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The Dynamics of Interpersonal Communication in Grandma's Foundation's Social Services for the Elderly in South Tangerang

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Abstrak

The increasing population of older adults in urban areas presents new challenges for social services, particularly in addressing psychosocial well-being. In this context, interpersonal communication plays a crucial role in fostering empathetic and supportive relationships between volunteers and older adults. This study aims to analyze the dynamics of interpersonal communication in community-based social services at Grandma's Foundation in South Tangerang and examine its role in supporting the psychosocial well-being of older adults. This research adopts a qualitative approach using a case study method. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with managers, volunteers, and older adults, as well as document analysis. The data were analyzed thematically using an interpersonal communication framework, incorporating Person-Centered Communication, Communication Accommodation Theory, and Social Support Theory. The findings indicate that interpersonal communication at Grandma's Foundation is characterized by empathetic, participatory, and adaptive interactions across generations. Volunteers play a key role in building trust, providing emotional support, and adjusting communication styles to accommodate the emotional and cognitive conditions of older adults. Nevertheless, challenges remain, including potential miscommunication and instances of over-accommodation, such as elderspeak. In conclusion, this study demonstrates that interpersonal communication is not merely a means of message exchange but a strategic instrument in volunteer-based social services that contributes significantly to the development of humanistic, inclusive, and responsive care for older adults in urban settings.

INTRODUCTION

The increase in the elderly population in Indonesia is one of the important demographic issues that has an impact on various aspects of social life. Population aging has multidimensional consequences, including physical, psychological, and social impacts. Older adults face risks of chronic diseases, limited mobility, and decreased independence, accompanied by increased psychosocial vulnerability such as loneliness, anxiety, and loss of emotional support due to changes in family structures in urban areas.

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This situation requires a holistic approach to social services that emphasizes not only medical aspects but also empathetic and empowering interpersonal communication (Hibaturrahman et al., 2025).

Therapeutic communication is often used to describe professional communication practices in medical or institutional settings, such as hospitals and social welfare institutions. This approach emphasizes active listening techniques, empathy, and positive reinforcement to support psychological healing (Wardani, Aini, et al., 2025). However, in the context of non-governmental communities involving non-professional volunteers, communication interactions are more fluid, cross-generational, and built on social empathy and emotional closeness. Therefore, this study focuses on community-based *interpersonal* communication, which is a communication practice that is not only therapeutic but also collaborative, participatory, and contextual in accordance with urban social dynamics.

South Tangerang is a relevant research location due to its urban characteristics, which are marked by high social mobility, population density, and weakening family support networks. In such conditions, social institutions such as Grandma's Foundation serve as alternative spaces for the elderly to obtain emotional and social support through interpersonal interactions with volunteers. The dynamics of communication between managers, volunteers, and the elderly are key to understanding how communication can function as a means of fulfilling psychosocial needs amid the pressures of urban life.

Conceptually, previous research in Indonesia has focused more on *therapeutic communication* in clinical or institutional settings Mawaddah & Wijayanto, (2020); Rachmawati et al., (2024). There are still few studies examining how interpersonal communication occurs in community-based social institutions that rely on volunteer participation. Thus, there is a research gap in understanding how non-professional communication contributes to the well-being of the elderly in complex and multicultural urban areas.

Based on this context, this study positions interpersonal communication as the main conceptual framework for understanding the interaction between volunteers and older adults in community-based social services. Interpersonal communication is understood as a process of direct message exchange characterized by emotional involvement, empathy, and immediate feedback, thereby enabling the establishment of supportive and meaningful relationships in elderly care (DeVito, 2007). To examine these communication practices more specifically, this study refers to *Person-Centered Communication* (PCC), which emphasizes individual-centered communication and respect for the personal needs and experiences of the elderly (Liao et al., 2023). Additionally, *Communication Accommodation Theory* (CAT) explains the adjustment of communication styles in cross-generational interactions between volunteers and the elderly (Gasiorek & Giles, 2013); C. A. Shaw & Gordon, 2021) , and *Social Support Theory* (SST), which views interpersonal communication as the primary means of providing emotional, informational, and instrumental support (Manchha et al., 2025). The integration of these three perspectives is used as the basis for analysis to understand how non-professional communication at Grandma's Foundation contributes to meeting the psychosocial needs of the elderly amid the complexities of urban life.

