

# Overview of Elderly Knowledge About Thanatophobia

Herni Sulastien<sup>1,3</sup>, Ni Nyoman Ernawati<sup>3</sup>, Tandiyo Rahayu<sup>2</sup>, Widya Hary Cahyati<sup>1</sup>, Siti Zuraida Muhsinin<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Jurusan Kesehatan Masyarakat, Universitas Negeri Semarang

<sup>2</sup>Jurusan Pendidikan Jasmani, Universitas Negeri Semarang

<sup>3</sup>program Studi D3 Keperawatan, Universitas Nahdlatul Wathan Mataram

Corresponding author: [hernisulastien@students.unnes.ac.id](mailto:hernisulastien@students.unnes.ac.id)

**Abstract.** The elderly are a vulnerable group who experience various physical, psychological, and social changes as they age. One common psychological issue among the elderly is fear of death (*thanatophobia*), which can negatively affect mental health and quality of life. Knowledge about *thanatophobia* is important to help the elderly become more prepared for the aging process. This study aims to describe the level of knowledge among the elderly regarding *thanatophobia* in the working area of Gunungsari Public Health Center, West Lombok. This research used a quantitative descriptive design with a survey approach. A total of 97 elderly participants were selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected using a questionnaire modified from the *Death Anxiety Scale*. Data analysis was conducted descriptively using frequency and percentage distribution. The findings showed that the majority of respondents (54%) had low knowledge about *thanatophobia*, 15% had moderate knowledge, and only 31% had a good level of knowledge. Most respondents were female, aged 60–74 years, unemployed, and had a low level of education. Most elderly individuals in the Gunungsari Public Health Center area have a low level of knowledge about *thanatophobia*. Educational interventions and holistic mental health counseling involving families and healthcare professionals are needed to improve the elderly's understanding of death anxiety, supporting them in facing old age with greater peace and better quality of life.

**Keywords:** elderly, knowledge, *thanatophobia*

## 1 Introduction

The elderly are a population that continues to grow year after year. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the number of elderly in Indonesia will reach approximately 11.59% of the total population in 2023 and is expected to continue to grow along with improvements in quality of life (1). Looking at the number of elderly people in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), 5.92% are aged 60-69, 1.62% are aged 70-74, and 1.52% are over 75. In terms of gender, there is no significant difference between the percentages of elderly women and men by age group. However, the percentage of elderly women is consistently higher than that of elderly men (2). As age increases, the decline in bodily functions, both physical, physiological, and psychological, is inevitable. Therefore, the elderly face various health problems that require immediate and integrated treatment. One of the psychosocial problems that occurs in the elderly is depression. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), as many as 3.8% of the population experiences depression, including 5% of adults and 5.7% of adults aged over 60 years. Approximately 280 million people in the world experience depression. About 50% of this depression is more common in women than men (3). One of the causes of depression experienced by the elderly is due to anxiety in facing death. Death anxiety or often called *Thanatophobia* comes from Greek, where "Thanatos" means death and "phobos" means fear. So it can be concluded that the meaning of *thanatophobia* is the fear of death. For various reasons, some people have a fear of death and dying at some point in their lives. If someone suffers from a phobia of death or dying, it can cause extreme distress or anxiety that affects their daily life because of *thanatophobia* itself. This phobia is specifically a type of mental condition that falls into the category of anxiety. All phobias are characterized by a very strong response, anxiety, or fear of certain situations or objects (4). According to the results of research (5) on the description of the level of death anxiety in the elderly, it shows that 40 respondents out of 79 respondents experienced

high death anxiety with a frequency of 50.6% and 39 respondents out of 79 respondents experienced low levels of death anxiety with a frequency of 49.4%. From the results of research (6) on family support and coping mechanisms related to anxiety in the elderly, many elderly people were still found to experience anxiety from 30 respondents, 11 elderly respondents experienced severe anxiety with 53.3%. In line with research (7) on the description of the level of anxiety in the elderly approaching death, it shows that 82.2% of the elderly experience severe anxiety in the elderly. If the feeling of anxiety is felt by the elderly continuously, it can have a negative impact on the health of the elderly both physically and mentally, and can even cause physical illnesses such as blood circulation disorders, hormonal metabolic disorders, joint disorders, and various neoplasms so that it can interfere with daily activities in the elderly (8). Based on an initial survey conducted in the Gunungsari Community Health Center work area, there were 3225 elderly people and the results of research by (9,10) that in the area most of the elderly were aged 60-75 years. Based on the description above, the study was interested in examining the description of elderly knowledge about thanatophobia at the Gunungsari Community Health Center, West Lombok.

