residents deemed relevant and possessing diverse experiences within the nursing home environment. Additionally, interviews are conducted with caregiving staff at both facilities to gain further insights into the well-being of the elderly and the social interactions that occur.

The data collected are analyzed using a thematic approach, where the researcher identifies key themes emerging from the interviews. This analytical process involves systematic coding of the data to identify significant patterns related to social dynamics, well-being, and the challenges faced by the elderly.

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 The Social Dynamic of Elderly at Nursing Home (*Panti Jompo*)

One significant aspect of elderly life in nursing homes is the social relationships that develop among residents. Based on interview findings, it becomes evident that social dynamics among nursing home residents vary widely, influenced by individual social backgrounds, health conditions, and personalities. Some residents manage to form close

bonds with their peers, creating small groups that frequently gather for conversations or engage in shared activities, such as playing cards or participating in events organized by the facility. These close relationships serve as crucial social support for the elderly, helping them cope with the feelings of loneliness and loss that often arise after leaving their homes and families [11-12].

However, not all elderly individuals are able to adapt well to the social dynamics within the nursing home. Some residents, particularly those with mental health issues such as dementia or depression, tend to withdraw from social interactions. Older adults with severe cognitive or physical impairments often find it challenging to establish meaningful social connections, which can ultimately exacerbate their psychological conditions. Moreover, differences in cultural and linguistic backgrounds can impede the creation of harmonious social interactions. For instance, elderly individuals from diverse regions (those in the nursing home in Tanjungpinang come from various districts) may experience difficulties in communication or have differing expectations regarding social norms, potentially leading to minor conflicts or feelings of isolation.

In nursing homes, social hierarchies tend to develop organically among residents, shaped by factors such as length of stay, social background, and health status. Long-term residents often hold higher positions within the informal social structure, as they are more familiar with the environment and the day-to-day routines of the facility. These individuals often assume unofficial leadership roles, guiding and assisting new residents in adjusting to the rules and customs of the home.

Friendships also form based on shared interests, life histories, or similar physical conditions. For example, residents with the same chronic illnesses or physical limitations frequently create small support groups, where they exchange experiences and provide mutual assistance in navigating daily tasks. These interactions offer valuable insights into the community dynamics, where both solidarity and competition can coexist. This interdependence not only fosters strong social networks among residents but also plays a critical role in enhancing their psychological well-being.

The relationship between elderly residents and caregiving staff plays a crucial role in determining the well-being of older adults in nursing homes [13-14]. Interview findings reveal that the majority of elderly individuals rely heavily on staff to meet their daily basic needs, such as eating, bathing, and taking medications. Positive relationships with staff can enhance residents' feelings of safety and comfort, whereas poor relationships may exacerbate feelings of helplessness and isolation. As expressed by one of the nursing home administrators:

"All the elderly here feel happy because we care for them as if they were our own parents. Some even say that this nursing home is their home now, and they no longer think about going anywhere else" (Mrs. DS, administrator of a government-run nursing home).

Caregivers who possess strong interpersonal skills and demonstrate empathy towards residents are more likely to foster a warm and supportive environment. Conversely, some elderly individuals express dissatisfaction with staff services, particularly concerning the limited time available for each resident. Staffing shortages often lead residents to feel neglected or disrespected. In some instances, elderly residents perceive that caregiving staff are too busy or rushed to provide them with the attention they deserve.

The relationship between elderly residents and their families constitutes a vital aspect of social well-being in nursing homes. Many elderly individuals report a loss of contact with their families after entering such facilities, which adversely affects their emotional state. While some families maintain regular visitation, numerous residents receive infrequent visits from relatives, often due to geographical distance or family commitments. Those who are

seldom visited tend to experience feelings of isolation and a lack of appreciation, ultimately increasing their risk of depression.

Conversely, for some residents, life in a nursing home can offer a sense of security and stability that they may not have experienced while living with family. Some elderly individuals perceive life in the nursing home as a means of escaping familial conflicts that may arise at home. They view the nursing home as a neutral space where they can receive care without feeling like a burden to their families.

3.2 Well-Being and Challenges Faced by the Elderly in Nursing Home (*Panti Jompo*)

The physical well-being of elderly residents in nursing homes is significantly influenced by their access to healthcare services. Observations indicate that nursing homes generally provide basic medical services, including medication administration, routine health check-ups, and wound care. However, some residents report that healthcare services in these facilities are not always optimal. Elderly individuals with more complex health conditions, such as diabetes or heart disease, require more intensive care, yet often encounter limitations in facilities and resources within the nursing home.

Moreover, the physical activity levels of residents in nursing homes are frequently constrained. While nursing homes may offer light exercise programs or other physical activities, participation rates among residents vary. Those who are more active tend to experience a higher quality of life, whereas others, particularly those with mobility issues, are less likely to engage in physical activities. This situation has the potential to exacerbate their physical health, as older adults require sufficient physical activity to maintain optimal bodily functions.

