

## COMMUNICATION RESILIENCE IN ELDERLY RETIREES COPING WITH POST-RETIREMENT SYNDROME

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**Abstract.** Elderly retirees often encounter psychological and social challenges that affect their quality of life, one of which is Post-Retirement Syndrome (PRS). PRS is marked by feelings of identity loss, alienation, and difficulty adapting to lifestyle changes. This study examines the communication resilience developed by retirees in coping with PRS and the factors influencing its effectiveness. A qualitative approach was employed, utilizing in-depth interviews with ten retirees experiencing PRS. Participants were selected based on specific criteria, such as the severity of PRS and their social engagement post-retirement. The data, analyzed through thematic analysis, highlighted that social support, past experiences, and adaptability to new social roles shape communication resilience. Effective strategies included proactive communication, forming new communities, and leveraging technology. The study concludes that communication resilience is crucial in improving retirees' well-being and overcoming the challenges of PRS.

**Keywords:** Communication Resilience, Post-Retirement Syndrome, Elderly Retirees, Social Adaptation

### INTRODUCTION

Indonesia faces unique challenges related to its aging population. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the number of elderly individuals in Indonesia has steadily increased yearly. This condition demands greater attention to issues of elderly welfare, including their psychosocial well-being. In Indonesian culture, the extended family traditionally serves as the primary source of support for older adults. However, social changes such as urbanization, modern lifestyles, and the rise of nuclear families have significantly diminished this role. Elderly individuals who no longer live with their children or reside in urban areas often face a heightened risk of social isolation. In such circumstances, maintaining adaptive and effective communication becomes increasingly crucial. The growing elderly population is not always accompanied by adequate social and cultural infrastructure preparedness. Older adults in Indonesia continue to face significant challenges in accessing sufficient social support and mental health services. Shifts in family dynamics, including the transition from extended to nuclear families and urbanization, which drives younger generations to leave rural areas for urban employment, exacerbate the social isolation experienced by older people.

Old age is the final stage of a person's life span. This is when a person moves away from the more pleasant or rewarding times of the past. In this phase, the hope is to enjoy a quiet, peaceful life, retire with loved ones, and express affection. However, not all older adults can achieve this due to various changes, declines, and problems such as economic, health, social, and psychological problems, post-retirement syndrome, feelings of helplessness, uselessness, and unhappiness that often occur in old age (A'yun, 2023). Retirement is something that workers will face. Life expectancy affects how older people with retirement conditions from work can survive and be resilient. The fear of post-retirement or retirement transition causes severe psychological and physical problems for many people, especially those who have high ambitions and desperately want a high position in their jobs. That is the driving factor for the emergence of post-retirement syndrome (Khodijah, 2018).

Everyone wants a healthy and happy old age, but this desire does not always come true. In real life, many seniors suffer from depression, stress, and even chronic illnesses (Kurnaesih & Ardhiyanti, 2023). Retirement is one of the inevitable phases of life, especially for individuals who have spent most of their lives in the world of work. For some people, retirement is a moment that is awaited as an opportunity to rest and enjoy the fruits of their hard work. However, reality shows that the transition to retirement does not always go smoothly. Many retired seniors face significant challenges involving changes in lifestyle, loss of daily structure, and reduced social interaction. This often triggers a variety of psychological and social problems, collectively known as Post-Retirement Syndrome (PRS).

Post-retirement syndrome is a condition individuals can experience after an intensive leadership period. Recognizing post-retirement syndrome can be difficult because the symptoms are similar to those associated with chronic stress, fatigue, and other mental health issues. Stress, depression, unhappiness, and feelings of loss of self-esteem and honor are some of the things experienced by those affected by post-retirement syndrome (Rahmat, 2016). Several symptoms, including a sense of loss of identity, social isolation, stress, and depression, characterize PRS. This condition can be exacerbated by external factors, such as a lack of social support, and internal factors, such as the individual's inability to adjust to changing roles. In the context of retired seniors, maintaining social relationships and building effective communication is increasingly important to safeguard their well-being. Communication is a tool for sharing feelings and experiences and a means to get emotional support and rebuild a sense of connection with the social environment. This has a significant impact on the lives of older people, but in reality, not all older adults can meet their needs fully, and the lives of older people depend on the help of their families and others. Others believe that older people are incompetent, helpless, and useless (Febriansyah, Aromatika, & Koeswara, 2023).

