

The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic period on voluntary actions in the care of elderly parents in modern families

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to analyze and explain the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on voluntary actions in the care of elderly parents in modern families. During the pandemic, elderly parents are considered vulnerable and it is feared that they will be exposed to the Covid-19 virus, so special attention and care is needed. Meanwhile, during this pandemic, modern family activities are required to be more protective and productive in maintaining the family economy. This study uses a quantitative approach, the respondents are determined by *purposive sampling*, the data are obtained through questionnaires, and data analysis uses correlational analysis. The results show that during the Covid-19 pandemic, 33.3% of respondents expressed concern about the condition of their elderly parents. Meanwhile, as many as 48.1% of respondents actually expressed concern about the sustainability of the family economy. As many as 37% of respondents apply strict health protocols to protect their family members from Covid-19, and 11.1% of respondents limit socializing with the surrounding community, even with their own family members. Voluntary action during the Covid-19 pandemic was considered to be very influential on the patterns of care and attention of modern families to their elderly parents.

Keywords: elderly; voluntary action; modern family; covid-19

1 INTRODUCTION

In almost five decades, the percentage of Indonesian elderly has doubled (1971–2020), namely to 9.92 percent (26 million), where the female elderly population is about 1 percent more than the male elderly (10.43 percent versus 9.42 percent) (Riana et al. 2020). BPS data states that Indonesia's population structure is starting to be an *aging population*, marked by the percentage of the elderly population from 2020 which is estimated to reach more than 10 percent. Even from the results of the BPS projection, in 2045 the elderly in Indonesia is estimated to be almost one-fifth of the entire population of Indonesia (Riana et al. 2020).

As a developing country, Indonesia will enter the aging period, where the number of elderly people is increasing in number. This means that the life expectancy of the population in Indonesia is getting longer, starting from 2004 to 2015 the life expectancy in Indonesia increased from 68.6 years to 70.8 years and the projection for 2030–2035 is it reaching 72.2 years (Figure 1).

According to Prayitno, the elderly are two entities of social and biological facts, as social facts of the elderly are the process of withdrawing from various statuses given by society seen from the perspective of the structure of society (Prayitno 1999). Meanwhile, both biologically and physically, age growth can mean the weakening of humans physically and in health.

The increasing number of elderly is a challenge to achieve the target of healthy and independent elderly people. Thus, the existence of the elderly does not become a burden to society or the state, however, this group can become a potential human resource asset. The increase in the number of

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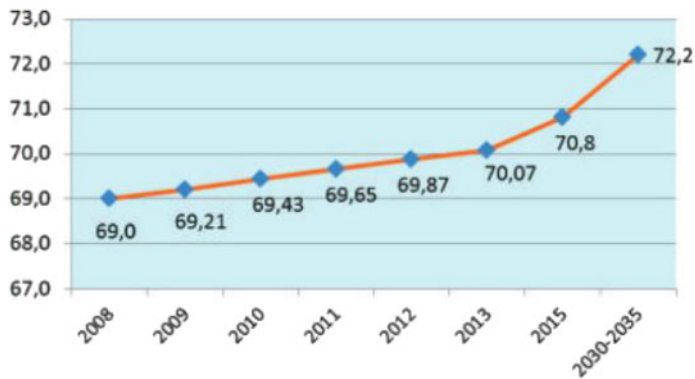


Figure 1. Indonesia's life expectancy in 2008 – 2015 and projection for 2030–2035.
 Source: Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics (2015).

elderly people also goes hand in hand with an increase in the number of households inhabited by the elderly, which is 28.48 percent in 2020 (Maylasari et al. 2019). This is interesting because it relates to the availability of potential both economic and social support that should ideally be provided by the family.

The increasing quantity of elderly people in Indonesia does not rule out an increase in problems related to the elderly. Moreover, the problems related to the elderly tend to be comprehensive and multi-dimensional. The complexity of the elderly's problem starts from the lack of attention and family support given to the elderly to neglect. This study is focused on a description of the problems of modern families in the Covid-19 pandemic situation when elderly parents are in it.

