

SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR THE ELDERLY: A STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF NEGLECTED ELDERLY PEOPLE AT THE BERINGIN BHAKTI FOUNDATION IN CIREBON

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ABSTRACT

The increasing number of elderly people in Indonesia encourages the importance of a comprehensive social protection system, especially for neglected elderly groups who are physically, socially and psychologically vulnerable. This study aims to examine in depth the experience of neglected elderly people in receiving social protection at Beringin Bhakti Foundation, Cirebon Regency. The method used is descriptive qualitative research with data collection techniques in the form of semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation of four elderly informants and one caregiver. The results showed that the social protection provided included fulfillment of basic needs, health services, spiritual guidance, skills empowerment, and integrated psychosocial assistance. This intervention has proven to be able to restore the physical and emotional condition of the elderly, build a sense of security, and restore their dignity as valuable individuals. Support from the Social Service, volunteers and the community are the main supporting factors, although there are still obstacles in the form of lack of family involvement. This research contributes to the development of an elderly social protection model based on a holistic and community approach.

Keywords: Neglected Elderly; Social Protection; Experience.

INTRODUCTION

The growth of the elderly population is a global issue that requires serious attention from every country, including Indonesia. According to projections by the World Health Organization (WHO), the world's elderly population is predicted to reach 2 billion by 2050. In Indonesia, data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that in 2023, the elderly population accounted for 11.75% of the total national population, and this number is projected to continue increasing to 16.77% by 2035 (Statistics, 2023). This aging phenomenon indicates that Indonesia is entering an aging society era, characterized by increased life expectancy and a growing elderly population, leading to demographic imbalances and social-economic challenges that must be anticipated (Sitanggang et al., 2024). This situation requires special attention from the government and society to ensure that the elderly live in decent conditions. One of the most vulnerable groups in this regard is abandoned elderly people.

According to (Turohma et al., 2024), neglected elderly individuals are those aged 60 and above who are unable to meet their basic needs—physically, socially, or psychologically—due to the absence of support from family or the surrounding community. The condition of neglected elderly individuals is one of the primary social issues requiring attention in social welfare development. They generally face limitations in accessing basic needs such as food, shelter, and healthcare, and tend to be isolated from family and society. Research by Qamariah et al. (2020) reports that neglected elderly individuals are classified as Social Welfare Problem Cases (PMKS) due to their inability to perform their social functions independently. The causes of abandonment include poverty, lack of family members, neglect by children, and physical limitations that hinder daily activities (Hadipranoto et al., 2020).

Neglected elderly individuals come from various social backgrounds, but generally share similar conditions, namely originating from families with extremely high levels of poverty. In a study conducted in Gadingkulon Village, Dau Subdistrict, Malang City, it was found that weak family and community support directly impacts the decline in the psychological and physical well-being of the elderly (Pradini et al., 2023). This situation is exacerbated by the low awareness of the community regarding their important role in supporting the social life of the elderly, as well as the limitations of social institutions in reaching these vulnerable groups (Asmorowati et al., 2024). Abandoned elderly individuals not only face physical challenges but also lose their self-worth and dignity due to being marginalized from their social environment (Fadlurrohim et al., 2020). Therefore, the elderly should not be viewed solely as recipients of assistance but also as subjects with the right to be protected and empowered.

The condition of neglected elderly people in Indonesia remains a concerning social reality. According to data from the Social Affairs Department of Lampung Province, there are 36,995 elderly people in neglected conditions, while in Banten Province, the number reached 64,767 people from 2022 to 2023. Based on information from the Ministry of Social Affairs in 2020, it is estimated that there are around 724,546 neglected elderly people in West Java. In Cirebon Regency, data from the Social Affairs Office records around 174,424 neglected elderly people, but only 1,825 have received social assistance. This disparity highlights a significant gap between the number of elderly individuals in need of assistance and the government's available intervention capacity. This situation underscores the need for greater attention from the government and society to enhance social protection programs for the elderly, ensuring more equitable access to assistance.

In response to these challenges, the Indonesian government has issued various regulations and policies to ensure the welfare of the elderly. Law No. 13 of 1998 on Elderly Welfare serves as the primary legal framework, affirming the rights of the elderly to social protection, healthcare services, and participation in community life. Furthermore, Law No. 11 of 2009 on Social Welfare also emphasizes the importance of social protection as an integral part of efforts to achieve fair and equitable social welfare. This legal framework serves as the basis for the government and various elements of society to design and implement programs aimed at providing a decent life for the elderly.

