

Phenomenological study: Spiritual life of older adults

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Abstract

Purpose: As getting older, individuals may face various physical, mental, and social challenges that are a natural part of life. In recent times, an increasing number of individuals have been exploring the potential benefits of spirituality in enhancing the overall quality of life and well-being for older adults. Spirituality can take on many forms, including religious beliefs, the pursuit of purpose and significance, and the comprehension of faith, among other areas. This research aims to thoroughly examine and uncover the spiritual practices and beliefs of older adults residing in East Java, Indonesia.

Method: This study involved qualitative research using a phenomenological methodology to gather data from ten older adults (60-90 years old) living at home in Malang Raya, Jawa Timur Provinces, Indonesia. Data was gathered through in-depth interviews and observations which were analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological methodology. A total of 10 questions were asked in the interviews.

Result: After conducting research, it was discovered that the spiritual experiences of older adult Indonesians could be categorized into eight distinct areas, which could be further grouped into two major themes and three minor themes. The two major themes were the recognition of an invisible power during the aging process and the importance of building a strong connection with God.

Conclusion: The spiritual life of senior citizens is a significant source of strength and fortitude, providing them with the necessary resilience to face the physical and mental challenges that come with transcendence. It is essential to recognize the transformative nature of a strong spiritual foundation, which can uplift and empower older adults to overcome the difficulties that may arise in the later stages of life.

Keywords: *older adults;spiritual;aging process*

INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020), individuals who are 55 years or older fall under the category of "older adults." President Number 88 of 2021 regulations, also known as the National Strategy for Aging, defines "older adults" as individuals who have reached the age of 60 years or above. As individuals progress in age, they may undergo physical, psychological, social, and spiritual changes that can result in limitations in their capabilities. These changes may result in psychological issues such as dementia, stress, anxiety, sleep disorders, Alzheimer's, and depression. The influence of the power of spirituality not only affects times of illness, but also influences the success, performance and quality of human life as well as the older adults. Spirituality has been proven to be able to bring people to success and prosperity. Someone becomes a powerful leader, fulfilling spiritual needs is something that can not be

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ignored. The need for spirituality has been proven to provide strength at times facing threats or disease (Bahriah et al., 2024). Spiritual is a dimension welfare for the older adults which can reduce various problems such as stress and anxiety, besides that, can also maintain one's own existence and inner goals life (Cain, 2019).

Spirituality relates to the inner self and psyche. The term "spiritual" derives from "spirit," which encompasses concepts like the soul, mind, inner self, religious beliefs, and more. According to the psychology dictionary, spirituality refers to belief in transcendental values. It's essential to attend to the spiritual needs of healthy and sick individuals as it forms the foundation of the care they receive. People with unmet spiritual well-being are at risk of experiencing poor psychological outcomes, diminished spiritual peace, reduced quality of life, and a higher likelihood of depression. Spiritual needs are the aspirations and hopes that guide individuals to discover meaning, purpose, and value in their lives. These needs can be religious or encompass broader aspects of life. Acknowledging and addressing spiritual needs is critical to ensure overall well-being and quality of life (Sipollo et al., 2020).

Gerotranscendence is a psychosocial theory of aging that was developed by Lars Tornstam, a Swedish professor. This theory suggests that human development is a lifelong process that continues into old age and beyond, resulting in a new perspective on life with optimized development. The theory focuses on two phenomena: aging individuals and the aging process itself. It explains the experience of growing old and the characteristics of normal, positive old age. As per the theory, an individual with a transcendent view of life in old age can interpret past experiences in a more meaningful way regarding their spiritual life and look at their life with a larger perspective (Meininger & Yeager, 2014). This phase of gerotranscendence is not solely caused by aging factors but also by nature, specifically from the psychosocial life of older adults. However, this phase may have issues regarding the psychosocial picture of older adults, whether in the transition phase or in the post-transition phase. Spiritual problems that occur in older adults often impact their spiritual and psychosocial states. Additionally, physical problems may arise due to a decrease in body functions, and older adults are prone to health problems, particularly physical health. Mental problems are generally experienced by older adults, such as loneliness, depression, stress, and fear of death, whether it occurs to them or their loved ones. Older adults who are not ready to face death may experience anxiety (Sipollo, 2021).