Regarding the existence of elderly parents in the family, Butler, Lewis, and Sunderland explained that feelings of alienation and rejection from family members are a psychological pressure for the elderly (Cummings 2002). This is of course an important concern for family members, because every elderly has needs that must be met, such as health needs, independent needs, attention needs, the need for social relationships or support, the need to be respected. Therefore, as much as possible, both family members and the elderly work together in an effort to meet these needs.

In the study entitled *Overview of Elderly Family Stress Levels*, it showed that most families experienced moderate stress levels—as many as 37 respondents (67.27%)—while severe stress levels were reported by 8 respondents (14.55%), and mild stress levels were reported by 10 respondents (18.18%). This proves that families with elderly parents experience an influence on their psychological condition. Because caring for elderly parents is indeed not easy, when considering the elderly who are psychologically and physically have experienced a decline. The input obtained from this study is the importance of family and elderly collaboration so that they can further maximize their role in providing mutual support to reduce stress levels, thus forming a healthier mental life (Mubin & Mahmudah 2019).

Another study entitled “Factors Associated with Family Burden in Caring for the Daily Activities of the Elderly,” states that there is a significant relationship between family knowledge, family socioeconomic activity, and length of care for the elderly with family burdens in caring for the elderly. The recommendation from this study is that families should increase knowledge about the maintenance of daily life activities in the elderly, namely by reading a lot and finding out information about the maintenance of daily life activities in elderly parents through the mass media (Erwanto 2017).

The family burden in caring for the elderly can cause psychological changes, as mentioned in a study entitled “The Level of Family Anxiety Caring for the Elderly” (Kartika Sari & Aziz 2020). The psychological change discussed in the study is anxiety. Anxiety is a constant feeling of worry related to everyday situations. The conclusion in this study is that the level of family anxiety in caring for the elderly varies. In this study, it was found that the level of family anxiety with elderly members is moderate anxiety.

Research conducted by Riesta Ridha Tri Fadhilah entitled “The Relationship Between Social Interaction and *Happiness* in the Elderly” explains that there is a relationship between social interaction and happiness in the elderly with a significance level of $0.000 < 0.05$. This study also provides a correlation of 0.707, and it is found that the higher the social interactions carried out by the elderly, the higher the happiness of the elderly (Fadhilah 2018). This shows that the need for interaction is a factor that affects the happiness of the elderly in living their social life.

The problem of parenting the elderly in modern families is a very interesting issue today. From some of the research results above, it is deemed necessary to also explain the problems that occur in modern families with elderly parents. The concept of a family as a gathering place for parents and children and also as a fun place for family members is not always the case.

In the description of several studies above, it reveals how families with elderly parents in them face the problems and burdens that must be faced in the parenting process. The problem is becoming increasingly complex with the current Covid-19 pandemic conditions. So that researchers feel this problem is unique and it will be useful to investigate further. Researchers want to find out more about the problems of modern families when there are elderly parents in this Covid-19 pandemic condition.

Talcott Parsons’ social theory approach explains voluntary action, namely actions that always have value considerations and use *means* to achieve the goals to be achieved. The essence of voluntary social action thinking according to Parsons is (Johnson 1994): 1) an action has a purpose; 2) the action takes place in a situation that is certain, and uncertain, so that a way is needed to achieve the goal; and 3) normally an action is regulated in accordance with the determination of the means and objectives to be achieved. In short, the action is seen as the smallest and most fundamental unit of social reality. So the action unit is formed by actors, tools, goals, and an environment consisting of physical and social objects, norms, and values (Craib 1992).

The basic components of a unit of action are objectives, tools, conditions, and norms. A tool or method is a component in which people take action to achieve a certain goal. A condition is a situation that cannot be controlled by people in taking action to achieve a goal. In his book entitled *The Structure of Social Action*, Parsons describes the concept of *voluntary behavior*. This concept implies an individual’s ability to determine the means of a number of alternatives available in an effort to achieve goals (Parsons 1937).

