



Compassionately Aging: The Lived Experience of Elderly Following the Death of a Spouse

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| <p>Corresponding author:</p> <p>*Sri Lestari sri.lestari@ums.ac.id</p> <p>Article History</p> <p>Submitted : April 29th, 2024</p> <p>Final Revised : October 29th, 2024</p> <p>Accepted : November 08th, 2024</p> <p> </p> <p><i>This is an open access article under the CC-BY license</i> Copyright ©2024 by Author, Published by Jurnal Psikologi Teori dan Terapan</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Abstract</p> <p>Background: The old age is frequent experiencing the repeated loss of loved ones such as life partners, family members, and peers. The death of a spouse becomes a painful experience and has a bad impact on the psychological condition of the elderly. This research aims to acknowledge the lives of the elderly who experience the death of a spouse and represent the elderly's self-compassion in interpreting their lives. A qualitative approach with a phenomenological design was used in this study. Participants were four elderly over 60 years old who experienced the loss of a partner with a span approximately one year after the death. In-depth interviews with open-ended questions were used when collecting the data. Six themes were obtained within the interviews: preserving social relations, adapting to change, social support, accepting the spouse's death, religiosity, and the meaning of losing a spouse. The findings present that the elderly can cope with the difficult times after their spouse's death owing to social support, faith, and their ability to overcome the difficulties. The elderly show an attitude of acceptance of life changes and gratitude, followed by a positive outlook on future life.</p> <p>Keywords: Elderly; self-compassion; spouse death</p> |
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Abstrak

Latar Belakang: Masa lanjut usia (lansia) seringkali mengalami kehilangan orang yang dicintai secara berulang seperti pasangan hidup, anggota keluarga, dan teman sebaya. Kematian pasangan menjadi pengalaman yang menyakitkan dan berdampak buruk pada kondisi psikologis lansia. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk memahami kehidupan lansia yang mengalami kematian pasangan serta mendapatkan gambaran welas diri lansia dalam memaknai kehidupannya. Penelitian dilakukan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain fenomenologi. Informan dalam penelitian ini berjumlah empat orang lansia berusia di atas 60 tahun yang mengalami kematian pasangan dengan rentang waktu kurang lebih satu tahun. Wawancara mendalam dengan pertanyaan terbuka digunakan dalam proses pengambilan data. Pada penelitian ini didapatkan enam tema yaitu menjaga relasi sosial, menyesuaikan diri dengan perubahan, dukungan sosial, menerima kepergian pasangan, religiusitas, dan makna kehilangan pasangan. Temuan penelitian memaparkan bahwa masa sulit yang dialami oleh lansia mampu diatasi dengan adanya dukungan sosial, keimanan, serta kemampuan dalam diri lansia untuk bangkit dari masa sulit tersebut. Lansia menunjukkan sikap penerimaan terhadap perubahan hidup serta rasa syukur yang disertai dengan harapan positif untuk kehidupannya.

Kata Kunci: Lansia; welas diri; kematian pasangan

Introduction

Data shows that 33.67% of older adults no longer have a partner due to the death of a partner (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021). Losing a spouse for the elderly causes a deep sense of sorrow because they are used to living together. Feeling lost, lonely, declining health and economic quality are some of the problems that arise in the elderly after the death of a spouse (Tiyaningsih & Sulandari, 2021). Older adults who experience the death of a partner are also more vulnerable to various psychological problems related to feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, misery, or deep anger. Furthermore, Bui et al. (2018) stated that older adults who experience the death of a partner have high levels of stress arising from emotional and psychological pressure, lack of social support, challenges in the role of being a widower or widow and lack of self-care. The psychological impact of the death of a partner can make it difficult for an older adult who experiences the death of a partner to achieve a prosperous psychological state. Losing a partner, especially in men, is associated with lower levels of life satisfaction over time (Berg et al. in Santrock, 2013). Another study by Aspriani (2015) shows that older adults experience moderate levels of stress, one of which is caused by the loss of a spouse.

Wife and husband's proximity to their social networks, family support, and environmental social bonds were all significantly linked to emotional well-being, and proximity to social networks was linked to reported health (Ermer & Proulx, 2020). When a spouse dies, it will certainly result in a deep sense of loss. Nevertheless a "good death" is characterized by physical comfort, social support, acceptance, and proper medical care, and it should minimize psychological distress for individuals leading up to their safety and family. Positive partner relationships during the last days increase survivors' yearning but reduce their anger (Carr, 2003). The risk of death in a man or woman is significantly higher after the death of a spouse and appears to be prominent in the first three months of mourning (King et al., 2017). While living life as a widow also has acute and long-term effects on loneliness in older adults (Yang & Gu, 2021).

These problems can be overcome with the ability and attitude within oneself not to give up quickly or lose hope, continuously accept the changes within oneself, and have good hopes for events in life. Positive ways of relating to oneself are essential when faced with difficult life circumstances (Neff & Dahm, 2015). One way to cultivate a positive view of yourself is through self-compassion. According to Akin (2010), depression, anxiety, self-criticism, and mental stress are all negatively related to an individual's self-compassion.

In previous research, self-compassion was assumed to be able to contribute to understanding the welfare of the elderly after the death of a partner. An intervention program for older adults after the death of a partner, which was considered capable of reducing psychological pressure in older adults who lost their partner by using several special program techniques, including self-compassion training (Bui et al., 2018). In addition, according to Brown et al. (2019) self-compassion is associated with reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety and higher levels of well-being in the elderly. Furthermore, Allen and Leary (2014) found that those with high self-compassion had a more positive emotional rhythm when asked to write down age-related events. Thus, self-compassion positively influences the elderly's perspective on facing old age.