This research aim to investigate the spiritual lives of older adults individuals. The problem being studied is the overall picture of spiritual life in the older adults population, with a focus on identifying the significance of religion or belief systems for the older adults, exploring the methods or rituals involved in carrying out worship activities, examining the emotional experiences of the older adults after participating in religious activities, identifying the barriers that the older adults may face when carrying out such activities and developing solutions to overcome them, exploring the factors that strengthen the beliefs and trust of the older adults, evaluating the support system available to the older adults for worship activities, studying the changes in the character of older adults individuals after performing religious activities, examining the relationship between trust and dealing with illness, and exploring the connection between trust and dying.

METHOD

Variable Identification

This research utilizes a phenomenological study design to explore the description of spiritual needs of older adults individuals. The study aims to uncover the meanings behind feelings, readiness, hopes, and challenges experienced by participants when fulfilling their spiritual needs.

Research Subjects

The study involved ten older adults individuals who faced internal hurdles in fulfilling their spiritual needs. The criteria for participation in the research were as follows:

- a. Age of 60 years or above (verified through ID card)
- b. No cognitive impairment
- c. Residents of Greater Malang (including Malang City, Batu City, and Malang Regency)
- d. Willingness to participate (demonstrated by completing informed consent)
- e. Ability to communicate effectively.

Research Instruments

The researchers are developing a questionnaire to assess the spiritual lives of older adults. The interview process is conducted in various ways, including direct interviews, using the WhatsApp application, and using the Zoom application. The entire conversation is recorded using an electronic voice recorder, which is a smartphone that produces digital sound files in MP4 format. The storage and battery capacity depend on the type of smartphone used. The research employed an interview questionnaire consisting of ten questions.

Research Methods

Data collection techniques used in research include in-depth interviews conducted with the help of semi-structured interview guidelines. These guidelines are prepared based on the research objectives and all participants are interviewed using open-ended questions in order to allow their responses to shape the direction of the interview.

Statistical Analysis Techniques

The analysis using Colaizzi's phenomenological method. It is to uncover the genuine experience of the phenomenon under investigation; Colaizzi's method consists of seven steps. First informants' descriptions of the experiences are read in order to acquire a sense of the whole. After that significant statements are extracted. Meanings are formulated from the significant statements. Formulated meanings are organised into themes. Themes are integrated into an exhaustive description. The essential structure of the phenomenon is formulated. And finally for validation the informants will evaluate the result of the analysis, if it means the same as their original experiences were.

RESULT

The results of this research are about the description of spiritual life implemented by ten older adults in Malang Raya. Data collection was carried out on ten older adults who had different religions. The themes that emerged were obtained after going through the data analysis process from the results of in-depth interviews and then the researchers described them narratively in presenting the research results. The interview topics that researchers asked the older adults were

based on specific objectives that had been previously formulated regarding nurses' experiences in knowing the picture of the spiritual life of the older adults in Malang Raya.

Demographic Data of Older Adults

The participants in this research were 10 older adults who lived in Malang city and Malang district. Participants were selected based on predetermined inclusion criteria. Participant demographic data can be seen in the following table 1. There are 8 older adults aged between 60 and 80 years old. Out of these, 7 are male. 7 older adults have completed senior high school education. Additionally, 8 older adults follow the Catholic religion.

Theme Description

Participants' statements were interpreted in two ways, namely textually by finding the meaning of the language, and contextually, namely according to the background of the statements expressed by the participants. The interpretation results were obtained in the form of participants' keywords which were collected and had the same meaning and then grouped them into categories. These categories are grouped into sub themes which then sub themes build themes. Twenty-two themes produced in this research describe the spiritual life of older adults in Malang Raya: 1. Read the holy book. 2. Fulfill religious obligations. 3. Motivate yourself. 4. Become more patient and calm. 5. The condition of our body does not affect our trust. 6. There is no relationship between pain and trust. 7. Miracles of healing from God. 8. Life belongs to God. The researcher drew 2 major themes from 8 sub-themes: the recognition of an invisible power during the aging process and the importance of building a strong connection with God. There were 3 minor themes: The path to salvation, peace, and gratitude.

Major Themes

1st Theme: The recognition of an invisible power during the aging process.

As individuals grow older, their bodies undergo degenerative changes that can lead to a decline in overall function. For some older adults, this may inspire a sense of faith in the power of divine intervention to support and strengthen them as they navigate physical, mental, and social changes and transitions. As described in Figure 1.