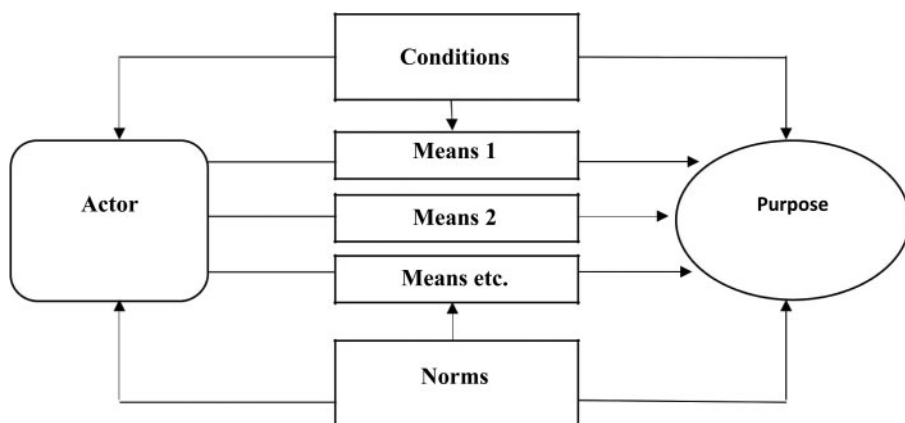


Figure 2. Talcott Parsons’ schematic of voluntary action.

Source: Taken from several sources (Johnson 1994; Turner 1982).

2 METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach, with respondents who are determined using the *purposive sampling technique*. The use of the technique of *purposive sampling* is expected to ensure that

respondents are relevant to the research design, and are in accordance with the considerations taken by the researcher (Black & Champion 2001). Data were collected in this study using a questionnaire, which serves to provide a description as well as take measurements so that it can describe the elements related to the research problem.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Voluntary actions are actions that are always based on the consideration of values and *means* to achieve the desired goals. Because values and methods are the principles in every action, the fundamental thing that must be considered is how the roles of actors and certain situations achieve the goals of the action. The role of actors in this case is to realize the goal of protecting and fulfilling the needs of the elderly in the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic, which of course has changed compared to the situation or conditions before Covid-19.

The concept of Voluntary Action as proposed by Talcott Parsons explains that an action has a way or means to achieve a certain goal. Some of the elements used were conceived by Parsons as actors, both individuals and groups, goals to be achieved, conditions that influence actions, and norms that govern the actions of the individual or group.

Modern families with elderly people in them are in a vulnerable condition both in health and in economic conditions but must survive in the face of this Covid-19 pandemic (Mori et al. 2021). In a modern family at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, with a complex work rhythm the responsibility of caring for elderly parents is both a goal and a dilemma. A child wants a decent and happy life for his parents economically, but they must also be more careful in carrying out activities outside the home because of the large risk of Covid-19 transmission to vulnerable groups, namely elderly parents. Of the 27 respondents, 48.1% considered meeting economic needs as the main goal they had to fulfill in the current Covid-19 situation. This became natural for them because the national economy was experiencing a decline. The result is a decrease in income, even termination of employment, which will have direct implications for meeting the needs of daily life and the existence of other necessary costs such as health care for the elderly.

With the main objective in the economic aspect, the family does not automatically ignore the existence of the elderly, because families do have to adapt to the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic. The way this is done is by implementing health protocols, namely wearing masks, keeping your distance, and washing your hands when you are working outside the home, and trying to keep the 3M protocol when you get home. As many as 37% of respondents even strictly enforced the 3M protocol to protect elderly parents at home.