When faced with negative responses such as anxiety and sadness, self-compassion can help individuals overcome challenges by accepting and treating themselves well (Sonya, 2021). In this way, self-compassion can help older people face challenges and carry out developmental tasks with wisdom. According to Allen and Leary (2014), older adults with good self-compassion positively respond to the aging process and believe that self-compassion can help them overcome age-related problems. Research by Brown et al. (2019) also shows that self-compassion is related to psychological health in the elderly, and those with high self-compassion appear to be more negatively correlated with psychological distress than those with low self-compassion. A study was also conducted on older adults with chronic illnesses and found that self-compassion was positively related to acceptance of pain and negatively related to the severity of depression, anxiety due to pain, and physical and psychosocial disabilities (Edwards et al., 2019). Therefore, this research aims to understand and obtain a picture of self-compassion in older adults after the death of a partner.

Self-compassion is the ability to love oneself, which involves kindness, care, concern, and a sense of complete understanding of oneself when faced with shortcomings, failures, and suffering (Neff, 2003a; Neff, 2003b, 2016; Neff & Dahm, 2015). According to Stevens & Woodruff (2018), self-compassion is the ability to feel love towards oneself in the same way that a person who is compassionate towards others would feel, having the feeling that every human being goes through the same life processes such as joy, success, disappointment, loss, misery, and coupled with the desire to alleviate the suffering felt.

Compassion includes three essential components: self-kindness, universal humanity, and mindfulness (Neff & Dahm, 2015). Meanwhile, Irons & Elaine (2017) added six core components of self-compassion: caring about psychological well-being, sensitivity, sympathy, tolerance for stress, empathy, and non-judgment.

The purpose of this study is to obtain an overview of the life expectancy of the elderly in dealing with the situation of being left behind by a couple facing God. How is the psychological dynamic of self-compassion in the elderly after their spouse dies?

Method

The qualitative phenomenological method is the proper method to find clarity regarding a phenomenon experienced by individuals (Herdiansyah, 2015). In this case, researchers want to see how a phenomenon experienced by an individual can influence the views, attitudes, feelings, and behavior of the individual experiencing it. Studying the meaning that many individuals live by their life experiences regarding a phenomenon or concept is the focus of phenomenological studies. The task of phenomenological researchers is to describe what the participants have in common in experiencing a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The next step for researchers is to collect data from participants who have experience with the phenomenon and develop a description that is compiled based on the essence of all individuals' experiences. The description that is compiled contains the "what" experienced and the "how" experienced it (Moustakas, 1994).

Subjects

Older adults aged over 60 years who experienced the death of a partner in less than two years were obtained purposively. Participant characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristic of Research Informants

| | Informant 1 | Informant 2 | Informant 3 | Informant 4 |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Gender | Male | Male | Female | Female |
| Age | 74 years | 68 years | 62 years | 75 years |
| Religion | Islam | Islam | Islam | Islam |
| Length of time left by partner | 1 years 5 months | 1 years | 10 months | 10 bulan |
| Length of marriage | 51 years | 42 years | 39 years | 56 years |
| Living with | children and grandchildren | children and grandchildren | children and grandchildren | Alone but close to children |

Data Collection

After explaining the research, the informant filled out the informed consent form. Interviews with informants were conducted according to a mutually agreed time and lasted 40-65 minutes. The interview focused on revealing the life of the elderly after the death of a partner. The entire data collection process was audio recorded, and then a verbatim transcript was compiled (Braun & Clarke, 2008).

Data Analysis

This research uses thematic analysis, where researchers familiarize themselves with the data, develop codes, identify themes, and make reports from the results submitted by informants (Braun & Clarke, 2008). An informant validation technique (member checking) was carried out to test the validity of the data.

Result

The experiences of older adults who experience the death of a partner are described into six main themes shown in Table 2 which describes the self-compassion of the elderly after the death of a spouse. A detailed explanation for each theme that appears in the data is presented as follows.

Tabel 2. The theme of self-compassion in the elderly after the death of a spouse

| Emerging themes | |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. | maintaining social relationships |
| 2. | adapting to change |
| 3. | social support |
| 4. | accepting the death of spouse |
| 5. | religiosity |
| 6. | the meaning of losing a spouse |

Theme 1: Maintaining social relations

Building social relationships cannot be separated from human life, both with family and society. In this research, all informants agreed they had a good relationship with their families. According to informant 1, he never misses news from his children and grandchildren weekly, even though he also has two children living far away.

“...ya kegiatannya cuma itu, keluarnya ya di situ, yang lain ya sudah capek, kadang-kadang cuma di rumah, ya to, terus ya digunakan untuk istirahat lah, karena dari pagi sampai sore kadang-kadang nggak istirahat...” (“...yes, that is the only activity; I go out there, the others are tired, sometimes I just stay at home, okay, then I use it to rest, because from morning to evening sometimes I do not rest...”) (I.2)

“Minimal seminggu, e, seminggu sekali lah, ya, seminggu sekali, bisa lebih dari satu kali dalam seminggu ya...ya cerita-cerita tentang kesehatan dan kabar masing-masing gitu.....” (“At least a week, e, once a week, yes, once a week, maybe more than once a week... yes, stories about each other's health and news like that...”) (I.1)

Apart from family, social relations in the community are also related to the daily activities carried out by all informants. Informant 1 actively attends activities in Rukun Tetangga (neighborhood association) and the school's alumni community. For him, gathering with the community is an encouraging activity and makes him feel young again.

“...ada kegiatan sarasehan, kemudian kerja bakti sebulan sekali, ya, terus pengajian...Kalau di luar eyang kan punya komunitas e alumni atau lulusan SMP Negeri X...” (“...there are workshops, then community service once a month, yes, then recitation...Outside, you have a community of alumni or graduates of State Junior High School (SMP Negeri X)...”).

In their old age, several informants were still actively selling to fill their time and earn income. For informant 4, selling at the market is entertainment, where he spends more time interacting with fellow traders.