## 2 Methods

This study used a quantitative approach with a descriptive design. A sample of 97 respondents was drawn using purposive sampling based on inclusion criteria. The instrument used was the Death Anxiety Scale questionnaire, which measures or evaluates a person's perceptions, opinions, or experiences related to anxiety in the face of death.

## 3 Results And Discussion

Based on the results of research conducted on 97 elderly respondents living in the Gunung Sari area, it was found that the majority of respondents were in the age range of 60–74 years, namely 58 people (60%). Respondents were also dominated by women as many as 68 people (70%), and most of them were unemployed, namely 64 people (66%). In terms of education level, most of the elderly did not receive formal education, recorded as many as 48 people (49%). And as many as 41 respondents (42%) were in good health. Meanwhile, most of the elderly lived with children and partners (husband or wife), namely 86 people (89%). Most respondents had knowledge in the poor category, namely 52 people (54%). Meanwhile, as many as 30 people (31%) had good knowledge, and the remaining 15 people (15%) were in the sufficient knowledge category.

This study involved 97 respondents. Respondents' characteristics were described based on gender, age, occupation, education, illness and residence status.

**Table 1.** Demography of Respondent

| Category      | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---------------|-----------|----------------|
| <b>Gender</b> |           |                |
| man           | 29        | 30%            |
| woman         | 68        | 70%            |
| <b>Age</b>    |           |                |
| 60-74 Years   | 58        | 60%            |
| 75-90 Years   | 39        | 40%            |
| > 90 Years    | 0         | 0%             |
| <b>Work</b>   |           |                |
| Work          | 64        | 66%            |

|                             |           |             |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Not Working                 | 33        | 34%         |
| <b>Education</b>            |           |             |
| No School                   | 48        | 50%         |
| Primary school              | 42        | 43%         |
| Junior High School          | 7         | 7%          |
| Senior High School          | 0         | 0%          |
| Bachelor's degree (S1)      | 0         | 0%          |
| <b>Diseases Experienced</b> |           |             |
| Hypertension                | 38        | 40%         |
| Asthma                      | 10        | 10%         |
| Taste                       | 8         | 8%          |
| None                        | 41        | 42%         |
| <b>Residence Status</b>     |           |             |
| Stay Alone                  | 11        | 11%         |
| Living Together             | 86        | 89%         |
| <b>Sum</b>                  | <b>97</b> | <b>100%</b> |

Source : Primary data 2025

Based on the results of a study conducted on 97 elderly respondents living in the Gunung Sari area, it is known that the majority of respondents are in the age range of 60-74 years, which is 58 people (60%). Respondents are also dominated by women as many as 68 people (70%), and most of them are not working, namely 64 people (66%). In terms of education level, most of the elderly do not receive formal education, recorded as many as 48 people (49%). Meanwhile , most of the elderly live with children and spouses (husband or wife), which is 86 people (89%).

**Table 2.** Knowledge Level of Respondent

| Category   | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|------------|-----------|----------------|
| Good       | 30        | 31%            |
| Enough     | 15        | 15%            |
| Less       | 52        | 54%            |
| <b>Sum</b> | <b>97</b> | <b>100%</b>    |

Source : Primary data 2025

Of the 97 respondents, the level of knowledge of the elderly varied, with most respondents having knowledge in the less category, namely 52 people (54%). Meanwhile, as many as 30 people (31%) have good knowledge, and the remaining 15 people (15%) are in the category of sufficient knowledge.

Older people who have a good understanding of the process of death and the spiritual meaning behind it tend to have lower levels of anxiety compared to those who lack understanding. Lack of knowledge can trigger feelings of excessive fear, helplessness, and an inability to manage emotions. Research by (4) shows that there is a significant relationship between the level of knowledge and the level of anxiety in the elderly, where the elderly with low knowledge tend to experience high anxiety in the face of death. The results of the study support the findings in this study which show that the elderly with a low level of knowledge about thanatophobia tend to experience greater anxiety. Judging from gender, most of the respondents were female as many as 68 people (70%), while the respondents were male as many as 29 people (30%). Based on the results of research (11), it is known that women have a lower level of knowledge than men. This difference can be caused by various factors, such as social, cultural, economic, and educational backgrounds. In some