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze the dynamics of interpersonal communication built in Grandma's Foundation's social services for the elderly in South Tangerang. The focus of the study is on interaction patterns, message forms, and the values of empathy and emotional closeness constructed through communication between volunteers and the elderly. By understanding interpersonal communication practices in the context of community-based social institutions, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to the study of communication science,

particularly interpersonal and social communication, as well as practically to the development of a more humanistic, participatory, and contextual model of elderly care in urban areas.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, which aims to deeply understand the dynamics of interpersonal communication in social services for the elderly at Grandma's Foundation in South Tangerang. A qualitative approach was chosen because this study focuses on the meaning, process, and subjective experiences of the actors involved, particularly in communication interactions between volunteers and the elderly in an urban community context.

Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with Grandma's Foundation managers and volunteers to explore communication patterns, forms of empathy, and interaction strategies used in social services. Participatory observation was used to directly observe the interpersonal communication processes that took place in elderly care activities, while documentation was used as supporting data in the form of activity archives, program notes, and institutional communication materials.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques, through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The data obtained were categorized based on main themes related to the dynamics of interpersonal communication, such as empathy, emotional closeness, and social participation. To maintain data validity, this study applied source and technique triangulation, so that the results of the study are expected to be able to represent the reality of interpersonal communication in social services for the elderly in a comprehensive and contextual manner.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study found that interpersonal communication between managers, volunteers, and elderly people at Grandma's Foundation took place in an increasingly complex and emotional pattern, but remained structured. Managers played the role of "coordination center," using face-to-face briefings and digital media (such as WhatsApp) to convey instructions and operational directions. This communication style was important so that volunteers knew their tasks and schedules clearly, while ensuring alignment with the service mission.

Managers do not always use a formal style when talking about the feelings and needs of older adults. In the context of decision-making or performance evaluation, communication can be more personal and supportive. This is consistent with findings in the literature that interactions in volunteering and aging should pay attention to emotional aspects in addition to administrative ones, because communication not only conveys information but also builds connections between generations (Gasiorek & Giles, 2013).

The dynamics of interpersonal communication at Grandma's Foundation reflect a pattern of interaction that is structurally organized yet flexible and rich in emotional aspects. Managers play a central role as coordinators who ensure that information flows and service vision are clearly conveyed through digital media and face-to-face meetings. In practice, the relationship between managers and volunteers is built on the principle of partnership, where volunteers are given the space to actively provide input regarding conditions in the field. This is confirmed by the statement of the first source:

> *Communication with management is very transparent; we are provided with clear schedules and SOPs via WhatsApp groups. However, we are also invited to discuss personal matters if there are emotional issues when dealing with the elderly in the field. (Interview with Agi, 2025)*

The above statement shows that even though the instructions are technical in nature, the management still pays attention to the emotional aspects of the volunteers, which

is consistent with the literature's need to pay attention to the emotional side as well as the administrative side of volunteer work. In line with this, the second source emphasized the aspect of cooperation:

> *Our relationship with the management is more of a partnership. In addition to technical briefings, there is room for us to provide input regarding the specific needs of the elderly people we assist so that the services remain on target. (Interview with Nanda, 2025)*

This illustrates relational coordination, where meaningful communication strengthens cross-actor coordination in social services. Finally, the management emphasizes the organization's vision in this communication pattern:

> *We in management emphasize a supportive approach to volunteers. Communication is not only about technical tasks, but also ensuring that they understand the organization's core values, namely empathy and care. (Interview with Ahmad Fauzi, 2025)*

This explanation from the manager reinforces the finding that managerial communication at Grandma's Foundation aims to ensure that volunteers understand the context of the service comprehensively, rather than simply being program implementers.

This communication pattern reflects that volunteers are given space to actively contribute their input. They are not merely program implementers, but also partners in identifying the emotional and social needs of the elderly. This role is in line with the idea of intergenerational caring, where the younger generation ("young caregivers") contribute directly to caring for and supporting the well-being of the elderly (D'Amen et al., 2021).