“...Lha nggih kulo teng pasar mangkate esuk bali sore, omong-omongane kalih wong pasar...” (“Yes, I am at from morning to evening at the market, so yes, I chat with market people”) (I.4).

In contrast to informants 2 and 3, they began to reduce their participation in activities within the community because of the routines they carried out every day. Informant 2 chose to take part in certain activities related to religious activities; the rest was used for resting.

“...ya kegiatannya cuma itu, keluarnya ya di situ, yang lain ya sudah capek, kadang-kadang cuma di rumah, ya to, terus ya digunakan untuk istirahat lah, karena dari pagi sampai sore kadang-kadang nggak istirahat...” (“...yes, that is the only activity; I go out there, the others are tired, sometimes I just stay at home, okay, then I use it to rest, because from morning to evening sometimes I do not rest...”) (I.2).

“...kalau untuk yang di masyarakat saya itu sekarang sudah agak tak kurangi to mbak, karena mungkin kayak pertemuan RT itu kan waktunya juga nggak bisa saya hadir setiap bulan... kalau kegiatan sosial ada yang punya hajat, terus yang meninggal, ya saya ke sana, tapi untuk yang biasanya, ke rumah ibu kalau misalnya pas sabtu minggu itu saya sempatkan waktu untuk nengok ibu saya, kan masih ada itu ibu saya.” (“... for those in my community, now there's a little less to do, is because maybe it is like the RT meeting, I do not have the time to attend it every month... if there is a social activity for someone who has a purpose, and then there is someone who dies, then I go there, "But usually, going to my mother's house, for example, on Saturday and Sunday I take the time to visit my mother, my mother is still there.") (I.3).

Theme 2: Adapting to change

The illness that informant 3's husband had been suffering from for a long time made him think that he would be able to accept sincerely his death, but after facing this feeling, it was difficult for him to do so. Likewise, informant 1 lost his wife suddenly, making him very devastated and having a hard time accepting the reality. In this case, all respondents had difficulty accepting the fate of losing their life partner.

“...tapi saya itu dalam hati saya nganu, Ya Allah misale bapak itu dipanggil sewaktu-waktu itu saya ikhlas. Tapi kenyataannya, pas bapak diambil itu saya juga nggak, nganu mbak, saya, saya juga belum bisa menerima to waktu itu, karena ya itu ternyata ikhlas itu di mulut tapi di hati itu susah njalaninnya gitu nggih” (“...but in my heart, I was feeling nauseous, O Allah, for example, if you called me at any time, I was sincere. However, in reality, when my husband was taken, I did not feel like it either, sis; I also couldn't accept it at that time because, yes, it turned out that I was sincere in my mouth, but in my heart, it was difficult to carry it out.”) (I.3).

“...karena begitu cepat ya...ya mungkin beda kalau eyang putri itu sakit beberapa hari beberapa minggu gitu... jadi mungkin sudah Allah sudah menghendaki, masih nata hati, jadi syok betul, syok, gitu ya. Bahkan e, untuk melihat proses ia menghadap Allah itu, jadi ya yaudah pokoknya berat, syok...” (“...because it was so fast... yes, maybe it would have been different if the grandmother's daughter had been sick for a few days or a few weeks... so maybe God had willed it, she was still in good conscience, so she was shocked, shocked, like that. Even to see the process of him facing God, so yeah, that is it, it is tough, it is a shock...”) (I.1).

All informants were faced with the reality of continuing their lives without the presence of their partner, who usually accompanied them. In responding to this, informant 1 stated that he felt that his enthusiasm for life had disappeared for half a year since his wife left. Informant 3 felt the same way; after her husband left, she felt confused about how she would live her life after this until a thought emerged as to why she should continue her life again.

“...dalam setengah tahun itu hilang semangat, e, kemudian, apa, e mungkin termasuk nafsu makan, dan sebagainya, e, keinginan untuk bertemu banyak orang menjadi hilang, menjadi sulit, begitu...” (“...in half a year the enthusiasm is lost, e, then, what, e may include appetite, and so on, e, the desire to meet many people is lost, it becomes difficult, I see...”) (I.1).

“...Bingung ya mbak ya, bingung. Terus nanti itu saya sama siapa? Ya gimana mbak, rasane itu ya campur aduk, antara bingung, sedih...Terus saya juga kadang-kadang pas nganu, juga saya begini, ya tadi, maksudnya, kenapa saya, untuk apa saya hidup lagi gitu lho, saya juga, anak juga sudah mentas semua, sudah punya keluarga sendiri-sendiri...” (“...Confused, sis, yes, confused. So, who will I be with then? Yes, what about it sis, I have mixed feelings, between confused, sad... Then I also sometimes feel nauseous, and I am like this, yes, that means, why me, why am I living like that anymore, you know, me too, my child has to. Everyone is done; they already have their own families...”) (I.3).

Until now, Informant 4 has been reluctant to visit her husband's grave when making grave visits. He felt sad because images of memories appeared in his mind, making him unable to focus on praying.

“Kulo ning sarean ora wani, durung iso ngadep sarean mbah kakung. Dadine ning sarean sing diadep mboten sarean e mbah kakung, nek madep kono malah ora fokus tahlil, malah bayangke...” (“I do not dare to go to the grave; I have not yet thought about visiting my husband's grave. So, if I go to the grave, I do not face my husband's grave; if I face the grave, I do not focus when reading the tahlil, I just imagine”) (I.4).

For male informants, their loneliness now makes them reluctant to travel. Even informant 1, was reluctant to visit his favourite place to eat with his late wife.

“...saya, saya nggak seneng, apa itu, keluar-keluar itu nggak seneng, jadi ya istilahnya apa mengingat-ingat, meratapi saja. Itu, begitu...” (“...I, I am not happy, what is that, going out is not fun, so what is the term for remembering, just lamenting. That, that is how...”) (I.2).