One form of social protection that is widely implemented is through social welfare institutions for the elderly (PSTW) or nursing homes. These institutions play an important role in providing social, psychological, medical, and physical, mental, and spiritual guidance for the elderly, especially those who are neglected or do not have families to care for them (Mutiarany & Anjani, 2022). The existence of these homes provides a solution for elderly individuals who have been abandoned, a problem that is still commonly faced by elderly individuals in nursing homes and significantly impacts their quality of life (Khoirunnisa & Nurchayati, 2023). However, the effectiveness of services provided in these homes also depends on various factors, including the capabilities of caregivers and the integration of services offered.

The social service models implemented by various institutions often focus on charitable approaches, such as providing housing, food, clothing, and religious activities. This is evident in a case study at the Graha Werdha Marie Joseph Pontianak Nursing Home, which shows that basic needs are indeed met, but empowerment aspects remain minimal (Sari et al., 2024). An approach that relies on passive assistance tends to make the elderly dependent and less independent. This model is also less responsive to the psychosocial needs and self-actualization of the elderly. The next challenge is how to create a service system that not only meets short-term needs but also encourages the elderly to remain productive and feel valued.

Research at Karang Werdha Bimo Seno, Kartoharjo, Madiun shows that a community-based approach can be an effective solution in improving the well-being of the elderly. Through programs such as group exercises, mobile health services, and group-based social assistance, the elderly's social interaction increases, and a sense of belonging to the community is built (Niam et al., 2024). This approach emphasizes the importance of social empowerment and collaboration between the elderly, the community, and the government in building a more humane and sustainable support system. However, implementing community-based programs requires long-term commitment and cross-sectoral synergy. Without full government support, such programs risk not lasting long. Therefore, community-based interventions need to be promoted as an integral part of the national social protection system, not merely as local initiatives.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of community-based approaches heavily depends on the capacity of implementers, particularly elderly caregivers who serve as a bridge between the elderly and the social service system. A study at the Social Protection Office of Bandung Regency revealed that caregivers face various challenges, ranging from difficulties in providing physical and psychological health services to limitations in building trust with the surrounding community (Kadarwati et al., 2017). This indicates that improving human resource capacity is the key to the success of elderly social protection. Continuous training, professional supervision, and moral and material support are essential for caregivers to perform their roles optimally. In this context, research on the Beringin Bhakti Foundation is important to identify capacity needs and strategies for improvement.

Based on the issues outlined above, this study aims to conduct an in-depth examination of the experiences of abandoned elderly individuals until they receive social protection from the Beringin Bhakti Foundation in Cirebon. Thus, this study focuses on the subjective experiences of the elderly during their time of neglect until they received social protection, including their basic needs, health services, and the emotional and social support they received at the foundation.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the experiences of neglected elderly people in relation to social protection at the Beringin Bhakti Cirebon Foundation. This approach was chosen because it is able to reveal the meanings, experiences, and perceptions of elderly people holistically in the context of their lives. The main focus is on understanding the social reality experienced by the research subjects, rather than generalizing the findings (Creswell, 2018). The research location was specifically chosen because it addresses the issue of neglected elderly people. Participants were selected purposively to ensure the relevance of the information obtained to the research focus. This study included four neglected elderly informants and the dormitory mother or foundation staff responsible for the program. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews to obtain personal narratives and reflections on experiences, observations to understand the social interactions of the elderly in the foundation environment, and a study of documentation of administrative records, activity archives, and foundation profiles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Neglected Elderly People in Cirebon Regency

Based on data from the Cirebon Regency Social Service in 2021, the number of neglected elderly people reached an alarming figure of around 174, 424 individuals spread across various sub-districts, including Sumber Sub-district with 6,787 elderly individuals, Babakan Sub-district with 6,170 individuals, Waled Sub-district with 5,956 elderly individuals, and Dukupuntang Sub-district with 5,730 individuals. This distribution indicates that the issue of elderly neglect is not concentrated in specific areas but is widespread across various districts, requiring attention and the fair distribution of social services. On the positive side, this data can serve as a basis for more targeted intervention planning. However, on the other hand, if not accompanied by an increase in social service capacity

in each area, it will widen the gap in protection for the elderly, especially those in areas with high numbers but limited access.