In interactions with the elderly, volunteers appear to prioritize empathy. Their approach is not only verbal but also nonverbal, such as smiles, friendly body gestures, and eye contact. This is in line with the findings of health communication studies that nonverbal communication (e.g., haptic, kinesic, vocalic) plays a crucial role in nurturing nurse-elderly relationships and improving the quality of interactions (Wanko Keutchafo et al., 2020).

When interacting directly with seniors, volunteers adapt these formal instructions into a warmer form of communication that focuses on emotional needs (person-centered communication). Volunteers actively adjust their choice of words and speaking tempo, and use nonverbal communication such as eye contact and friendly facial expressions. This approach makes seniors feel valued, as expressed by the following source:

> *The volunteers here are very polite and patient. If I don't hear clearly, they are willing to repeat what they said slowly until I understand. I feel very appreciated here." (Interview with Siti, 2025)*

This response from the elderly proves the effectiveness of active listening techniques and speech adjustments made by volunteers to bridge the physical limitations of the elderly. Similar experiences were felt by other elderly people:

> *They treated me like new family. They didn't just come to provide physical assistance, but were genuinely willing to sit and listen to my stories until I felt relieved. (Interview with Indah, 2025)*

This statement shows the function of communication as a mechanism for emotional release (emotional ventilation), where the presence of volunteers provides psychological security and reduces loneliness. Furthermore, the third elderly person added:

> *I feel calm because they speak softly and always smile. Their presence makes me feel that I am no longer alone in facing old age. (Interview with Sahuda, 2025)*

This shows that the use of nonverbal communication such as smiles and a gentle tone (nonverbal immediacy) plays a crucial role in maintaining relationships and improving the quality of interactions.

This statement reinforces that interpersonal communication at Grandma's Foundation encourages emotional attachment that goes beyond simply providing services. Elderly people who receive empathetic communication feel more psychologically secure and experience reduced loneliness. Literature on intergenerational communication projects shows that cross-generational engagement (e.g., students and elderly people in mentoring programs) can reduce social isolation among the elderly and increase social connectedness (Kirk et al., 2023).

However, the study also identified barriers to communication. The age gap between volunteers and seniors caused significant challenges, particularly in relation to seniors' declining hearing and the need to repeat information. Seniors may feel embarrassed to ask questions again, leading to potential miscommunication. These types of barriers have been

discussed in theories of aging and communication: for example, a speaking style that is too "simplistic" or "over-accommodating" (sometimes called elderspeak) can reinforce stereotypes and actually decrease the quality of interactions, as explained by volunteers:

> *The biggest challenge is the age gap. Sometimes we have to really adjust the pace of conversation so that it is not too fast, and avoid modern terms that are difficult for grandmothers and grandfathers to understand. (Interview with Andhika, 2025)*

This situation is consistent with Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), which states that failure to adjust one's speaking style can widen the social gap. On the other hand, older adults often feel embarrassed to communicate their difficulties:

> *Sometimes I feel embarrassed to ask again if something is unclear, because I am worried that I will bother or burden the volunteers who have worked hard to help us. (Interview with Nuraima, 2025)*

The tendency of older adults to withdraw because they do not want to be seen as a burden is a common psychological barrier in interactions with older adults. As a solution, the manager explained the organization's mitigation efforts:

> *We recognize the challenges posed by generational differences. Therefore, we conduct regular training on active listening techniques and intonation adjustment strategies to ensure that the relationships we build remain dignified. (Interview with Ade Hartono, 2025)*

This management measure reflects the function of communication as a means of strengthening service capacity, which aims to equip volunteers to build effective, equal communication relationships that avoid elderspeak behavior.

In response to these obstacles, managers conducted interpersonal communication training for volunteers. The training material covered techniques for speaking in a soft tone, choosing simple words, and strategies for validating the elderly's understanding (e.g., asking them to repeat the message). This strategy is relevant to the approach recommended in the literature on elderly care, where service providers (caregivers) need to increase their awareness of their nonverbal style and adapt it to the needs of the recipients (Wanko Keutchafo et al., 2020).

