

Smartphone Usage Related to Elderly Social Life When COVID-19 Restrictions Occur in Indonesia [†]

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has caused social restrictions to prevent transmission, which creates limitations on interactions with other people, including family and friends. Smartphones are a tool that can help people to connect with family, friends, and others to conduct some activities to support daily life. By using a smartphone, people can connect and interact with other people without the need to meet in person. Smartphones among the younger generation have certainly become very important objects which they use almost all the time. Of course, this is a different situation and condition for older people. When the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, all human activities changed massively, including social activities. It would be interesting to study this situation in elderly people. This study aims to explore smartphone usage time and related social life in the elderly population when the COVID-19 pandemic occurred in Indonesia. Individual interviews were conducted on a targeted group of respondents aged 60–75 years using purposeful sampling, followed by a semi-structured interview using an interview guide. The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis of the three roles smartphones have in the lives of elderly people: (1) enriching individual meaningful activities, (2) participation in activities, and (3) energy conservation for individuals. The elderly use smartphones to connect with their families during the COVID 19 pandemic so they do not feel lonely, and to access health services, but some elderly have difficulty adapting to using smartphones to carry out activities during the pandemic. The use of smartphones by the elderly is very helpful during the pandemic to stay connected with family and obtain health assistance. However, sudden changes make it difficult for the elderly to adapt to the use of smartphones; therefore, it is necessary to have a brief and easy-to-understand guide for the elderly to be able to adapt to using smartphones.

Keywords: smartphone; elderly; social life; occupational therapy



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1. Introduction

More than 25.7 million people, or 9.6 percent, are aged 60 years and over in Indonesia, based on the National Socioeconomic Survey (Susenas) for 2019. Elderly people in Indonesia will increase by 10 percent by 2020 and 20 percent by 2024; it is further estimated that in 2050 the elderly population in Indonesia will reach 25 percent of the total population [1,2]. The elderly population groups are vulnerable to not enjoying a decent level of welfare and living in poverty. They will have a loss of income because they may be less productive or less able to interact or participate in social life because of physical or cognitive limitations that generally occur in the elderly population [3].

The Indonesian government officially declared COVID-19 a pandemic on 2 March 2020 [4]. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused social restrictions to prevent transmission, which created limitations on interactions with other people, including family and friends. The elderly population is a higher risk group during the COVID-19 pandemic, not only for serious illness when odds of survival are the lowest, but they are also separated from others and isolated. If they lost their livelihood, it was difficult to buy food or get medicine to survive [5].

To solve the social restrictions that occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of technology is very helpful for carrying out various activities. One of the technologies that is often used is the smartphone. By using a smartphone, people will be able to connect and interact with other people without the need to meet in person. Smartphones among the younger generation have certainly become very important objects which they use almost all the time. Of course, this is a different situation and condition for older people. When the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, all human activities changed massively, including social activities. However, some elderly people have difficulty using the features on their smartphones, and sudden changes make it difficult for the elderly to adapt to the use of smartphones. Occupational therapists support the elderly to be able to use smartphones easily to help with their daily activities. With awareness that smartphones are an important item to assist with various activities of the elderly, it is important to develop applications suitable for each culture and nationality.

2. Methods

This study aims to explore smartphone usage time and related social life in the elderly when the COVID-19 pandemic occurs in Indonesia. Individual interviews will be conducted on a targeted group of respondents aged 60–75 years using purposeful sampling, followed by a semi-structured interview using an interview guide. The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis.

We searched literature related to smartphone use in the elderly to strengthen our analysis and guidelines. The keywords used were “elderly person” and “smart phone”, duplicate documents were deleted, and only original works were reviewed.

We made a poster to get respondents to participate in this study. The criteria for respondents who participated in this study were being able to read, having no cognitive impairment, and using smartphones both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. We conducted online interviews using Google Meet. Interviews were conducted for thirty minutes for each respondent.

Each respondent answered questions from the researcher, including the question of when he used his smartphone, what he did with his smartphone, what difficulties he faced in using his smartphone and how often he used his smartphone. Each respondent's answer was recorded with the respondent's consent and immediately deleted from the database as soon as this research was completed in order to guarantee confidentiality.

3. Results

We recruited five elderly people aged 60–70 years and all of them live in Jakarta, which is an urban area. Of the five respondents, three are women and two are men. A total of 70% of respondents have been using their smartphone since before the pandemic and the others began using smartphones when the pandemic began. From the interviews we obtained information about the elderly using smartphones to communicate (telephone), for virtual interaction (video calls), online shopping, and access to information (online news). In using a smartphone, elderly had trouble, such as the letters being too small, so it is hard to read and type sentences, safety factors related to financial transactions, information overload that makes it difficult to know true or false information. Overall, elderly people use their smartphone an average of five to six hours a day.

4. Discussion

There are three roles that smartphones have in the lives of the elderly [6]: (1) Orienting participation in activities for making decisions and to prepare for managing in daily activities. (2) Enriching individual worthy activities, and (3) Orienting participation in activities related to voice calls or virtual interactions with their family, friends, or neighbor. In order to make decisions related to information received from social media, the elderly must be able to know if the information is true or false. Other enriching individual worthy activities related to the use of smartphones are being able to access virtual health services (telehealth), order food, and ask others for help. Occupational therapists can use smartphones as assistive technology to improve and support the well-being of the elderly [6]. We found all studies reported some difficulties with using smartphones for the elderly due to their physical and cognitive condition. The elderly had a positive attitude toward smartphones used for communication, leisure, and instrumental activities of daily living. Healthcare applications were in high demand for elderly users for checking basic health conditions. The elderly-specific design was developed for mobile phone appearances and functions.

5. Conclusions

The use of communication technology such as smartphones can help the elderly in social restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The elderly use smartphones to make social interactions with their family, friends and neighbors. The use of smartphones can help the elderly to support their daily activities such as ordering food, online shopping and to get virtual health services (telehealth). But the elderly has difficulty in using smartphones, especially in receiving new information such as how to use new applications and sorting the information that they received. Occupational therapy can help elderly to increase the benefits of using smartphones by utilizing smartphones as assistive technology and providing education about the use of smartphones and sorting the information that they received. Smartphones used by elderly can help complete daily activities.

Further research is needed on the comparison of smartphone use among the elderly in Asian countries such as Thailand and Japan. Differences in the need for smartphones in the elderly population may occur due to differences or similarities in national culture. On the other hand, it is also necessary to study the role of occupational therapy specifically regarding the use of smartphones in the elderly so that it can help the elderly to improve their wellbeing.

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