The older a person gets, the more he experiences the loss process. Loneliness is a life-threatening condition for older people who live alone without a family, lose a husband or wife, and are unable to live independently (Damayanti & Sukmono, 2017). On the other hand, communication resilience is one of the key relevant concepts in helping retired older adults overcome PRS. Communication resilience is an individual's ability to maintain and adjust to interpersonal interactions amid pressure or challenges. Older people with good communication resilience can manage social relationships more effectively, even when facing difficult situations. They tend to be more proactive in seeking support, building new social networks, and utilizing technology to communicate. However, studies on communication resilience in retired elderly are still relatively limited, especially in Indonesian society. One way to overcome post-retirement syndrome in the elderly is to provide social support from family and the surrounding environment. Social support can help seniors cope with loss and emptiness after retirement (Hidayat, Hamid, & Lestari, 2020).

Good communication resilience can also help individuals overcome any shyness or discomfort they may feel when talking about their condition; by speaking in easy-to-understand language and listening with empathy, the individual can feel more comfortable opening up and expressing their feelings. Communication research investigates how individuals, organizations, media systems, and governments question and explain resilience, allowing us to understand better societal and systems perspectives on resilience (Houston & Buzzanell, 2018). Environmental sensitivity to these conditions makes the elderly look for a solution and escape to overcome the communication problems. Proper communication can help the individual feel heard, understood, and supported in recovery. Effective communication can also help individuals overcome any shyness or discomfort they may feel when talking about their condition; by speaking in easy-to-understand language and listening with empathy, the individual can feel more comfortable opening up and expressing their feelings.

This study explores communication resilience in elderly retirees who experience PRS, focusing on the strategies they use to overcome challenges, obstacles they face, and supporting factors that help them. The research also aims to contribute to developing interventions designed to support older people in rebuilding their social lives after retirement. The study is relevant not only in the academic context but also as a basis for developing social policies and programs aimed at improving the

quality of life of older people. This article is compiled to provide a comprehensive overview of the topics covered. The first part reviews the literature on communication resilience, PRS, and social challenges older people face. The following section describes the research methods, including study design, data collection techniques, and analysis procedures. The study's results are presented in the findings section, followed by a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications. Finally, this article closes with recommendations for further research and developing relevant intervention programs. By understanding communication resilience in the context of PRS, this research is expected to provide new insights into how retired seniors can be empowered to face the challenges they experience. In addition, the results of this study are also likely to be a reference for the government, community organizations, and families in supporting the welfare of older people more holistically.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a single case study design to understand the communication resilience of retired older adults who experience Post-Retirement Syndrome (PRS). In terms of other definitions, qualitative research is a study that utilizes open interviews to study and understand the attitudes, views, feelings, and behaviors of individuals or groups of people (Moleong, 2017). The approach used is a single case study approach, which is research whose main research direction is to investigate one case of phenomenon. In a single case study, the purpose or focus of the research directly targets the background or core of the problem and explores and explains the phenomenon being studied in detail (Yin, 2019). Participants were selected purposively based on the criteria: 60 years or older, had retired for at least one year, and experienced symptoms of PRS. A total of 10 participants from various professional backgrounds were involved. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and documentation. The interview explores communication strategies, barriers, and factors supporting communication resilience. The data was analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic methods, which included initial coding, theme identification, and narrative drafting. The research meets ethical standards, including consent to participate through informed consent, data anonymity, and the right of participants to stop engaging at any time. The research locations are centered in urban and semi-urban areas representing diverse social contexts.

## RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Malcolm R. Parks stated that relational norms govern communication and are formed and maintained only in close and intimate relationships (Budyatna & Ganiem, 2011). Joseph A. DeVito believed that interpersonal communication consists of sending messages from one person to another to receive messages from another group or small group that can get immediate feedback and different effects (Suranto, 2011). Retirement is often a dynamic transition period, where seniors face fundamental changes in routines, loss of professional identity, and reduced social interactions previously established in the work environment. This condition can trigger feelings of isolation, loss of meaning in life, and anxiety, which ultimately impacts the mental and emotional health of older people. In a situation like this, the presence of the family as the central support system has a significant influence. There is a negative relationship between self-concept and post-retirement syndrome. The more positive the self-concept, the lower the tendency of a retiree to experience post-power syndrome. On the other hand, retirees who have a negative self-concept have a higher tendency to experience post-retirement syndrome (Nurhayati & Indriana, 2015).

Supportive communication can help individuals cope with post-retirement stress and adapt to post-retirement changes. Self-esteem support, on the other hand, involves behaviors that support a person's identity or ego, and messages aim to reinforce a person's feelings about their characteristics and abilities (Holmstrom et al., 2015). Family relationships have a crucial role in the lives of the elderly, especially for those facing Post-Retirement Syndrome (PRS). In retirement, older people often face challenges such as losing routine and professional identity and changing social

relationships. Family relations are one of the most fundamental aspects in supporting the welfare of the elderly, especially for those who face psychosocial challenges such as Post-Retirement Syndrome (PRS).

Families' emotional support, such as attention, compassion, and recognition of older people's role in the family, helps create a sense of security and emotional connection. Seniors who feel accepted and valued by their families show a better ability to adapt to significant life changes. In addition, open and inclusive communication patterns allow older people to express their feelings, needs, and aspirations more freely. Effective communication encourages harmonious relationships and strengthens mutual understanding between older people and other family members.

However, research also found that family relationships only sometimes run with obstacles. Generational differences, attention imbalances, and internal conflicts can hinder seniors from getting the support they need. For example, families who are too busy with each other's activities or do not understand the emotional needs of older people can increase feelings of isolation and unappreciation. This situation can worsen the symptoms of PRS they experience. Therefore, family members need to understand their role in providing appropriate attention and support, especially in modern social change, where traditional family structures are beginning to shift.

In addition to emotional support, the role of the family in encouraging older people to remain socially active is also an essential factor in building their resilience. Involving seniors in various family activities, such as family gatherings, celebrations, or religious activities, helps them feel part of the community. Older people who are encouraged to participate in social activities tend to have better levels of emotional well-being than those who withdraw from social environments. In this era of technology, using communication devices such as smartphones and social media is also an effective tool for strengthening family relationships, especially for families who live far away. Seniors taught to use technology by their family members show an increased sense of social connectedness and higher happiness.

This study highlights that positive family relationships provide emotional support and play an essential role in encouraging seniors to stay connected to their communities. These findings show that families are responsible for helping the elderly face retirement with more confidence and optimism. Consistent support, good communication, and efforts to understand the needs of seniors can be key to creating a more meaningful retirement experience and building their resilience to the challenges that arise during this time.

Interpersonal relationships with people around them are vital in supporting the elderly facing Post-Retirement Syndrome (PRS). Retirement is often characterized by reduced social interaction due to the loss of work routines and professional roles, which can ultimately trigger feelings of isolation and loss of meaning in life. In these situations, relationships with people around you, such as neighbors, peers, and community members, become a significant source of support. Older people with good relationships with people outside the family report lower levels of social isolation, a stronger sense of social connectedness, and better adaptability. This support is physical presence and simple everyday interactions, such as small talk, mutual help, or simply sharing time. These interactions make seniors feel valued, accepted, and involved in community life.