“...ya sejak itu saya nggak pernah kesitu, padahal kan enak itu sebetulnya, ya gitu-gitu. Jadi, apa, e, saat-saat yang sangat berbeda...Sekalipun sekali waktu juga saya paksakan, kenapa sih, yaudah pengen makan ya makan, tapi kan ketika sedang makanpun, waduh ada rasa yang berbeda...” (“...yes, I have never been there since, even though it is delicious. So, what, eh, times are very different... Even if I force it once, why, when I want to eat, I eat, but even when I am eating, wow, there is a different taste...”) (I.1).

The change in various things creates a new task in the informant's life. Both informants stated that since the death of their partner, they realized that they had to become more independent, especially in household matters. Informant 3 stated that she had to do simple tasks, such as replacing a lamp that had gone out or locking the house fence, which her husband usually did. He added that although he could ask children or neighbors for help, informant three thought he should be able to do this task himself. Likewise, with informant 1, while his wife had previously provided food on the table, he now had to prepare his food.

“...kayak contoh kecil gitu lampu mati, itu kan nek dulu saya nggak pernah mikir mbak, pertama saya harus, ya kan anak saya juga kerja to mbak, cowok to mbak, dan saya harus, saya harus apa, harus bisa, anu, apa, mungkin saya minta tolong tetangga saya, atau saya harus sendiri gitu saya harus bisa.”

("...like a small example, the lights went out, that is what Grandma used to never think about, sis. First, I have to. My son also works; the boy does, and I have to; what do I have to do? I have to be able to, so what? maybe I ask my neighbours for help, or I have to do it myself; I have to do it.") (I.3).

"... mandiri menyiapkan makan, untuk sahur misalnya, untuk buka puasa. Ya ambil sendiri, om A kan ngopeni anak-anak ya, om A juga tahu kalau pulang kantor membawakan makanan kesukaan saya. Tapi kan ya udah saya ambil, kemudian ambil piring sendiri, ambil makanan, gitu..." ("... independently prepare food, for example, for sahur, for breaking the fast. Yes, take it yourself; Uncle A will care for the children. Uncle A also knows that he brings my favourite food when he comes home from work. However, I already took it, then took my plate, took the food, that is it...") (I.1).

Another change that also had an impact on the informant's life was a change in status. Informant 3 said that she never thought that her neighbors would use her status as a widow as a joke. Her belief and feeling of loyalty to be a lifelong partner to her late husband made her stronger in facing this.

"...kadang saya nggak senengnya itu nganu kayak oh rondo, saya janda gitu...kalau orang ngomong itu mungkin itu bagi mereka biasa, tapi bagi saya itu nganu mbak, sakit gitu lho mbak... sampai nganu "Kowe wes ra arep nduwe bojo meneh?" (Apa kamu tidak mau punya suami lagi?) karena saya itu masih punya suami, saya Insya Allah suami itu sampai besok mati gitu lho mbak." ("Sometimes I do not feel happy about it, like oh widow, I am a widow like that..., if people say that maybe it is normal for them, but for me it is sis, it is like that, sis. Until 'you do not want to have a husband anymore? because I still have a husband; insha Allah I have husband untill I die tomorrow, you know, sis.") (I.3).

Furthermore, the two male informants felt introspective; they felt they had not treated their partners well during their wives' lives. For informant 1, he felt less caring and patient, especially when faced with household problems.

"...menyadari bahwa saya dulu...kurang peduli kepada eyang putri... O iya ya, karena ngatur rumah tangga itu sekalipun kelihatannya sudah kerja kan selalu saja ada membenarkan ini, membenarkan ini, menjalankan ini, menjalankan itu, oh ada satu yang agak lalai, ya harus maklum... Saya dulu kurang sabar terhadap eyang putri." ("...realized that I used to...not care about my grandmother's daughter... Oh yes, because even managing a household seems like work; there is always someone justifying this, justifying this, doing this, doing that, and there is one careless person, right? I must understand. I used to be impatient with my grandmother's daughter.") (I.1).

Feelings of regret for not giving enough love to his wife emerged in Informant 2 after the death of his partner.

"...tapi dulu itu kalau saya tahu akan seperti ini, saya akan lebih sayang lagi, kalau tahu seperti ini, ya saya akan lebih sayang lagi" (...but in the past, if I knew it would be like this, I would love it even more, if I knew it would be like this, I would love it even more...) (I.2).

However, as time passed, all the informants tried to find ways not to be mired in sadness for too long. Both informants stated that when they were alone, they would feel the impact of sadness from their partner's departure, so meeting other people or adding beneficial activities made them more robust to face reality. Informant 3 chooses to come to his son's house daily to help care for his grandson; he does this, so he does not feel lonely. Informant 1 also did the same thing. What helped him to enjoy life more after the death of his partner was to add valuable activities.

"...saya tu berusaha untuk nyari kesibukan, biar rame, nggak sendiri ... tapi nek saya ngurusi cucu saya itu saya lupa, anu, wes kenyataane ya harus saya hadapi..." ("... I am trying to find something to do, to be busy, not to be alone... but my grandma is taking care of my grandchildren, and I forget, well, the reality is I have to face it...") (I.3).

"...ya tapi kan saya punya komunitas lain, ya misalnya jalan-jalan setiap Sabtu. Ya mungkin saya akan menambah aktivitas saya..." ("...yes, but I have other communities, for example, I go for a walk every Saturday. Yes, maybe I will increase my activities...") (I.1).

Theme 3: Social support

The presence of children and grandchildren, both in person and virtually, is an excellent comfort for all informants. After the death of a partner, the presence of children and grandchildren can lift their spirits to rise from sadness. This way, activities with children and grandchildren are essential for the informant. Informant 3 stated that her current activities focus on caring for his grandchildren. Likewise, informant 1 did activities with his grandchildren at home to play with them and help them while they were studying.