The adoption of the modern 3M family health protocol with the elderly in it for all respondents has gone well. So it can be said that although the largest percentage is on the purpose of fulfilling the family's economy, all respondents agreed not to ignore the risks posed by Covid-19 on elderly parents in their families. This is indicated by 0% of modern families who admit that they made changes to their habits during the Covid-19 pandemic situation, in addition to protecting themselves, they also focus on vulnerable groups, namely elderly parents who are in the house. And as many as 33.3% of respondents think their main goal is protection of the health of the elderly, as long as the Covid-19 situation has not been resolved. The different goals in voluntary actions carried out by modern families during the Covid-19 pandemic are not without cause. The elderly are indeed individuals who experience decreased physical and social function. Not a few elderly people feel alienated and unnoticed by their families, apart from high work intensity, coupled with distance treatment with the aim of protecting elderly parents from the risk of contracting Covid-19. Family support is an important form of concern in meeting the needs of the elderly because they want to be recognized for their existence. The occurrence of social changes in society has made the individuals around the elderly have their respective levels of activity, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Being old is marked by biological deterioration which is seen as the symptoms of physical deterioration, including sagging skin, wrinkles, gray hair, tooth loss, reduced hearing and vision, fatigue, sluggish movements and less agility. Other setbacks that occur are cognitive abilities such

as forgetfulness, regression in orientation towards space, time, place, and not easily accepting new things/ideas. Children tend to have difficulties with elderly parents in terms of providing an understanding of the Covid-19 pandemic situation which raises suspicion between family members and each other. This is indicated by changes in personal relationships within the respondent's family of 29.6%.

Not to mention the feeling of being neglected. This is triggered because family members keep their distance from each other so that their parents, who are vulnerable groups, can be protected from the spread of Covid-19, which may be brought by family members, but elderly parents cannot immediately understand them. The intensity of face-to-face communication patterns between parents and children is also gradually limited, which causes parents to feel neglected, marginalized, and as if their role is no longer needed as family members. Therefore, the elderly feel neglected by their own families. Even though this is done as a way for their children to achieve the goal of protection.

The aspects of norms and conditions in the voluntary actions of modern families with elderly parents during the Covid-19 pandemic are related to what the goals of the family are to be achieved. The care of elderly parents by respondents found that 44.4% voluntary action is a need that must be fulfilled as a form of effort to make elderly parents happy, both in the form of protection and fulfillment of economic needs. Needs exceed the obligations as children towards parents, because when making efforts to achieve both health protection and economic goals, children feel that there are needs that they must fulfill.

The problems that arise later are those that come from within, such as forms of suspicion that result in patterns of interaction, feelings of alienation due to health protocols maintaining distance and wearing masks. Until the differences in norms and conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic, which make efforts to achieve goals in life shifts with other alternative goals that are more acceptable both psychologically and normatively.

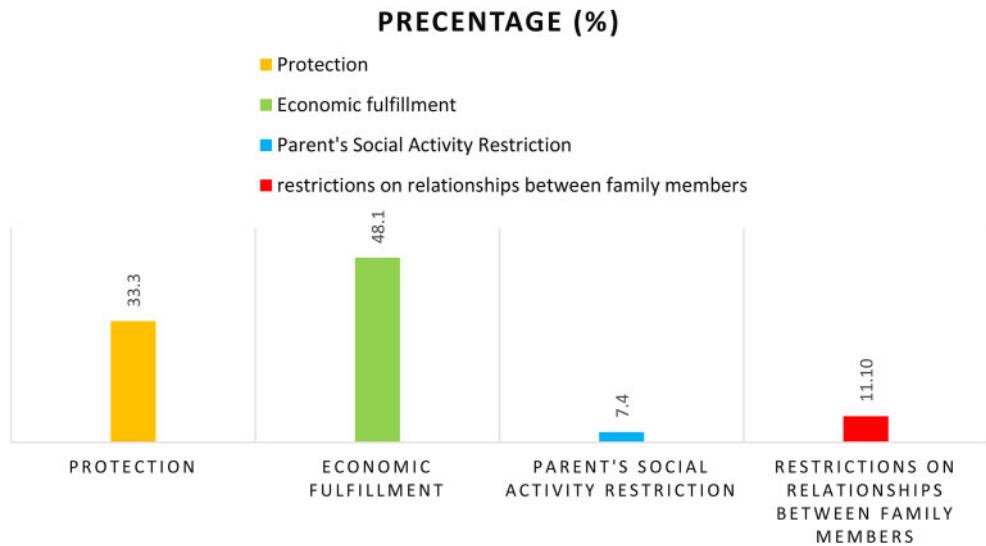


Figure 3. Purpose of modern family voluntary actions for elderly parents

Figure 3 shows that during the current Covid-19 pandemic, in modern families where parents are elderly, the opinion about the need for protection of elderly parents is 33.30%. It turns out that for children, maintaining the family economy is considered more important at 48.10%. Efforts to limit the social activities of their parents who are elderly are only 7.40%, children do not seriously limit their parents' social activities. However, in terms of restricting the relationship between family members, 11.10% of respondents stated that the relationship between family members was tighter than the restrictions on their parents' social activities.

