



Overview of Coping Strategies for Caregivers of Elderly Individuals with Dementia at Senior Care Darmawan Park Sentul

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Abstract

Dementia is a clinical condition that is mostly experienced by the elderly and can be identified by progressive cognitive decline that disrupts one's ability to be independent. Elderly people with dementia require special services from others as caregivers who can provide good care in everyday life. However, caregivers often experience personal difficulties in caring for elderly people with dementia. Hence, they need strategies to deal with potential problems. This paper is a qualitative research with a case study approach. The aim of this study is to describe the coping strategies of caregivers of elderly dementia at Darmawan Park Sentul Senior Care. The respondents of this study were two caregivers who worked for elderly people with dementia in Senior Care. Results shows that both subjects developed two coping strategies: problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. The dominant coping strategy used by both respondents in this study was emotion-focused coping. The aspects of emotion-focused coping that are still used by both respondents are seeking social emotional support and self-control. The form of effort most often used by both respondents in dealing with their problems was telling the closest people around them, such as their family, friends, co-workers, and superiors, to get advice, attention, and suggestions.

Keywords *coping strategies, caregiver, elderly with dementia*

INTRODUCTION

Elderly individuals, commonly referred to as the Elderly, represent the later stage of life and are often marked by a decline in the ability to maintain balance against physiological stress. Globally, the number of elderly individuals continues to rise. In 2019, the elderly population was 1 billion and is projected to increase to 2.1 billion by 2050 (Shanti, 2022). In Indonesia, the elderly population is also relatively high; according to data from Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) in 2020, the elderly population in Indonesia was 9.92%, totaling 26.82 million people (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2020). Aging leads to significant physical decline, but. However, of the common issues faced by the elderly is cognitive decline or impairment, one of which is dementia. Elderly individuals with dementia are characterized by gradual, persistent, and progressive changes in cognition, function, and behavior due to dementia symptoms. This indicates that elderly individuals with dementia face numerous challenges requiring special care due to physical and cognitive limitations.

A caregiver is a term used to describe someone who typically cares for and supports others or patients in their daily lives (Awad & Voruganti, 2008). Based on a preliminary study conducted at Senior Care, it was found that during the care of elderly individuals with dementia, some caregivers displayed maladaptive responses to the elderly's behavior in certain situations. Some patients with dementia exhibited tantrums, such as hitting, resisting, and attacking those around them when required to engage in activities. In response, caregivers often chose to withdraw from the situation. When faced with uncooperative elderly individuals, caregivers attempted to divert their attention to other patients, or those unable to handle the situation allowed other caregivers to intervene and calm the patient. These challenges faced by caregivers at work put them at risk of experiencing emotional, physical, mental, and social stress and fatigue because it is not easy for caregivers to

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manage patients who require constant assistance and are always expected to provide optimal care.

Therefore, based on the findings from the preliminary study, caregivers need coping strategies to endure stressful situations and reduce the associated pressures, enabling them to continue providing high-quality care. Coping refers to individuals' efforts to minimize negative emotions when experiencing excessive stress (Sundari et al., 2022). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed that coping strategies can be divided into two types: problem-focused and emotion-focused. Problem-focused coping is more likely to occur when a situation is perceived as changeable, and individuals address the issue directly to reduce stress. In contrast, emotion-focused coping occurs when a situation is perceived as threatening or unchangeable, leading individuals to regulate their emotional responses to the stressor rather than attempting to resolve the problem directly.

This study investigates the coping strategies used by caregivers of elderly individuals with dementia at Senior Care Darmawan Park Sentul to manage work effectively to provide optimal care. By understanding these strategies, this study seeks to fill a gap in the existing literature and provide insights that could inform interventions and support programs designed to enhance caregiver well-being and effectiveness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have identified a variety of coping strategies used by caregivers. Research conducted by Gunawan et al. (2023) on coping strategies in caring for family members with schizophrenia found that caregivers utilize two types of coping: problem-focused and emotion-focused. The use of problem-focused coping demonstrated that sharing concerns and expressing feelings with a trusted individual effectively alleviated caregivers' burdens. Additionally, discussing issues with a trusted person served as a means to resolve the problems caregivers face during the caregiving process. In terms of emotion-focused coping, caregivers sought to draw closer to Allah SWT and engaged in religious activities as a coping mechanism.

On the other hand, research conducted by Iavarone et al. (2014) found that caregivers of Alzheimer's patients at Cardarelli Hospital in Nepal employed task-focused coping, a form of problem-focused coping, where they actively performed tasks in response to persistent caregiving duties. It was also discovered that reliance on emotion-focused coping led to higher levels of difficulty for caregivers, whereas task-focused coping and avoidance improved caregiving outcomes.

Furthermore, institutional caregiving, as opposed to home-based caregiving, presents different challenges. Research by Andela et al. (2021) suggests that the risk of burnout experienced by caregivers has a negative impact on their behavior in caring for the elderly. This behavior includes neglect and abusive actions, such as failing to provide food, clothing, and necessary care to meet the physical and mental needs of the elderly. Burnout affects the quality of care received, as well as the satisfaction and safety of the elderly. Therefore, it is crucial to understand caregivers' coping strategies to enable them to maintain energy levels, focus, and affection, thus improving their well-being and quality of care.