"...tapi saya kan terus lihat anak saya, cucu saya, terus ya mungkin buat saya sekarang terlihat lebih mengikhhlaskan bapak gitu... nek saya ngurusi cucu saya itu saya lupa, anu, wes kenyataane ya harus

saya hadapi..." ("...but I keep looking at my children, my grandchildren, and maybe now I look more sincere to you like that... Grandma, I am taking care of my grandchildren, I forget, so, well, I have to face it...") (I.3).

"...cucu itu penghibur yang luar biasa, jadi menyenangkan gitu ya, menyenangkan...Hadirnya anak-anak cucu itu lho, kehadiran, kehadiran mereka itu, sekalipun istilah kehadiran itu kan bisa dalam bentuk suara di HP, gitu aja..." ("...grandchildren are extraordinary entertainers, so it is fun, yes, it is fun...The presence of grandchildren, you know, their presence, presence, even though the term presence can be in the form of sound on a cellphone, that is all...") (I.1).

After the death of their partner, all informants tried to find something to do to overcome the feelings of loneliness they experienced. In his old age, informant 4 chose to sell tofu at the market as a job he did every day. His declining physical condition often worries his family. However, his children still support Informant 4 in choosing activities that make him happy.

"...jarene anak e kulo, wes penting ning pasar atimu seneng, ojo nggagas bathi, ojo nggagas sing piye-piye, penting atimu seneng." ("My son said, the important thing is that my heart is happy in the market, you don't need to think about profit, don't think about anything, the important thing is that my heart is happy") (I.4).

Furthermore, the excellent relationship between the late husband's family and informant A was a source of happiness that she felt after her husband's death.

"...keluarganya almarhum bapak itu, nganu, apa ya, masih menganggap saya sebagai kakaknya, jadi nggak ada bedanya gitu, jadi biasanya masih misal, e, mau kemana itu saya juga diampiri, saya dikabari, jadi itu yang membuat saya, ya saya seneng gitu lho." ("...the family of my husband, what is it, still considers me his older sister, so there is no difference, so usually it is still, for example, e, where I'm going, I am also approached, I am told, so that is what makes me, yes I am happy like that, you know.") (I.3).

After the death of their couple, several informants felt the loss of a figure with whom they used to share their complaints. However, for informant 3, her daughter is the closest person who can replace the figure of her late husband, with whom she used to talk heart to heart. Informant 1 also stated that his daughter was the person he considered closest to sharing stories with.

"...kan biasanya kan berdua, ngomong-ngomong, nggih to, terus ngomong apa gitu kan dengan bapaknya, jadi nek sekarang bapaknya nggak ada ya saya itu ceritanya terus apa gitu ya semuanya ke anak saya yang cewek itu..." ("... usually it is just the two of us, talking, talking, then saying something like that with the father, so now the father is not there, so I am telling the story and then whatever, it is all to my daughter, the girl...") (I.3).

"...tapi yang perempuan itu memang lebih, apa, lebih dekat ya, nggak tahu itu mungkin, apa, naluri atau dasar atau sifat-sifat dasar, e, kalau wanita itu lebih banyak ngomong gitu ya, sehingga andai kata saya diem merekapun selalu apa yang membuka wacana, ya..." ("...but my daughter is indeed more, what, closer, I do not know, maybe, what, instincts or basic or basic characteristics, e, if women talk more like that, yes, so if I keep quiet they will always be what which opens discourse") (I.1).

Another form of support felt by Informant 1 came from colleagues who had the same experience. In dealing with sadness after the death of his wife, the advice and support given was able to help him recover from adversity.

"...Kemudian ketemu teman yang punya pengalaman sama, kan ada yang ditinggal istri dan sebagainya, saya mesti tanya diskusi...dengan ketemu teman-teman dan nasihat banyak teman, gitu...istilahnya disuruh move on gitu ya..." ("...Then I met friends who had the same experience, there were those who left their wives, and so on, I had to ask for discussion...by meeting friends and getting advice from lots of friends, that is how it was...the term was told to move on, right...") (I.1).

Theme 4: Accepting the death of a spouse

One of the things that helps informants to be able to accept their partner's departure is to see the situation of other people with the same experience. The emergence of feelings of optimism accompanied by gratitude for what they experienced was shown by informants 1 and 3 when telling how people around them experienced the death of their partner. Both informants agreed that the conditions they received were better than those who experienced similar incidents but could still recover from adversity.

"...ada satu sih itu Pak W itu...beliau mungkin lebih apa ya, terkendala daripada saya, karena anaknya dua orang semuanya di Jawa Barat, di Jakarta, ya dia sendiri dia ya. Ternyata bisa juga, gitu." ("...there is one Mr. W... He is perhaps more constrained than me because he has two children, all of whom are in West Java, in Jakarta; yes, he is alone. Turns out it is possible, I see.") (I.1).

"Tidak saya sendiri yang menerima cobaan seperti ini, masih banyak orang yang nasibnya mungkin kurang beruntung dibanding saya...Yang bikin saya juga semangat lagi itu kadang saya melihat nganu mbak, tetangga saya itu ada yang suaminya meninggal, anaknya masih kecil-kecil..." ("I am not alone in experiencing trials like this; there are still many people whose fate may be less fortunate than mine... What makes me even more enthusiastic is that sometimes I see Miss, one of my neighbors whose husband died, their children are still small...") (I.3).

Theme 5: Religiosity

All informants agreed that the events they experienced made them closer to God. Belief in the Creator can help them learn to accept destiny sincerely. Informant 1 believes that everything God has created will return to Him, which can help him not stay in sadness for too long.