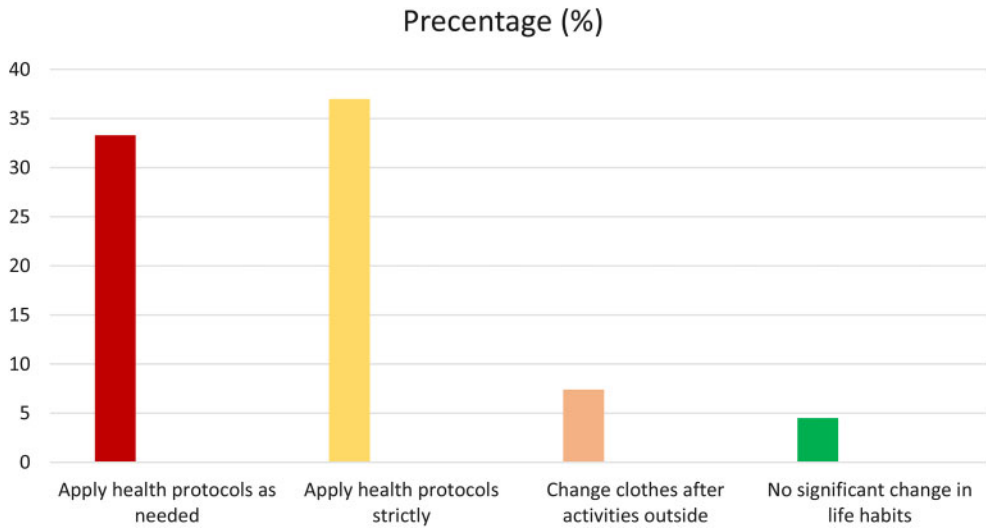


Figure 4. Voluntary action of modern family towards elderly parents

Figure 4 illustrates that in regard to compliance with modern families to health protocols, there are 33.30% who apply it as needed, while 37% stated that it is strictly enforced. There are 7.40% of respondents who change clothes after activities outside the home as a form of compliance with health protocols. There were no respondents (0%) who stated that there was no significant change in their life habits, meaning that all respondents are aware of life changes that are considered important during the Covid-19 pandemic.