societies, women tend to have more limited access to education and information, which can have an impact on their low level of knowledge, including about *thanatophobia*. This is reinforced by research (12) which shows that elderly women tend to have higher rates of *thanatophobia* than men, due to lack of access to information and mental health education. Similar research by (13) also revealed that gender plays a role in the level of anxiety about death, where women have higher anxiety scores than men. Most of the respondents were in the age range of 60–74 years which was included in the category of early elderly. At this stage, the elderly generally begin to experience various declines in function, including a decline in cognitive function. This condition can cause a slowdown in brain function that affects the ability to think, remember, and concentrate, thus impacting their understanding of various things, including death. This is reinforced by research (11) which states that increased understanding of the aging and mortality processes in the elderly can reduce anxiety about death (*thanatophobia*). In addition, according to (Yousefi et al, 2020), cognitive decline in the elderly is significantly associated with increased anxiety and uncertainty, especially in the face of death. The education level of respondents was mostly never in school, as many as 48 people (49%) and as many as 42 people (43%) only completed basic education (SD). According to (14), education in general is useful in changing mindsets, behavior patterns and decision-making patterns. With a higher level of education, it will be easier for a person to think rationally and capture new information, including in describing new problems. On the other hand, a person's low level of education will cause the person to experience anxiety easily compared to those with a high level of education. These results are reinforced by a study (15) which states that the elderly with low education have lower levels of knowledge and are more prone to experiencing death anxiety. In addition, (7) also shows that low education is related to a lack of understanding of health information, including about *thanatophobia*. Most of the respondents who work are 64 people (66%). The majority of them work as farmers, laborers, construction workers, or housewives. This type of job generally does not demand higher education and tends to have limited access to information. This causes their level of knowledge, including about *thanatophobia*, to be low. Based on the results of the study ((16) it is stated that informal sector workers have a low level of health knowledge due to limited education and information. This low knowledge is associated with increased anxiety about death. This is in line with research (Fazel & Abbasi, 2019) that found that a lack of understanding of death can increase *thanatophobia*. The results showed that most of the 86 respondents (89%) lived in the same house with their families. However, this does not automatically increase the knowledge of the elderly because family members only focus on providing physical support, such as food and care but pay less attention to the cognitive and psychological needs of the elderly. This is in line with research (17) which shows that passive or only physical family support does not sufficiently increase the knowledge of the elderly, especially if it is not accompanied by educational communication. Research (18) also adds that the quality of communication between family members greatly affects the mental readiness of the elderly in facing death. The results of the study from a health perspective showed that as many as 38 people (40%) experienced hypertension, as many as 10 respondents (10%) experienced asthma, as many as 8 respondents (8%) experienced gout and 41 respondents (42%) were in good health. Elderly people who experience chronic diseases tend to have higher motivation to seek information, follow treatment and engage in counseling. However, according to research (19), the knowledge of the elderly remains low because the education provided by health workers has not been maximized. Another study by (13) shows that although the elderly with chronic diseases interact more often with health workers, limited communication methods and low health literacy are the main obstacles in increasing their knowledge of issues such as *thanatophobia*.

#### 4 Conclusion

Most elderly individuals in the Gunungsari Public Health Center area have a low level of knowledge about *thanatophobia*. Educational interventions and holistic mental health counseling involving families and healthcare professionals are needed to improve the elderly's understanding of death anxiety, supporting them in facing old age with greater peace and better quality of life.