This study builds on the existing body of literature by focusing on caregivers' coping strategies in an institutional setting in Indonesia, where cultural factors and available resources may shape these strategies in distinctive ways.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research design of this study is a qualitative case study. The sample in this research consists of two caregivers for elderly with dementia at Senior Care Darmawan Park Sentul. The selected sample meets the predetermined criteria, namely caregivers with different coping strategies who hold the primary responsibility for caring for elderly with dementia at Senior Care.

Data collection was carried out from April 2024 to July 2024 through in-depth interviews and observation focused on the caregivers' job descriptions, experiences, and coping strategies used in caring for elderly people with dementia at Senior Care Darmawan Park. During the interview process, the researcher used questions based on a predetermined interview guide, with each session lasting approximately 40 minutes. All interviews were conducted face-to-face at Senior Care Darmawan Park Sentul and recorded with the respondents' permission. In this study, the researcher also conducted a form of participatory observation by collecting data through direct involvement in the daily lives of caregivers for elderly individuals with dementia. Moleong (2018) argued that observation in research is essential for several reasons, including: enabling the direct observation of behaviors or events, documenting occurrences within a context relevant to proportional knowledge or directly derived from data, serving as a tool for verifying interview results, and helping researchers understand complex situations. Observations can also be conducted when other communication methods are not feasible. The researcher observed the characteristics, behaviors, activities, and challenges faced by caregivers in their day-to-day care of elderly individuals with dementia and subsequently recorded all behaviors exhibited by the caregivers to support the collected data. The observations were conducted with the consent of the respondents, who were informed that they would be observed for the purposes of this research. The data analysis technique used in this study is the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which comprises three stages: data collection, data display, data condensation, and conclusions. The data collected from the interviews were then analyzed by extracting the key meanings of each statement and summarizing several major themes. In the final stage, the conclusions are presented descriptively based on the subjects of the study in accordance with the research framework. These preliminary conclusions may be modified if additional data collection does not yield convincing evidence. However, if the preliminary conclusions are already supported by valid and robust evidence at the time the researcher returns to collect data, then the preliminary conclusions will have established credibility. Informed consent was obtained from the researcher before the interviews occurred, and the interview transcripts were stored by the researcher to maintain the confidentiality of the respondents' data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study found that there are two coping strategies used by caregivers of elderly with dementia at Senior Care. These two coping strategies are problem-focused and emotional-focused coping.

Problem-Focused Coping Solving Planful Problems

This study found that both caregivers often try to solve problems by clearly identifying the issues, coordinating with the team and superiors, and carefully seeking appropriate solutions together. This was supported by the following statements from the respondents:

"Coordination, yes. Everything must be coordinated. We discuss it.. and find a solution together."
(Respondent 1)

"Then, we look for a solution together. Because here we really work as a team, so you can't do it alone."
(Respondent 2)

Confrontative Coping

Based on the results of the interviews with both subjects, it was found that only one subject

employed confrontative coping by acting directly and proactively in addressing the issues they faced with the elderly, without avoiding or minimizing the problems. This statement was supported by the following statements from the respondents:

"I immediately assisted in cleaning the wound with the nurse. I would observe and take photos of each wound so that I could report it to Kak Dea, ensuring that she was informed of the improvements."
(Respondent 2)

Emotion-Focused Coping

Seeking Social Emotional Support

Based on the interviews, they found that they try to seek support from close people, such as family, friends, coworkers, and superiors. They do this to obtain advice, attention, and suggestions. This statement was supported by the following statements from the respondents:

"... when I feel stressed out, I tend to talk to my friends or if I'm at home, I would talk to my family."
(Respondent 1)

"I can video call every day with my mom or send a picture to her to let her know that I have left for work."
(Respondent 2)

Self Control

Based on the interview, it was found that both respondents strive to regulate their emotional responses to challenging situations in order to alleviate difficulties when feeling frustrated by elderly individuals with dementia exhibiting uncontrollable behavior. This conclusion was supported by the statements made by the respondents:

"I just pretend in front of everyone, but deep down, I'm like 'Oh God, oh God.'"
(Respondent 1)

"When I get emotional, I just keep it to myself and repeat 'Astaghfirullah, astaghfirullah' over and over."
(Respondent 2)

Escape Avoidance

Another strategy identified from the interviews was that respondents used avoidance or escape to cope when difficulties arises from caring for elderly individuals with dementia. This is supported by the following statement from the respondent:

"When a senior is really angry with me, I just leave. It is better to let someone else handle it."
(Respondent 1)

Distancing

One of the respondents chose to withdraw from their surroundings, including friends, superiors, and even family. The respondent opted to engage in other positive activities to forget the issues that caused frustration. This is supported by the following statement from the respondent:

"When I am feeling upset, I usually just stay in the dorm, play on my phone, listen to music, and that is it."