The government, together with social institutions, has made efforts to provide assistance to elderly people living in dire conditions. The Cirebon Regency Government provides social assistance to the elderly through the Cirebon Eman Ning Mimi program, designed to alleviate the burden on abandoned elderly people (Rohman, 2025). This program is focused on women over the age of 55, with assistance in the form of 10 kilograms of rice and a sum of cash. In addition to the local government program, the elderly also receive support through various other social programs, such as the Family Hope Program (PKH), assistance from the National Zakat Agency (BAZNAS), and empowerment programs from social institutions.

One of the institutions actively providing protection and services to neglected elderly individuals in Cirebon Regency is the Beringin Bhakti Foundation. Through its Social Welfare Home for the Elderly (PSTW) Kasih Ibu unit, the foundation develops various programs covering basic needs fulfillment, health services, and social activities that support active interaction and empowerment of the elderly. This is in line with (Afriansyah et al., 2019) that the existence of PSTW is very relevant considering that elderly care homes are not only places of residence but also serve as service centers to improve the well-being of the elderly, aiming to meet their basic needs so they can live their golden years in a healthy and independent manner.

Informant Profile

The elderly informants who were neglected came from various social backgrounds, but they all had one thing in common: they came from very poor families. The description of their social profiles in this study does not mention their names in order to protect the privacy of these elderly people who had been neglected for a long time. The first informant, MI, is 70 years old and has been living in the shelter for two years after being rescued by the Local Police Unit in the Kadipaten area and brought there by the Majalengka Social Services Department. He has no identification, has never been sought by his family, and experiences difficulties in communicating and shows signs of depression. The next informant, RI, is from Cipinang Beber and has been living in the shelter for four months after previously living alone in an uninhabitable shack. He has no permanent residence, is unable to care for himself, and has a history of economic hardship due to debt from gambling. The third informant, NI, is an 85-year-old woman from Cibinong who has been residing at the shelter for four years. She was initially placed there by her adopted child with the promise of a three-month stay, but has not been picked up since. NI initially showed resistance, loneliness, and physical limitations, requiring the use of a wheelchair, but now she is beginning to feel at home. The last informant, EI from Pronggol, has been living in the shelter for over a year after her six children agreed to place her there. Previously, EI lived as a beggar on the streets and was uncomfortable living in a rented house near a cemetery, often running away and being brought back by an ojek driver.

The stories of these four informants reflect the complexity of the conditions faced by abandoned elderly people in Indonesia, who generally experience abandonment due to economic, social, or psychological factors. Through the role of the Beringin Bhakti Foundation, the elderly regain a sense of security, proper care, and humane social protection. This experience is important in understanding the urgency of a social protection system for the elderly.

Profile of the Beringin Bhakti Foundation

The Beringin Bhakti Foundation of Cirebon Regency was established on March 11, 1982, as a social institution that initially prioritized providing educational services for children with special needs (children with disabilities), and to this day remains the only foundation in Cirebon Regency that demonstrates concern for children with disabilities. In reality, many children with disabilities such as blindness, deafness, speech impairments, and intellectual disabilities still do not receive adequate educational services. To expand its social services, the foundation subsequently opened a kindergarten unit and a nursing home for the elderly named the Tresna Wreda Social Home (PSTW) Kasih Ibu.

This home has a vision to achieve well-being and happy and prosperous social services for the elderly, both those living in the home and those outside the home environment. The mission of this institution includes five main points: meeting the physical, mental, and social needs of the elderly; improving health quality; building a spirit of life; maintaining dignity and respect; and creating a dynamic life for the elderly. Additionally, the foundation's programs include religious activities,

morning exercises, regular health check-ups, and skill-building training such as livestock farming and gardening.

The organizational structure of PSTW Kasih Ibu reflects a structured and professional management system. The primary responsible party is Dra. Hj. Sri Bendera Murni, with daily leadership handled by Hj. Tuti Rusmiati, A.Md.Keb. The treasurer position is held by Rohen Agustina, S.E., and the secretary by Hj. Nana Winarn. Below them are functional departments such as health, logistics, and infrastructure, each managed by competent personnel. This entire structure supports services for the elderly, who are the foundation's primary clients.

