



Stress Levels in the Elderly Facing Covid-19 at the Kawatuna Health Center

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Abstract

Data on mortality due to Covid-19 worldwide shows an increase with age. In 2021 it was reported that the highest number of deaths related to Covid-19 occurred in the age range ≥ 60 years, namely 47.3%. The effects of Covid-19 make the elderly experience psychological disorders, so the stress level in the elderly increases, which can decrease the immune system. The study aimed to identify the stress level of older people in dealing with Covid-19 at the Kawatuna Public Health Center. The research design used was descriptive with a survey design. The research was located in the Kawatuna Health Center, during 18-24 August 2022. The population was all elderly who visited the Kawatuna Health Center. The sample was total accidental sampling, with about 30 respondents. The data collection technique used the Dass questionnaire (Depression Anxiety Stress Scales). The results showed that 16.7% of the respondents had no stress to moderate stress (5 respondents), and 83.3% had moderate to severe stress levels (25 respondents). It is recommended that health workers increase guidance to elderly patients with various health promotion strategies, for example, teaching relaxation techniques, carrying out regular physical activities, and health counseling for monitoring and evaluating stress levels in the elderly. In this case, the nurse's role is to provide this education.

Keywords: Stress Level, Elderly, Covid-19

Key Messages:

- The study aims to identify the stress levels of older people in dealing with Covid-19, and the results show that a majority of respondents experienced moderate to severe stress levels.
- The study recommends that health workers provide guidance and health promotion strategies to help the elderly manage their stress, with nurses playing a key role in providing education

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1. Introduction

When the Covid-19 pandemic broke out, the elderly group became one of the most affected vulnerable groups (1). This is due to the fact that the elderly often experience various types of chronic or degenerative diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and others (2). In addition, the elderly's immune system tends to weaken along with decreased organ function, which can increase the risk of Covid-19 and the likelihood of experiencing more severe symptoms, even leading to death (3). Therefore, access to health services is very important for older people during the Covid-19 pandemic (4).

During a pandemic, older people are facing not only physical risks but also high psychological risks. The elderly have the opportunity to experience mental disorders such as anxiety, stress, and depression, mainly because of the fear of contracting the virus and the impact that might occur if they are infected (5). The lockdown policy issued by the government has brought major changes in daily activity patterns. However, looking at statistical data about the causes of the virus and the number of positive patients and deaths caused by the virus can cause anxiety and stress levels in the elderly to increase. This is because this situation shows the serious impact of the pandemic, and the elderly may feel increasingly vulnerable and worried about their health (6). Research shows that many older adults experience high-stress levels during the Covid-19 pandemic because they feel limited in their range of motion, lack social interaction with others, and fear contracting the virus. Older people feel isolated and lonely because of a lack of attention from others, especially if they live alone or are far from their families. These factors can cause stress and anxiety in older people during the Covid-19 pandemic (7).

The elderly are a group that has a high risk of contracting Covid-19, especially the elderly who experience psychological disorders and comorbidities that cause the elderly's immune system to be weak. The results of interviews with 5 older people who were visiting the Kawatuna Health Center found that 3 out of 5 elderly said they were very stressed because of the increasing death rate of Covid-19 patients every day, and 2 of them said they were afraid of contracting Covid-19 because of their vulnerable age. The research aims to identify older people's stress levels in facing Covid-19.

2. Methods

This type of research was descriptive with a survey design; the researcher would describe the stress level in older people dealing with Covid-19 at the Kawatuna Health Center, which would be held in August 2022. The study population was elderly patients who came to the Wireuna Health Center to attend the elderly health service (Posyandu Lansia), and the participants were about 30 people, with the sample size being 30 people; according to the total sampling technique. To collect data on stress levels in older people using the DASS (Depression Anxiety Stress Scales) questionnaire with an ordinal measurement scale; the measurement criteria, including <20 (no stress), 20-24 (mild stress), 25-29 (moderate stress), and ≥ 30 (severe stress) (8). Then, data on the characteristics of the respondents consisting of gender, education level, marital status, and history of Covid-19 were collected using a questionnaire. The data analysis used was descriptive analysis.