"...karena kan ada kan ngajinya gitu, "innalilahi wa inna ilaihi rojiun", udahlah, ya, sekalipun apa, sifat dasar mungkin nggak bisa ditutupi, disembunyikan, ya untuk ekspresi apa namanya, menahan air mata itu, tetapi kan nggak boleh, gitu. Nggak boleh berlama-lama ya." ("...because there is a recitation of the Koran like that, "innalilahi wa inna ilaihi rojiun", never mind, yes, no matter what, the basic nature may not be able to be covered, hidden, yes what is the name for an expression, holding back tears, but it is not allowed, like that. Cannot stay too long, okay?") (I.1).

Furthermore, for informants, this incident was a reminder always to be more obedient when worshipping God.

"...itu yang membuat saya mungkin...Ya Allah ringankan langkah, hati, dan kaki untuk lebih apa lebih tekun beribadah, ..." ("...that is what makes it possible for me...O Allah, lighten my steps, heart and feet so that I can be more diligent in worship...") (I.3).

In fulfilling their obligations as Muslims, all informants perform prayer as an activity they do every day. For informants 1 and 4, they are obliged to perform their obligatory prayers in congregation at the mosque near their house. They also carry out other worship activities to get closer to God, such as reading the Koran, or attending recitations.

"...dugi terus sholat, sholat terus istirahat sediluk, terus ning langgar (datang terus salat, salat terus istirahat sebentar, kemudian pergi ke musholla" ("come and pray, pray and rest for a while, then go to the prayer room..") (I.4).

"...kadang-kadang tadaruz Al-Quran...karena dekat di masjid sholat di masjid...terus pengajian di masjid itu selapan sekali, 35 hari sekali..." ("...sometimes reciting Al-Quran...because it is close to the mosque, praying at the mosque...then reciting the recitation at the mosque every once in a while, once every 35 days...") (I.1).

"...kadang-kadang ada kegiatan di masjid, terus malam Selasa saya ikut apa, pengajian, malam Jumat itu untuk yasinan di masjid" ("...sometimes there are activities at the mosque, then on Tuesday night I take part in the recitation, Friday night is for read Yasin at the mosque...") (I.2).

Theme 6: The meaning of losing a spouse

Half a soul has been lost, which is a picture felt by the two informants after the death of their spouse. However, they are not trapped in ongoing sadness by believing that they have a God who has power over what happens to them.

"...seberapa kita sehat, gagah, tapi kalau Allah sudah berkehendak itu kita tidak ada apa-apanya..." ("... no matter how healthy we are, how strong we are, but if Allah wills it, we are nothing...") (I.3).

For several informants, the death of a spouse could be interpreted with feelings of sincerity and gratitude. After the departure of their partners, the two informants felt grateful for the presence of their children and grandchildren, who always supported them to recover from sadness.

"...masih terus harus bersyukur, karena saya masih alhamdulillah nggak punya suami tapi anak saya dekat-dekat, terus juga mereka masih sayang masih mendukung itu saya nganu mbak, apa, bersyukur ya... ya setelah dihadapi mungkin memang takdir, gitu..." ("...I still have to be grateful because I do not have a husband, but my children are close by, and they still love me and support me. I am confused about what. I am grateful, yes, after facing it, maybe it is fate, I see...") (I.3).

For informant 4, death was the best decision from God so that her husband would not feel the pain he had been suffering; this made him more accepting of his partner's departure.

"...tapi yo wis piye yo, upamane diparingi panjang umur yo mesakke. Dodone sesek, mbendino ting nganu, yo jane karep e kon mari, yo nek ngoten, tapi nek mari yo mesakke." ("But what about it, if you are

given a long life, it would be a pity, your chest hurts, you go to the hospital every day, you want to get better, but if it continues like that, it is a pity") (I.4).

Several informants also described gratitude in the form of efforts to make optimal use of God's gifts. They agreed that the age and health bestowed upon them should be used for things that would benefit them.

"...kemurahan Tuhan kemurahan Allah SWT kepada kita itu harus disyukuri, harus dioptimalkan, ya apa saja, tentang kemampuan fisik, kemampuan apa, kecerdasan, perasaan, dan sebagainya, harus diolah sedemikian rupa agar bentuknya adalah mensyukuri nikmat Allah..." ("*... God's mercy, Allah SWT's mercy towards us must be grateful for, it must be optimized, whatever, regarding physical abilities, abilities, intelligence, feelings, etc, must be processed in such a way that the form is gratitude for Allah's blessings...*") (I. 1)

"...intinya hidup itu nganu, harus berbuat baik terus gitu mbak, jadi selagi kita masih punya kesehatan, kita juga masih diberi umur, harus berbuat baik lah, sekecil apapun...ya itu untuk memanfaatkan waktu, kesehatan, usia itu sebaik-baiknya." ("*...the point is that life is boring, you have to do good all the time, sis, so while we still have health, we are still given life, we have to do good, no matter how small...yes that is to make the best use of our time, health and age*") (I.3)

Informant 4 interpreted that her memory of her late husband was a warning to continue offering prayers and asking God for forgiveness.

"...Mangkiah nak lali nopo ora nahlilke, diparingi eling, mergone diparingi eling niku ben saget, dadi ora diparingi lali, diparingi eling, nek diparingi eling lak kulo iso nahlilke..." ("Later, if you forget about the deceased, you will not be able to pray/tahlil, given that memory so that you do not forget to keep praying") (I.4).

To live life in the future, older adults have hope for themselves and their families. In their old age, older adults hope to continue their activities and carry out their routines, such as working and participating in beneficial social activities. In connection with the previous theme, the elderly hope they will always be allowed to worship and get closer to God. Older adults also hope that happiness and health will always accompany themselves and their families.

"Yo kepingine yo nyambut gawe, yo nggo sangu ibadah, sangu ning masjid, paringi sehat, kuat, nggih niku saget ning masjid ora ketang sithik niku to iso ning masjid." ("Yes, he wants to work, find provisions for worship, go to the mosque, and be given health and strength. Yes, you can go to the mosque, at least you can go to the mosque even occasionally") (I.4).