The Beringin Bhakti Foundation currently only accommodates elderly women due to facility limitations, particularly the lack of space or dormitories for elderly men. According to information from the shelter caretaker (Interview, June 4, 2025), the previously recorded number of elderly residents was ten. However, two of them have returned to their respective families, while three others have passed away due to illness, leaving only five elderly residents currently residing at the home. The admission process for elderly residents at this home is conducted through a fairly selective mechanism, as explained by one of the Foundation Staff (Interview, May 28, 2025). They explained that there are usually reports from the Social Services Department or the Police, which are followed up with an assessment and a direct visit to the location, after which a meeting is held to issue a recommendation letter stating that the elderly person is eligible to be placed in the home. The nursing home caretaker also emphasized that if the elderly person is referred directly by the Social Services Agency, the nursing home has no authority to refuse, regardless of the physical or psychological condition of the elderly person. However, if the application comes from an individual, the nursing home has the right to consider and even refuse, especially if it is deemed impossible to handle (Interview, 4/6/2025).

Social Protection for the Elderly

Social protection for neglected elderly people at the Beringin Bhakti Foundation is not limited to meeting basic needs, but also reflects a comprehensive approach that takes into account physical, social, emotional, and spiritual aspects. This holistic approach aligns with Law Number 13 of 1998 on Elderly Welfare, which emphasizes the importance of providing services aimed at maintaining the dignity and empowering the elderly to live a decent and prosperous life in their old age. The services provided must be able to address the physical, social, and psychological needs of the elderly to achieve a complete and humane level of well-being (Nurazmimar, 2023, p. 37).

The fulfillment of basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter is the most fundamental form of social protection provided by the Beringin Bhakti Foundation to abandoned elderly people. The elderly at this home receive three nutritious meals a day and additional snacks every morning. As stated by the dormitory supervisor (Interview, 4/6/2025), meals are provided in the morning, afternoon, and evening, with additional bread or snacks around 9 a.m. The food is also kept clean. Additionally, they are provided with clean clothing, adequate bedding, an indoor bathroom, and social spaces such as a living room and a yard for activities. Meeting these needs marks a turning point for the elderly who previously lived in neglectful conditions with limited access to basic necessities. The transformation in the lives of the elderly at this shelter demonstrates how basic needs serve as a crucial foundation for social and emotional recovery. According to RI, an informant interviewed by the dormitory caretaker (Interview, June 4, 2025), he previously lived alone in an uninhabitable shack. RI arrived at the shelter without knowing how to bathe properly and had the habit of relieving himself in inappropriate places. Through the guidance of the caretaker, RI gradually learned to understand healthy and clean living habits. A similar experience was shared by MI, an elderly person without identification from Majalengka who had never been sought by their family. The regular fulfillment of basic needs at the shelter allowed them to survive despite unstable mental health. This demonstrates that meeting basic needs not only saves physical well-being but also serves as a crucial foundation in restoring the dignity and quality of life for abandoned elderly individuals. With this protection, the elderly gain a sense of security, emotional stability, and the opportunity to live out their golden years in a more humane manner.

Healthcare services are one of the top priorities in elderly social protection at the Beringin Bhakti Foundation, given the elderly's vulnerability to various health issues. To ensure a decent quality of life, the foundation conducts regular health check-ups by medical staff, including internal midwives and personnel from the Talun Sub-District Health Center who visit monthly. In addition to preventive and curative services, the elderly receive free medications and medical assistance for those without BPJS coverage. In emergency situations, the foundation facilitates referrals to external healthcare

facilities. Physical activities such as elderly exercises, walking, and recreation are part of a promotive approach to maintain physical fitness and enhance the quality of life for the elderly. One foundation staff member explained that daily healthcare costs are fully covered, including medication purchases and personal needs such as diapers (Interview, 4/6/2025). These efforts align with research findings (Kristina et al., 2024) emphasizing the importance of comprehensive healthcare services as part of elderly social rehabilitation, particularly for those without family support or formal social security.

Spiritual aspects are an important part of the foundation's efforts to protect the elderly. Religious activities are regularly held in accordance with the beliefs of each elderly person, such as congregational prayers, religious lectures, and daily recitation of the Quran. Every six months, the foundation also holds joint recitations as an effort to strengthen faith and provide inner peace. This is directly felt by EI, one of the residents who claims to feel more at peace and comfortable since actively participating in religious activities and socializing with fellow elderly residents. Meanwhile, NI, who is non-Muslim, is still given space to worship according to her beliefs. According to the dormitory caretaker, NI is often seen sitting quietly on her bed in the middle of the night, as if praying.