2nd Theme: The importance of building a strong connection with God.

Building a personal relationship with God is a method used by older adults, this is done through religious rituals followed regularly and with discipline. Following the beliefs held by each older adult person. This is a process believed by older adults who believe they will receive a reward in the afterlife. As described in Figure 2.

Minor Themes

1st Theme: The path to salvation.

Older adults experience many life changes, leading to uncertainty. They seek guidance and salvation in divine power. As described in Figure 3.

2nd Theme: Peace.

The spiritual needs of older adults are crucial in their lives, especially in the face of various pressures and challenges, such as illness. Despite their vulnerability, physical weakness, and pain, older adults can find solace and tranquility in connecting with God. As described in Figure 4.

3rd Theme: Gratitude.

Older adults express gratitude for divine support despite illness, loneliness, and retirement. As described in Figure 5.

Table 1
Demographic data of older adults

No.	Demographic Data	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
1	Age										
	60-70			✓	✓			✓		✓	
	71-80	✓				✓	✓				✓
2	Gender										
	80-90		✓						✓		
	Male		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓
3	Female	✓					✓	✓		✓	
	Education										
	Elementary school						✓				
	Junior high school										
	Senior high school	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
4	Bachelor degree									✓	✓
	Master degree										
	Religion										
	Muslim							✓		✓	
	Hindu										
	Buddha						✓				
	Christian										
	Catholic	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓

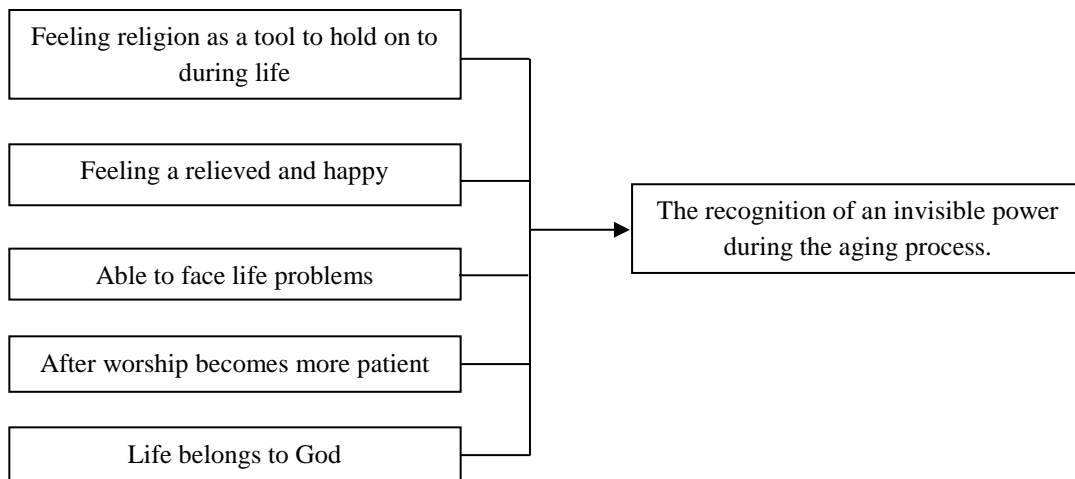


Figure 1. The recognition of an invisible power during the aging process.