Peers are often one of the key elements in the interpersonal relationships of older people. These relationships provide a space for seniors to share similar life experiences, discuss challenges they face together, and seek deep emotional support. Older people who are active in peer groups tend to be more motivated to face the challenges of PRS because they feel heard and understood by people with similar experiences. In addition, involvement in the local community, such as recitations, elderly gymnastics groups, religious activities, or other social gatherings, provides double benefits for older people. This participation expands their social network and helps create a sense of belonging towards a particular group, which reduces feelings of alienation. However, although interpersonal relationships provide many benefits, some obstacles often prevent older people from establishing relationships with those around them. Some seniors are reluctant to start new

interactions due to anxiety about rejection, lack of confidence, or the perception that they are no longer relevant in their social environment.

Moreover, age differences and outlook on life are challenges that older people face when building relationships with younger people. Other obstacles arise from physical and social environmental factors, such as the lack of public facilities that are friendly to older people, the lack of open space that allows social interaction, and physical distance from neighbors or communities. Older people who live in less supportive environments tend to feel more isolated than those who live in inclusive environments.

Supportive physical and social environments have been shown to play a significant role in fostering interpersonal relationships in older adults. Older adults who live in neighborhoods with easy access to public facilities, open spaces, or senior-friendly communities tend to be more socially active. In addition, communication technologies such as smartphones, messaging apps, and social media have become effective tools in strengthening interpersonal relationships, especially for older adults who live far from their community. Older adults who are taught how to use technology by their friends or family show an increase in their sense of social connectedness and happiness, as they are able to stay in touch and engaged with those around them despite being physically separated.

The findings of this study confirm that interpersonal relationships significantly impact older people's emotional and social well-being. Interactions with neighbors, peers, and local communities help create a sense of solidarity, connectedness, and emotional support essential in dealing with PRS. To maximize these benefits, communities must make an elderly-friendly environment, encourage active involvement in social activities, and reduce barriers preventing them from building new relationships. With an inclusive and supportive approach, interpersonal relationships can be one of the primary keys to helping seniors live their retirement with more confidence, optimism, and happiness.

The patterns of communication between the elderly and those around them play an essential role in shaping their emotional and social well-being, especially in the face of Post-Retirement Syndrome (PRS). Supportive communication has proven to be one of the main factors that help older people overcome psychosocial challenges arising from significant changes in retirement. This communication pattern is characterized by empathy, emotional validation, active support, and the delivery of positive messages. Empathy-based interactions allow seniors to express their feelings without fear of being judged. When older people feel listened to and understood, they become more confident in facing difficult situations. Emotional validation, such as recognizing the loss of a social role or frustration they experience, creates a sense of appreciation and minimizes feelings of isolation. Active support from people around them, such as involvement in social activities or practical assistance for daily activities, helps older people stay connected to their environment. In addition, positive messages, such as praise for their contributions or the urge to try new things, build optimism and a strong spirit in retirement.

Supportive communication is also seen in the relationship of older people with peers and community members. Peers with similar life experiences are often a significant source of support for older people. Seniors feel more comfortable sharing stories or complaints with people who understand their condition firsthand. Community involvement in social activities such as recitation, elderly gymnastics groups, or religious activities provides space to establish new relationships and strengthen a sense of social connectedness. Older adults who engage in these supportive interactions report higher levels of emotional well-being, reduced stress, and a better ability to cope with PRS symptoms. This support is emotional and instrumental, such as assistance in completing daily complex tasks independently.

On the other hand, defensive communication can worsen the condition of PRS experienced by older people. This communication pattern is often characterized by a rejection of empathy, judgment, unconstructive criticism, or an attitude of ignoring the complaints of older people. When people around you belittle the feelings or needs of the elderly, for example, by saying, "It's just a small

matter" or "Don't overthink about it," older people tend to feel neglected and unimportant. Sharp criticism, such as complaints about their dependence on others, also creates feelings of guilt and lowers self-confidence. Seniors who face this communication pattern are often reluctant to talk about their feelings or needs, which ultimately increases social isolation and worsens PRS symptoms. In addition, defensive attitudes from the interlocutor, such as denying responsibility to help or avoiding conversations that are considered problematic, create a significant obstacle to building healthy interpersonal relationships.