(Respondent 2)

Accepting Responsibility

Another strategy identified from the interview results is that when making a mistake that affects others, a respondent strives to gain knowledge and accept the situation. This is supported by the respondent's statement as follows:

"I always apologize and accept that I was wrong, and I won't repeat the same mistake."

(Respondent 2)

The results of this study identified two coping strategies used by caregivers to address the challenges encountered when caring for elderly individuals with dementia. These two coping strategies are problem- and emotion-focused coping. The results of this study are consistent with previous research, which showed that caregivers used two effective coping strategies when caring for family members with schizophrenia: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Gunawan et al., 2023). In this study, the problem-focused coping used by both respondents was planful problem solving that involved identifying the problem. The use of the planful problem-solving aspect is characterized by respondents' efforts to identify situations and seek out others for brainstorming, as well as attempting to devise steps to resolve issues directly related to health, safety, and comfort of the elderly. Both respondents engaged in this process to share problems with other caregivers and supervisors to obtain information about conflict-inducing situations or to find ways to prevent issues. In addition, brainstorming with supervisors allows them to evaluate existing problems and develop preventive measures through briefings and training for caregivers. This aligns with coping strategy theory, which states that the planful problem solving aspect involves actively seeking ways to resolve emerging problems and analyzing situations to lead conflict. Subsequently, one of the respondents in this study used the confrontative aspect of using aggressive methods when facing problems, as demonstrated when the respondent was faced with an elderly person suffering from a pressure ulcer. The respondent immediately took action by cleaning the wound on the elderly.

However, the dominant coping strategy employed by both respondents in managing daily challenges was emotion-focused coping, specifically seeking social emotional support and self-control. Seeking social emotional support is characterized by individuals' efforts to obtain emotional and social support from others (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Both respondents sought social emotional support by seeking advice, guidance, and emotional support from others when they felt that their workload was too overwhelming or when managing the elderly became too challenging, leading to emotional exhaustion. This is consistent with the research conducted by Rahmi and Suryani (2020), who found that seeking support from family, friends, or fellow caregivers can provide a platform for sharing experiences, feelings, and advice. Interacting with others can help caregivers feel supported and develop strategies to address challenges. The results of the study indicate that both respondents used the aspect of self-control, which involves efforts to regulate feelings and behaviors in relation to problem-solving. The respondents sought to manage their emotions and actions when faced with challenging or stressful situations, such as dealing with elderly individuals exhibiting uncontrollable behavior due to dementia. The study findings also indicate that both respondents used the distancing coping strategy, which involves detaching from conflict or fostering positive expectations. They distanced themselves emotionally from stressful situations with elderly dementia patients, downplaying the issues as unimportant to

make coping easier. Additionally, they avoided the problems by engaging in positive activities that brought them happiness and helped them manage the challenges more effectively. Furthermore, the study's findings indicate that one of the respondents employed the escape-avoidance aspect, which involves efforts to manage feelings and behaviors in relation to problem-solving. The respondent attempted to avoid problems by steering clear of confrontation and such situations; for instance, when confronted with an elderly individual with dementia who was angry, the respondent preferred to distance themselves and allow someone else to handle the situation. Lastly, the study's findings indicate that one of the respondent employed the aspect of accepting responsibility, which involves acknowledging and confronting issues while considering possible solutions. When faced with problems or mistakes, the respondent took responsibility by admitting the issues without blaming others. For instance, although they made an error in caring for an elderly individual despite their best efforts, they accepted that the error arose from factors beyond their control and aimed to avoid repeating it.

Sharing problems with others by expressing their feelings and grievances was found to effectively reduce caregivers' burden. The respondents felt comfort when they shared with colleagues and received attention from family members and superiors, which led them to more frequently engage in aspects of emotion-focused coping.

CONCLUSIONS

This study found that both respondents employed coping strategies by developing two types of coping strategies in dealing with challenges and stressful situations in their roles as caregivers for elderly individuals with dementia. The coping strategies of both respondents were derived from their personal experiences and perceptions while resolving their problems. The dominant coping strategy used by both respondents in this study was emotion-focused coping. The specific aspects of emotion-focused coping that both respondents continue to use are seeking social emotional support and self-control. The most frequent method used by both respondents to address their problems was sharing their concerns with those close to them, such as family members, friends, coworkers, and superiors, to receive advice, attention, and suggestions. This approach was taken to obtain emotional support, making it easier to confront challenges. Moreover, when faced with difficulties, respondents first attempted to regulate their emotions and refrained from expressing their true feelings in front of others. In this study, the coping strategies frequently employed by both respondents were considered effective in helping them manage challenges and persist in their work caring for elderly individuals with dementia.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

For further research, this study is expected to provide new insights into effective methods for managing work, enabling caregivers to deliver optimal care to elderly individuals with dementia, and to utilize a variety of methods in the data collection process to obtain more in-depth results. Future researchers should expand the sources of information by involving individuals close to the respondents.

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