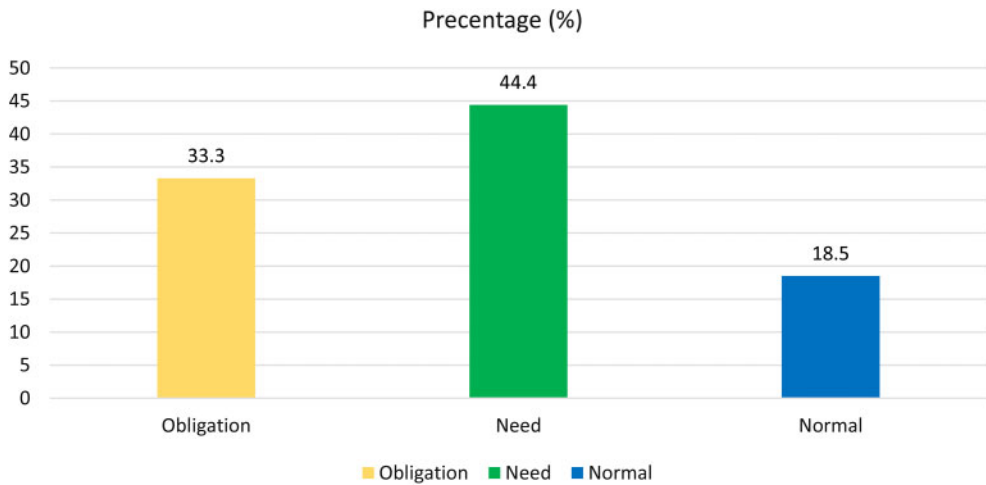


Figure 5. Modern family views of voluntary actions

Figure 5 illustrates that the responses of respondents (modern families) regarding voluntary actions towards their elderly parents during the Covid-19 pandemic can be categorized into three groups. In the first group, 33.3% of respondents thought this voluntary action was an obligation that had to be carried out. Meanwhile, 44.40% of respondents considered that voluntary action was a need that had to be fulfilled because it included the survival of their parents. 18.50% of

respondents thought that voluntary actions against their elderly parents were normal. With the presence or absence of the Covid-19 pandemic, full attention to elderly parents has become a habit.

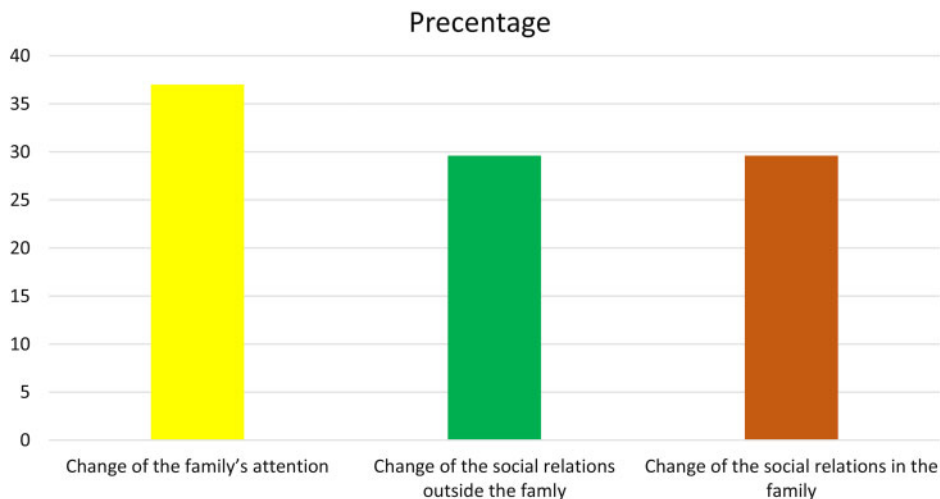


Figure 6. Conditions of social relations in modern families

Figure 6 illustrates that during the Covid-19 pandemic change has occurred within parenting and social relationships inside and outside the home in the modern family. There are 37% of respondents who stated that during the Covid-19 pandemic, the family's attention to their elderly parents had changed, to be more protective. In fact, at that time social relations outside the family also changed, there was no longer visiting each other. Even visits between siblings for the purpose of visiting their parents have also changed. There are 29.60% of respondents who stated that social relations outside the family have changed. Personal relationships in the family also experience the same thing, where each family member ultimately has to take care of himself so as not to be exposed to the Covid-19 virus.

4 CONCLUSION

There is no common goal when someone takes voluntary actions, and the problems found are different, starting from changes in interaction patterns, both regarding personal relationships within the family, social relationships outside, and differences in parenting patterns themselves. The difference is not that one action is truer than another. But it shows that an action even though it has the same goal can have a different tool or way by being influenced by the situation and norms prevailing in society. Coupled with actions that have different goals, but in fact have almost the same way of achieving their goals.

As an actor, the subject, in achieving the goal of parenting, wants to achieve the goal of making his parents happy or the goal of protecting elderly parents from Covid-19. In an effort to achieve this goal, the subject has different tools or ways, because the situational conditions in accepting the decision about these choices are different. Not to mention his efforts, the subject is also confronted with norms, values that greatly influence what the goal is, and also affect the method to be used.

1. Voluntary action often results in misunderstandings that lead to conflicts of values.
2. Voluntary action must be as a whole, actors, goals, conditions, and values have the same contribution.
3. The happiness of elderly parents is not the same as the concept of happiness from their children.
4. A dilemma has emerged in the form of elderly services in modern families during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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