The impact of defensive communication is also seen in relationships with family and community. When family members or friends show an attitude of indifference or are overly critical, older people become increasingly withdrawn from social interactions. This attitude creates an unsupportive communication environment where older people fear being judged or rejected. This affects their emotional well-being and reduces their motivation to engage in social activities or build new relationships. These barriers are often exacerbated by generational differences, where younger family members understand older people's emotional and social needs or give less time to support them.

The findings of this study show that supportive communication has a significant positive impact on increasing the resilience of older people, while defensive communication has the opposite effect. Supportive communication creates a supportive environment where seniors feel valued, understood, and encouraged to stay connected with others. Conversely, defensive communication exacerbates social isolation and gives rise to feelings of being unappreciated, which ultimately exacerbates PRS symptoms. Therefore, it is essential for people around you, both family, friends, and the community, to adopt supportive communication patterns. Education about empathy, emotional validation, and positive reinforcement can be a strategic step to create a more supportive communication environment for older people. In addition, communication training for families and communities can help reduce barriers to interaction with older people, especially in dealing with generational differences or communication styles. Support from local communities can also play an essential role in encouraging social engagement of older people, such as holding inclusive group activities or providing age-friendly facilities. By creating a supportive communication environment, older people can more easily face the challenges of PRS, build emotional resilience, and live their retirement with more confidence and optimism.

The results of the analysis show that communication patterns have a significant impact on the ability of the elderly to deal with Post-Retirement Syndrome (PRS). Supportive communication is vital in helping older people build emotional and social resilience. This pattern, characterized by empathy, emotional validation, active support, and positive messaging, creates a supportive environment where seniors feel valued, accepted, and encouraged to remain socially active. This support not only helps older people reduce social isolation but also strengthens their confidence and optimism in living in retirement. On the contrary, defensive communication hurts the welfare of the elderly. Attitudes such as rejection of empathy, unconstructive criticism, or judgment exacerbate feelings of social isolation and increase emotional stress. Older people who face defensive communication tend to withdraw from social interactions, exacerbating PRS symptoms.

Social capital in resilience becomes essential in times of need and difficulties. Additionally, communication resilience involves using alternative logic in problem-solving and exploring different perspectives and approaches when overcoming challenges. Communication resilience is all about emphasizing positive emotions and reducing the intensity of negative emotions while emphasizing optimism and hope to get through difficult times (Houston & Buzzanell, 2018). Resilience is the ability to adapt positively to adversity or stress. Maintaining positive relationships serves as resilience in intimate relationships through nonverbal behavior and perception (Afifi, Merrill, & Davis, 2016).

Therefore, families, friends, and communities must adopt supportive communication patterns in daily interactions and support older people in facing their emotional challenges. Education about empathy, positive reinforcement, and the importance of emotional validation are strategic steps in

creating an inclusive and supportive environment. With proper communication patterns, seniors can build resilience, maintain their well-being, and live their retirement more confidently and happily. This confirms that supportive communication from family and community is one of the main factors in helping seniors cope with emotional and social transitions in retirement. Consistent support and deep empathy can be key to creating a more meaningful retirement experience.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis concludes that communication patterns are vital in supporting the elderly in facing Post-Retirement Syndrome (PRS). Supportive communication patterns, characterized by empathy, emotional validation, active support, and positive reinforcement, provide significant benefits in helping older people build emotional and social resilience. Supportive interactions create a sense of connectedness, increase self-confidence, and encourage older people to stay active in their social environment. Conversely, defensive communication, such as rejection of empathy, unconstructive criticism, or judgmental messages, can worsen the emotional state of older people, increase social isolation, and lower their motivation to interact with those around them. Therefore, families, friends, and communities must adopt supportive communication patterns to create a safe and inclusive environment for seniors. With the proper communication patterns, seniors can more easily overcome emotional and social challenges, live their retirement optimistically, and maintain their overall well-being.

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