3. Results

Table 1 Frequency distribution of respondents based on gender, education level, marital status, and history of Covid-19.

Characteristics	n	%
Gender		
Male	12	40
Female	18	60
Education level		
Elementary school	12	40
Junior high school	3	10
Senior high school	9	30
College	6	20
Marital status		
Married	19	63,3
Not married	0	0
Widow widower	11	36,7
Covid-19 infected status		
Yes	6	20
Never	24	80
Total	30	100

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents were female, 60%; the highest education level was at elementary school level, 40%; the highest age about 53.3% at 60-74 years; the most marital status was 63.3%

married; and Covid-19 infected status was 80% have experienced Covid-19.

Table 2 Stress levels in older people dealing with Covid -19 at the Kawatuna Health Center

Stress level	n	%
No stress - Mild Stress	5	16.7
Moderate Stress - Severe Stress	25	83.3
Total	30	100

Table 2 shows that 83.3% of respondents had moderate to severe stress levels, about 25 respondents.

4. Discussion

The stress level of the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic at the Kawatuna Health Center, the majority of elderly respondents had a stress level in the severe category during the COVID-19 pandemic, namely 25 respondents (83.3%). The results of this study are in line with the results of the study (9) regarding the description of the mental status of older people during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Onekore Puskesmas area, Ende Regency, it showed that the stress level of older people was 67.4% experiencing severe stress, 21.6% moderate stress. The elderly can experience high levels of stress during the Covid-19 pandemic due to various factors, including 1) Social Restrictions: The social restriction policies implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic can cause the elderly to feel isolated and lonely due to limited social interaction and activities outside the home (10); 2) Fear of getting Covid-19: Older people tend to be more susceptible to the Covid-19 virus, so the fear of being exposed to the virus can cause high stress and anxiety (11); 3) Limited Access to Health: Older people often have chronic or degenerative diseases and need access to adequate health services. Limited access to health during the Covid-19 pandemic can cause worry and stress for older people (12); 4) Lack of Attention: Elderly who live alone or far from family may feel lonely and receive less attention during the Covid-19 pandemic (13). This can cause stress and anxiety in them; 5) Uncertainty: The Covid-19 pandemic has created uncertainty and concern about the future, including health, financial and social (14). Seniors can feel burdened with these worries and experience high levels of stress.

Stress in the elderly during a pandemic can be a serious problem because they have a higher risk of experiencing the adverse effects of stress, such as mental and physical health problems. Some efforts can help deal with stress in the elderly during a pandemic: 1) Stay connected with family and friends: Seniors who feel isolated and lonely may experience higher stress (15). To overcome this, seniors can use technology such as video calls or text messages to stay connected with the people closest to them. 2) Stay physically active: Regular exercise can help relieve stress in older people (16). Several types of physical activity suitable for older people include walking, yoga, and light exercise. 3) Adopt healthy sleep habits: Poor sleep habits can increase the risk of stress in the elderly (17). Make sure to get enough sleep at the same time every day to help relieve stress. 4) Participate in fun activities: Favorite activities such as reading books, watching movies, or drawing can help relieve stress in older people (18). 5) Keep up with social activities virtually: In this pandemic, many organizations have turned to virtual events, such as book discussion groups, art classes, and online games. Participating in these activities can help seniors feel more connected to others and reduce stress. 6) Get professional support: Seniors experiencing much stress can seek support from mental health professionals such as psychologists or psychiatrists (19). Counseling or therapy can help older people learn how to deal with stress and develop strategies to deal with their problems.

5. Conclusion

The conclusion is that the stress level in older people dealing with Covid-19 is mainly in the category of severe stress. As for suggestions based on research results, it is recommended that health workers improve coaching for elderly patients with various health promotion strategies, for example, teaching relaxation techniques, carrying out regular physical activities, and health counseling for monitoring and evaluating stress levels in the elderly. In this case, the role of the nurse is needed in providing this education.

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