## References

1. Badan Pusat Statistik. Statistik Penduduk Lanjut Usia [Internet]. Indonesia; 2023. Available from: <https://webapi.bps.go.id>
2. Badan Pusat Statistik. Statistik Penduduk Lanjut Usia 2024 [Internet]. Vol. 21, Sustainability. 2024 [cited 2025 Jun 12]. p. 1–14. Available from: [www.bps.go.id](http://www.bps.go.id)
3. World Health Organization. Ageing and Health [Internet]. 2024 [cited 2025 Jun 10]. p. 4–7. Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health>
4. Balaji MS, Ramya R, Maiti D, Administrasi D, Keperawatan M, Nursing RVC. Artikel Ulasan tentang Thanatophobia : Kecemasan akan Kematian yang Perseptif. 2024;7–13.
5. Holifah, Ningrum EW, Siwi AS. Gambaran Kemandirian pada Lansia Demensia di Roujinhom Kabushiki Kaisha Anjyu Okinawa Jepang. Semin Nas Penelit dan Pengabd Kpd Masy [Internet]. 2021;55–60. Available from: <https://prosiding.uhb.ac.id/index.php/SNPPKM/article/view/764>
6. Yohanes Reynaldi Lumowa RE. Pengaruh Usia Lanjut terhadap Kesehatan Lansia. J Keperawatan [Internet]. 2023;16(1):363–72. Available from: <http://journal2.stikeskendal.ac.id/index.php/keperawatan/article/view/1474/1008>
7. Myers JR, Bryk KN, Madero EN, McFarlane J, Campitelli A, Gills J, et al. Initial Perspectives From Rural-Residing Adults on a Digital Cognitive Health Coaching Intervention: Exploratory Qualitative Analysis. JMIR Form Res [Internet]. 2024;8. Available from: <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85202651967&doi=10.2196%2F51400&partnerID=40&md5=125199e77bcf06cd9e765b4f4c3e1eae>
8. Park K, Moon S. Informative and semantic language features of people with dementia displayed during reminiscence therapy. Psychogeriatrics [Internet]. 2022;22(6):843–50. Available from: <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85137481569&doi=10.1111%2Fpsyg.12891&partnerID=40&md5=a71d94bd8508b91e794b25afce9ffa40>
9. Sulastien H, Raharjo BB. Successful Happy Aging : A Literature Mapping with Bibliometric Analysis Using VoS Viewer. In: Proceedings of International Conference on Health Science, Practice, and Education [Internet]. Semarang; 2024. p. 294–300. Available from: <https://proceeding.unnes.ac.id/icohespe/article/view/4098>
10. Sulastien Herni , Muhsinin Siti, Sholiha Baiq SB. Ball Fishing Game Activity as a Medium For Mild Dementia. Indones J Glob Heal Res [Internet]. 2024;6(6):4271–6. Available from: <https://jurnal.globalhealthsciencegroup.com/index.php/IJGHR/article/view/5194>
11. Sinoff G. Thanatophobia (death anxiety) in the elderly: The problem of the child's inability to assess their own parent's death anxiety state. Front Med. 2017;4(FEB):6–10.
12. Thompson Z, Baker FA, Tamplin J, Clark IN. How Singing can Help People With Dementia and Their Family Care-Partners: A Mixed Studies Systematic Review With Narrative Synthesis, Thematic Synthesis, and Meta-Integration. Front Psychol. 2021;12.
13. Lind KE, Gray LC, Raban MZ, Georgiou A, Westbrook JJ. Antidementia medication use by aged care facility residents with dementia. Int J Geriatr Psychiatry [Internet]. 2019;34(7):1029–40. Available from: <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85065044703&doi=10.1002%2Fgps.5105&partnerID=40&md5=3781aad1368327f3e3204965cb17357d>
14. Soekidjo Notoatmodjo. Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia. 2nd ed. Mataram: Rineka Cipta; 2003.
15. Claassen DO, Josephs KA, Ahlskog JE, Silber MH, Tippmann-Peikert M, Boeve BF. REM sleep behavior disorder preceding other aspects of synucleinopathies by up to half a century. Neurology [Internet]. 2010;75(6):494–9. Available from: <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-77955471094&doi=10.1212%2FWNL.0b013e3181ec7fac&partnerID=40&md5=8b821a4bef8bdb105c433b9b7e023da6>
16. Relationship Between Activities of Visits to the Elderly Posyandu and The Elderly's Level of Independence. J VNUS (Vocational Nurs Sci [Internet]. 2024 Sep 15;6(1):15–22. Available from: <https://app.dimensions.ai/details/publication/pub.1172241828>
17. Utami DC, Nurhidayati I, Pramono C, Winarti A. Hubungan Aktivitas Fisik dengan Kualitas Hidup Lansia Usia 60-69 Tahun di Desa Sudimoro Kecamatan Tulung Kabupaten Klaten. 1 Conf Heal Soc Hum [Internet]. 2019;(1):97–107. Available from: <https://prosiding.umkla.ac.id/cohesin/index.php/home/article/download/10/10/40>
18. Yao R, Wu H, Koo M, Wang Y, ... Objective: The prevalence of glaucoma is rising due to an increasing

aging population. Because of its insidious and irreversible nature, glaucoma has gradually .... New  
 Perspect ... [Internet]. 2023; Available from:  
<https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=uU3IEAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA28&dq=elderly%7Caging+elderly%7Caging+bibliometric&ots=40jI6iZmEk&sig=JoFh7yW1Am63rBs5ZOP9-JMzPIU>

19. Lestari TA, Hastuti A, Miftah H, Fitrilia T, ... Bibliometric analysis of elderly instant porridge [Internet].  
 Journal of .... [jestec.taylors.edu.my](https://jestec.taylors.edu.my); 2023. Available from: [https://jestec.taylors.edu.my/Special Issue  
 ISCoE 2022\\_4/ISCoE 4\\_03.pdf](https://jestec.taylors.edu.my/Special%20Issue%20ISCoE%202022_4/ISCoE%202022_4_03.pdf)