From an emotional well-being perspective, many elderly individuals experience mood changes after transitioning to nursing homes. Several residents report feelings of stress due to the loss of personal freedom and a sense of separation from their families. The departure from their homes and the social communities they have cultivated over the years contributes to feelings of alienation in the new environment. These emotional impacts manifest as sadness, anxiety, and despair, with socially isolated seniors being particularly vulnerable to depression. As noted by the nursing home administrator:

"It can be quite difficult to predict their mood (the elderly), as sometimes they suddenly miss their children. There are even those who express a desire to return home, even though they no longer have a home" (Mrs. LH, private nursing home administrator in Tanjungpinang City).

Conversely, there are elderly individuals who successfully adapt to life in nursing homes and express satisfaction with the care they receive. Those with a positive outlook on residing in a nursing home tend to be better at maintaining their mental health [15]. Seniors who can accept their circumstances generally report higher levels of life satisfaction, even as they continue to navigate the emotional challenges associated with aging.

The psychosocial challenges faced by elderly residents in nursing homes encompass feelings of loneliness, loss, and diminished autonomy. Many seniors experience loneliness, even when surrounded by others within the facility. This is particularly prevalent among residents who have lost contact with family members or close friends. Such loneliness is often accompanied by a profound sense of loss, whether it pertains to the death of a spouse, the loss of their home, or a decline in their social roles within the community [16].

Additionally, the loss of autonomy emerges as a significant source of stress for seniors in nursing homes. Prior to their admission, many were accustomed to making independent decisions regarding their daily lives, such as when and what to eat, which activities to engage

in, or whom to spend time with. However, in a nursing home setting, these decisions are frequently dictated by care staff or institutional policies, leaving elderly residents feeling a lack of control over their lives [17]. This can foster a sense of helplessness that exacerbates their psychological well-being, particularly among elderly women.

According to the interview findings, elderly individuals who successfully adapt to life in nursing homes often employ various coping strategies to navigate the challenges they encounter. Some seniors choose to focus on the positive aspects of residing in a nursing home, such as improved access to medical care, a sense of security, and relief from household responsibilities. Those with strong religious or spiritual beliefs tend to cope more effectively with difficult situations, as they perceive their lives to be under a greater control than just their own.

Older adults employ various coping strategies to navigate the transition to life in nursing homes, with religious or spiritual practices often serving as a dominant approach. Many residents engage in spiritual activities such as prayer and meditation. These religious practices not only offer emotional comfort but also act as adaptive mechanisms, helping them find meaning and purpose amidst significant life changes. In government-run facilities, Islamic religious programs are provided, while privately run homes offer Christian religious services. Some residents participate in group prayers, either informally organized by fellow residents or formally arranged by nursing home administrators. These activities not only strengthen social bonds but also provide a sense of security and spiritual support.

Moreover, religious and spiritual practices contribute to the formation of a new identity within the nursing home environment. Residents who are active in religious activities are often regarded as key figures in the community, taking on informal leadership roles and offering emotional support to others facing similar challenges. By relying on their spiritual beliefs, older adults are better able to adapt to life in the nursing home, manage stress, and enhance their psychological well-being in the long term.

Moreover, social support from staff and fellow residents plays a crucial role in helping seniors adjust to their new environment. Harmonious relationships with other residents foster a sense of community and companionship, which aids in alleviating feelings of loneliness. Additionally, participation in social and recreational activities organized by the nursing home provides opportunities for seniors to remain mentally and physically active.

4 Conclusion

Findings from the interviews reveal that elderly individuals who effectively adapt to life in nursing homes frequently utilize a variety of coping strategies to address the challenges they face. Many seniors opt to concentrate on the benefits of living in a nursing home, including enhanced access to medical care, a heightened sense of safety, and freedom from household obligations. Additionally, those with robust religious or spiritual convictions often demonstrate greater resilience in the face of adversity, as they believe their lives are governed by forces beyond their individual control. Furthermore, social support from both staff and fellow residents is instrumental in aiding seniors' adjustment to their new surroundings. Positive relationships with other residents cultivate a sense of community and belonging, thereby helping to mitigate feelings of loneliness. Participation in social and recreational activities organized by the nursing home also offers seniors valuable opportunities to maintain their mental and physical engagement.

Based on the findings of this study, several practical recommendations can be implemented by policymakers and care providers to enhance the quality of life for older adults in nursing homes. First, there is a need to develop more structured social support programs that facilitate group activities encouraging social interaction, such as discussions, arts and crafts, or light exercise accessible to residents with varying physical abilities. Such

initiatives serve not only as recreational outlets but also as a means to strengthen social bonds among residents, thereby reducing isolation and improving emotional well-being. Second, enhancing spiritual support by ensuring regular access to religious or spiritual activities aligned with residents' beliefs is essential. This type of support has been shown to help residents find meaning and purpose in their lives, which is crucial for their adaptation to life in nursing homes. Additionally, providing training for staff to be more attuned to the emotional changes of residents is vital, enabling them to offer more appropriate and responsive emotional support to the elderly.

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