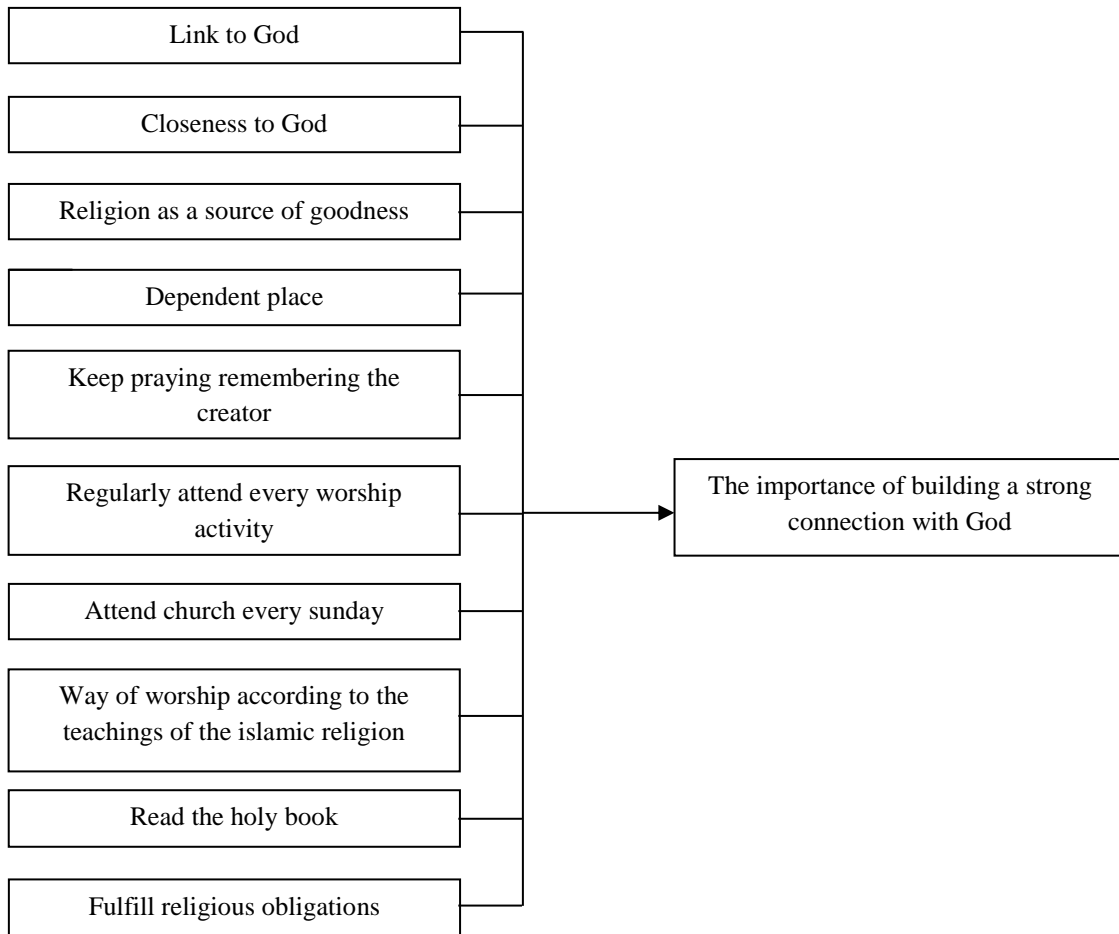


Figure 2. the importance of building a strong connection with God.

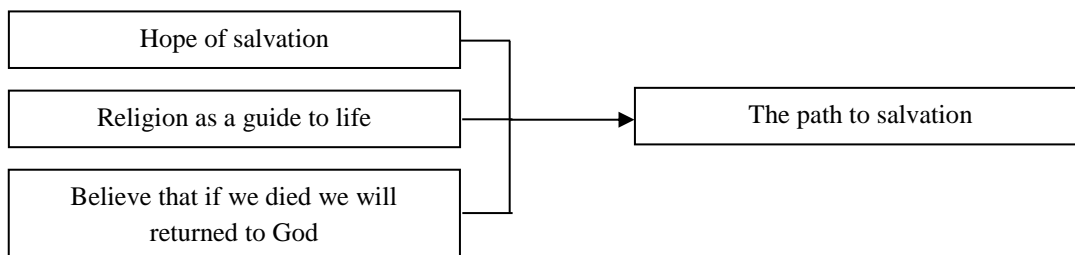


Figure 3. The path to salvation.

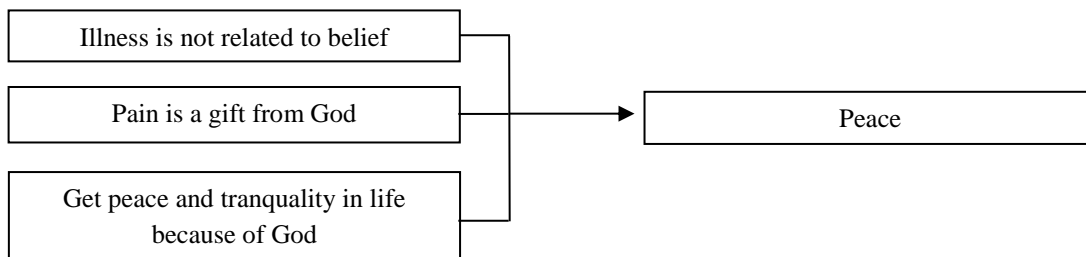


Figure 4. Peace.