Beyond spiritual aspects, the foundation also focuses on empowering the elderly through simple skills training that can stimulate their cognitive and motor activities. This aligns with research conducted by (Rahmadhani et al., 2024), which shows that the synergy between sustainable empowerment programs and a spiritual approach significantly improves the psychosocial well-being of neglected elderly individuals. The study emphasizes that by involving the elderly in empowering activities and fostering spiritual closeness, they feel more meaningful, confident, and have a sense of belonging to their social environment. The activities conducted at the foundation include making souvenirs, sewing, assembling prayer beads, creating decorative flowers, and gardening (Interview, 4/6/2025). These activities serve as a positive outlet, especially for elderly individuals like MI, who, despite facing communication difficulties and mild depression, still show interest in creative activities such as arranging objects into circular shapes from broken roof tiles—a form of self-expression valued by the staff.

The psychosocial aspect is a crucial dimension of the social protection system implemented at the Beringin Bhakti Foundation. Many elderly residents arrive at the shelter with emotional wounds resulting from experiences of abandonment, loneliness, and psychological stress throughout their lives. One of the foundation's staff explained that they have provided counseling services from professional staff such as psychologists and psychiatrists to help address emotional and behavioral issues that arise (Interview, 4/6/2025). These services not only maintain mental stability but also restore self-confidence and the elderly's zest for life as they face old age. As experienced by NI, she suffered severe stress due to feeling abandoned by her child, but gradually improved after receiving intensive care from caregivers. Similarly, EI shared, "I just can't stand being alone at home; I'm afraid, and the house is near a cemetery" (Interview, 4/6/2025). This statement highlights the importance of emotional support and a safe environment for the elderly facing internal pressures. At the care home, EI felt more at ease because she could interact with other elderly residents and receive attention from caregivers. This situation demonstrates that addressing psychosocial aspects not only reduces mental stress but also provides space for the elderly to feel valued and rediscover the meaning of life. This aligns with research (Audiel & Widayati, 2023) indicating that addressing mental and social dimensions through psychosocial programs can reduce emotional isolation and improve the overall quality of life for the elderly. An approach integrating psychological services into social protection has proven effective in enhancing the quality of life and psychological resilience of previously marginalized elderly individuals.

The social protection implemented by the Beringin Bhakti Foundation reflects a comprehensive and humane approach to addressing the issues of neglected elderly individuals. Through the fulfillment of basic needs, comprehensive healthcare services, strengthening spiritual aspects and empowerment, as well as continuous psychosocial support, the foundation has successfully created a safe, comfortable, and dignified environment for the elderly. The experiences of the informants demonstrate that appropriate social interventions can transform their lives from a state of neglect to a healthier physical and emotional state. This integrated approach not only restores the condition of individual elderly people but also serves as a model of good practice in adaptive social protection and holistic well-being. Thus, the Beringin Bhakti Foundation is not merely a place of residence but also a space for the recovery and restoration of the lives of elderly people who have long been marginalized.

The success of social protection for neglected elderly people at the Beringin Bhakti Foundation is inseparable from a number of supporting factors. Active support from the Social Services Agency

has been a key pillar in the form of case coordination and aid distribution, including the ATENSI program, which has been running since 2022. The presence of volunteers, community participation, and social organizations further strengthen the foundation's operations through donations of basic necessities, usable clothing, and assistance in daily activities for the elderly. This aligns with research findings (Azizah et al., 2025), which state that community care programs involving active local community participation have proven to have a positive impact on maintaining the well-being of abandoned elderly individuals. However, these efforts still face challenges, particularly due to the limited involvement of families. Most elderly individuals are rarely visited and have lost contact with their family members, making the process of psychosocial recovery more challenging. This situation reflects that the sustainability of social protection requires cross-sectoral collaboration that is not only institutional but also family- and community-based.

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that social protection for neglected elderly people at the Beringin Bhakti Cirebon Foundation is implemented holistically, covering basic needs, routine health services, spiritual support, skills empowerment, and psychosocial assistance. Findings from four elderly informants indicate that appropriate interventions can transform neglect into a more dignified, stable, and emotionally stable life. This success is supported by collaboration between the Social Affairs Department, the foundation, volunteers, and the community, despite challenges such as limited support and visits from family members. With a comprehensive approach, the foundation not only serves as temporary housing but also functions as a social recovery space that offers hope and new meaning to the lives of abandoned elderly individuals.

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