"...ya, saya berharap saya bisa, apa, menemukan komunitas komunitas seperti misalnya perkumpulan, paguyuban, dan sebagainya itu, menjadi lebih, lebih baik lebih bahagia, ya, nggih... ya yang jelas, apa, semua sehat, baik-baik semua, ya." ("*...yes, I hope I can, what, find communities such as associations, associations, etc, to be more, better, happier, yes, high... yes, what is clear, what, everyone is healthy, fine everyone, yes.*") (I.1).

"Harapannya ya keluarga saya baik-baik saja, dan semuanya sehat... saya juga beribadahnya lebih apa ya lebih diringankan lah, saya tidak malas gitu buat beribadah, terus mungkin ya kalau punya rejeki saya kepingin umroh, ya itu mbak harapan saya itu." ("I hope my family will be fine, and everyone is healthy... I also need to make my prayers easier. I am not lazy when it comes to worship, and maybe if I have the fortune, I want to go on Umrah; that is my hope, sis.") (I.3).

Discussion

This research aims to find out the picture of the lives of older adults after the death of their partner and the self-compassionate efforts they make. This research also reveals forms of self-compassionate behavior in the elderly as they live their lives after their partner's departure. When entering the life story of the elderly, the first theme emerges, namely maintaining social relations, where several communication patterns are carried out by the elderly with their social environment. The elderly show regular intensity in communicating with their families directly or using the telephone and social media. However, the elderly who are still working show different things, whereas the second and fourth elderly have more interaction with fellow traders. They feel that the daily selling routine makes them tired, so they spend more time at home resting and only interacting with their children when necessary.

In building social relationships, it was found that older adults became more selective in participating in social activities in the community. For the second and fourth informants, after work, they tend to attend activities within the community that are spiritual compared to other activities, such as community gatherings. The third informant prefers to use his time to gather with his grandchildren and children. In society, he tends

to attend activities that are not routine, such as weddings or funerals. The elderly also choose to join a community whose activities can benefit their lives, such as regular exercise every month. This result is in line with the Socioemotional Selectivity Theory proposed by Carstensen (2021), where the elderly become more selective about their social relationships by spending more time with individuals who are familiar with and have beneficial relationships.

Apart from building relationships with the social environment, older adults also build relationships with themselves, described in the second theme, namely adapting to change. According to Sveen and Walby (2008), more intense and prolonged effects that make the coping process more difficult tend to be shown by individuals who are faced with sudden, untimely, or traumatic death. However, in this study, older adults showed difficulties when faced with life after the death of a partner, both older adults who experienced the sudden death of their partner and their partners who had experienced illness or were in a coma beforehand. These difficulties are shown in several reactions, such as rejection, loss of enthusiasm for life, loneliness, self-isolation, and regret. The first older adult has been in a married relationship for 51 years with his wife; where after they both retired as teachers, they became more intense in carrying out activities such as reciting the Koran, taking care of the house, and traveling. After his wife left for approximately half a year, he felt he had lost his zest for life with a reduced appetite and desire to meet people.

Various emotions related to the difficulties experienced arise when the elderly are alone. For ten months, the third elderly lived a life without her husband present; sometimes, in her loneliness, she thought about what the purpose of her life was now because of her obligation as a parent to care for her children until marriage had been carried out; it was better for her to go with her husband. For the fourth older adult, ten months after the departure of her partner, she still felt sadness so that she could not hold back her tears when she visited her husband's grave. Even though she has passed 56 years of marriage, the fourth older adult feels that the last year before her partner's death was a memorable time for her because she had to stop selling so she could take care of and accompany her husband, who was reluctant to leave her when he was sick, so it was those moments of togetherness that she missed. The results of this research are supported by Moniex and Wilani (2022), that after the death of their husband, women experience various emotions, including sadness, longing, despair, difficulty living life, regret, fatigue, depression, and trauma. This research found that older men tend to show feelings of regret after the departure of their wives. This regret is related to the lack of attention and affection they gave them during their partner's lifetime.

The elderly also experience various changes in life, such as status and household duties. Older men and women face new tasks that encourage them to be more independent, especially in household matters. This also leads them to self-awareness that their current life is what they have to live with various new challenges that they have to face. For the third older adult, the married life she has lived for 39 years has left memories of her husband, who always provided attention as a place to tell stories and help with household tasks, such as cleaning the house and fixing damaged parts of the house. After her husband's death, she never thought that her status as a widow could be a joke for her neighbours. Other research reveals that participants who go through the grief process experience lifelong changes, including their identity and outlook on life (Arnold & Gemma, 2008).

However, the elderly can overcome these difficulties because they have the will to find a way to get up and live their current life without their partner present. They agreed that looking for something busy and active could help them come to terms with the various impacts they felt due to the death of their partner. Some older adults chose to continue working in their old age, such as the fourth older adult who felt that selling tempeh at the market could bring him happiness when he received money. Moreover, I interact with fellow traders. The second older adult continues selling to earn income while continuing the soto culinary business he built with his wife. For the third elderly, activities with family and caring for grandchildren are reasons for him to remain enthusiastic about living his life. The first senior felt the same thing; apart from the presence of his grandchildren and children, the activities in the alum community that he participated in were also things that helped him to overcome loneliness and live a better life after the death of his wife. In line with research by Fitriana, Lestari and Rahmayanti (2021), the elderly's loneliness can be reduced when doing physical activities such as work, socializing, recreation, and other activities.

The success of the elderly in going through difficult times after the death of a partner cannot be separated from social support, which is the next theme found in this research. According to Priastana et al

(2018), social support from family members influences the resilience of older adults who are grieving because of the death of their partner. This research also found that the support received from the family could provide strength for them in facing reality, especially the presence of grandchildren, which was also a source of happiness that they felt. Apart from that, support in the form of advice given by fellow elderly colleagues allows the elderly to gain other understandings that help them to recover from adversity by being more accepting of the events they are experiencing. In line with Taghiabadi et al. (2017), elderly people who receive emotional support and understanding from the environment tend to have harmony.