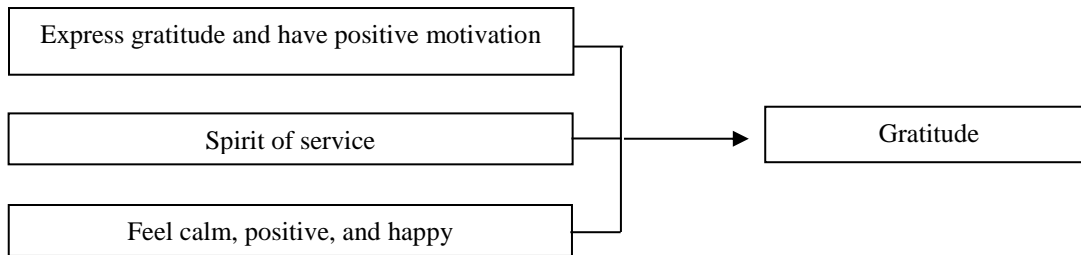


Figure 5. Gratitude.

DISCUSSION

Spiritual development is a lifelong journey that leads older adults to emotional fulfillment (Bahriah et al., 2024). The aging process presents a challenge for older adults during the transition period of their lives. The decline in the body's functional status means that older adults can no longer depend on their own strength. They address their body's weaknesses not only with medication, diet, and exercise, but also by drawing closer to God in their hearts. As people transition to retirement or unemployment, and their social circles grow smaller, older adults may find themselves needing more support. They often become more reliant on their faith to find peace in their lives, which helps them become more patient, sincere, and happier, despite facing various limitations and shortcomings. The unseen power that protects older adults during transitions in various changes brings hope and positive motivation. Spiritual care is essential for older adults as it can directly or indirectly affect them physically and mentally (Mahdavi et al., 2017). Linking to God, older adults can find solace in times of illness, pain, and loneliness. The spirituality of older adults plays a crucial role in their peace, calmness, and relief (Herlina & Agrina, 2019). Studies have shown that older adults admit that life belongs to God, the almighty who empowers them to face any problems in life and sets them free from the burdens of life in a spiritual way. Spirituality has been proven to reduce stress levels and improve the negative effects experienced due to stress (Mohamed et al., 2015).

Older adults understand the importance of developing a relationship with God by persistently working towards a stronger spiritual life. They engage in religious practices such as attending the synagogue, praying five times a day, reading holy books, and fulfilling other religious obligations. These rituals are believed to bring fulfillment to their lives and strengthen their connection to God, who is seen as a source of blessings and the assurance of life. Research has shown that developing a strong connection with God can positively impact one's emotional and mental health (Bahriah et al., 2024). Spiritual or religious beliefs can provide comfort and meaning, particularly as individuals approach the end of their lives (Boltz, 2012). To strengthen this connection, individuals may engage in activities such as prayer, reading holy texts, performing good deeds, fulfilling religious obligations, and trusting in the word of God. Increasing the amount of time spent in worship and striving for a deeper level of intimacy can also be beneficial (Shaw et al., 2016). Nurses can play a crucial role in supporting the spiritual needs of older adults, taking into account their customs and beliefs. Additionally, prayer has been shown to have cognitive rehabilitative benefits for older adults (Cain, 2019).

Older adult individuals facing chronic illness or end-of-life issues, loneliness, the death of a loved one, lifestyle changes, self-isolation, social care, socio-cultural disorders, increased dependence on others, and unexpected life events, all need assistance to address their spiritual needs. Nurses must assess their needs and provide appropriate support. This includes providing spiritual support

to help individuals feel more balanced and connected to a higher power in collaboration with priests (PPNI, 2018).

CONCLUSION

In Indonesia, older adults have distinct dimensions to their spiritual lives, but they all share a common goal: a guarantee of salvation for their soul when their time comes. To achieve this, they perform spiritual obligations or rituals of their religion to draw closer to divinity. In seeking this, they aim to transition to the afterlife empowered by invincible spiritual strength. Nurse need to assist the spiritual need of older adults to cope their transition life, especially older adults with chronic disease.

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