In connection with the following theme, namely accepting the departure of a partner, several informants showed an attitude of not getting trapped in continuous negative feelings by realizing that every human being must experience difficulties. The results of the interview revealed that when the elderly saw the life stories of other people who had the same fate, confidence emerged within themselves to be able to do the same thing, namely, to get through difficult times after the death of a partner. This is a form of self-compassion possessed by the elderly, where self-compassion can increase people's desire to continue seeking personal development and their capacity to manage their lives effectively (Homan, 2016).

The following theme finding is religiosity, which shows that the daily lives of all informants are inseparable from worship activities. According to Hermawati and Hidayat (2019), older adults with religiosity show confident behavior, do not experience feelings of isolation or depression, and are in harmony with the environment. All male and female informants equally showed an interest in spiritual activities to get closer to the Creator, such as praying at the mosque, attending recitations, and being grateful for the gifts and destiny determined by God. This differs from the research of Bini'Matillah, et al. (2018), women show more interest in spirituality through recognizing spiritual experiences, searching for answers to spirituality, and believing in positive changes in religion.

Apart from that, for several informants, the step they took to recover from sadness after the death of their partner was to interpret God's words contained in the holy book Al-Quran, that humans genuinely belong to God so that in the end, everything will return to God. This aligns with research by Nalle and Soetjningsih (2020), which states that praying and reading God's word will help people rise from adversity. (Irons & Elaine, 2017), state that one form of self-compassionate behavior is the ability to bring certain understandings and perspectives to mind and consider what might be helpful for oneself through that understanding. The previous description has shown that the form of self-compassion shown by the elderly is their ability to accept and apply the understanding they gain from the advice of their colleagues as well as spiritual activities such as prayer, reading the Koran, and attending recitations, which help the elderly to rise from times of adversity, after the death of a partner.

According to Erik Erikson's stages of development, the elderly will go through the final stage in the development process, namely the Integrity versus Despair stage, where through many different routes accompanied by a process of reflection on the past, the elderly may develop positive views or vice versa (Santrock, 2013). In understanding the event of the death of a partner, an attitude of acceptance accompanied by gratitude was shown by three out of four older adults, where this was the final theme found, namely the meaning of losing a partner. Gratitude describes positive emotions that can maintain social relationships, improve physical health and psychological well-being, and reduce loneliness (Bartlett & Arpin, 2019). The first and third elderly expressed their gratitude for the family support they received during their life after the death of their partner so that they did not feel alone and lonely. In this research, the daughter is a figure who can replace the partner role as a place to complain about the elderly.

Furthermore, the fourth older adult considered that this death was the best decision so that his partner would no longer suffer from his illness. The elderly also interpret this event as a reminder to use their remaining years to do good and be helpful to the people around them. Older adults who have a self-compassion or self-compassion attitude show a positive function within themselves, including a sense of happiness in making sense of life (Bartlett & Arpin, 2019). Also related to the previous theme, namely religiosity, their belief in God's power in determining the destiny of every human being makes them more willing to accept the death of their partner.

Based on the description above, the elderly have gone through a painful period, with various kinds of negative and positive reactions shown by the elderly. According to Choi & Jun (2009), the process of identifying and reflecting on life is related to the positive aspects of one's life and feelings of regret as part of

developing wisdom and self-understanding. The feeling of grief was initially described by the elderly as sadness, hopelessness to live life in the future, and a feeling of regret for their behavior in the past, but over time, the elderly showed an attitude of being able to accept life changes accompanied by other positive behavior and hopes. This arises because of the inner ability to rise, social support, and the religiosity of the elderly.

Conclusion

The experience of the death of a spouse is one of the phases experienced by older adults as they go through life's developmental challenges. The results of the research produced six main themes that show a picture of the life of the elderly after the death of a partner, including social relations, adjustment to changes in life, support received, acceptance of the departure of a partner, religiosity, and the meaning of the event of a partner's death. After the death of a partner, several reactions shown by the elderly include rejection, loss of enthusiasm for life, loneliness, self-isolation, and regret. However, they were able to get through this difficult time with social support, faith, and the abilities of the elderly. The elderly show an attitude of self-acceptance towards life changes and gratitude accompanied by optimistic hopes for their lives.

Future researchers who are interested in conducting studies on the lives of the elderly can explore more deeply the communication patterns that exist within families and their relationship to the lives of the elderly in their old age. Further research can then be carried out regarding the meaning of each spiritual activity carried out by the elderly and its influence on their lives. Apart from that, to obtain more detailed research results, data collection can be carried out on elderly widowers or widows due to divorce so that differences may arise in the elderly's interpretation of their lives can be understood.

Practical suggestions that can be given from this research can be carried out by elderly individuals, families, and communities. Developing a self-compassionate mindset in older adults can influence how they view the difficulties they face during aging and how they feel about themselves (Kunuroglu & Vural Yuzbasi, 2021). For this reason, communities can hold training programs to develop self-compassion skills specifically designed for older people, which elderly individuals and families can follow.

Suggestion

In this study, the form of self-compassion in the elderly was demonstrated based on the results of interviews, which were related to the lives of the elderly after the death of a partner but did not measure the level of self-compassion of each older adult using a self-compassion scale. More in-depth data might be able to enrich the findings of this research by exploring more deeply the differences in levels of self-compassion and their relationship to the behavior of older adults in responding to the death of a partner. Researchers who are interested in studying self-compassion in the elderly can discuss in more depth the professions undertaken by the elderly and how they influence self-compassion when faced with a problem or difficulty in life. Furthermore, it is recommended that future researchers carry out developments in data collection by combining qualitative and quantitative research methods to obtain more comprehensive research results.

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