Although online (digital) communication helps with internal coordination between managers and volunteers, this study confirms that face-to-face interaction is essential for building emotional closeness. Face-to-face communication provides a nonverbal dimension that is difficult to replicate online, such as touch, warm facial expressions, and personal warmth, all of which strengthen interpersonal relationships. This is in line with social technology studies showing that volunteer systems often use WhatsApp, email, and phone calls for coordination, but humanistic interactions are still needed in the context of voluntary relationships (Wanko Keutchafo et al., 2020).

The dynamics of interpersonal communication at Grandma's Foundation combine an efficient organizational structure with an empathetic, cross-generational approach, where communication serves not only as a tool for managerial coordination, but also as a means of building human relationships and reducing the social isolation of the elderly. The pattern of interaction between managers, volunteers, and the elderly is hierarchical yet flexible, with managers acting as a coordination center that conveys directions while instilling values of empathy through face-to-face and digital communication. This pattern reflects the principle *of relational coordination*, where repeated, meaningful, and timely communication strengthens service coordination and creates a social environment that makes the elderly feel valued and involved in the community.

In practice, volunteers are the main actors who interact directly with the elderly. They adapt the manager's instructions into a warmer, more personal form of interpersonal communication that focuses on the emotional needs of the elderly. This approach reflects the principle of person-centered communication, which is the communicator's ability to tailor messages based on the preferences, physical condition, and cognitive capacity of the elderly. Volunteers use simple language, speak slowly, and maintain friendly eye contact and facial expressions to create a comfortable atmosphere. The use of nonverbal communication such as light touch or nodding reinforces the emotional presence of volunteers, as described in the theory of nonverbal immediacy.

The relationship between volunteers and seniors at Grandma's Foundation has developed into an emotional and trusting one, where seniors feel safe to share their experiences without fear of being judged, while volunteers derive emotional satisfaction from

their supportive role. This dynamic reflects the concept *of empathic accuracy*, which is the ability of volunteers to accurately understand the emotional state of the elderly through verbal and nonverbal cues, such as changes in tone of voice, body language, and narrative patterns. However, this intergenerational interaction also faces challenges in the form of differences in communication styles that have the potential to cause miscommunication, including the tendency to speak too fast, the use of difficult-to-understand terms, or the unconscious practice of *elderspeak*. These challenges are in line with *Communication Accommodation Theory*, which asserts that failure to adjust communication or *over-accommodation* can widen the social distance and lower the self-esteem of the elderly.

In the context of the organization, Grandma's Foundation managers respond to these challenges by providing interpersonal communication training for volunteers, such as active listening techniques, language adaptation, and prevention *of over-accommodation*, so that communication serves to strengthen service capacity. The findings show that the dynamics of interpersonal communication at Grandma's Foundation are in line with the principles *of Person-Centered Communication* (PCC), where volunteers adjust their communication style to the emotional and cognitive conditions of the elderly, as well as *Social Support Theory,* which views communication as a mechanism for providing emotional, informational, and instrumental support. Through the integration of these approaches, interpersonal communication not only serves as a means of conveying messages, but also becomes the foundation of humanistic, empathetic volunteer-based social services that have a direct impact on the psychosocial well-being of the elderly.

The Role of Interpersonal Communication in the Well-being of Elderly People at Grandma's Foundation

The results of the study show that interpersonal communication has a significant contribution in improving the physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being of the elderly. Communication at Grandma's Foundation is not merely the delivery of instructions, but a comprehensive biopsychosocial service mechanism.

Regular communication between volunteers and managers allows the elderly to openly express their physical complaints. In this case, communication functions as "social monitoring" of the elderly's health conditions. This is explained by the management:

> *By talking regularly to volunteers and seniors, we can notice small changes in their bodies, such as when they ask for help walking slowly or say that their legs hurt. Communication is part of how we maintain their health. (Interview with Ahmad Fauzi, 2025)*

This statement shows that interpersonal communication in the field has an informal health detection function . This finding reinforces the view that effective communication between caregivers and the elderly can improve health compliance and prevent medical problems from developing more seriously (Liao et al., 2023). Through this informational and instrumental support, the risk of delayed medical treatment can be minimized (Wardani, Nur Aini, et al., 2025).

From a mental health perspective, interpersonal communication plays a crucial role in reducing psychological burdens, stress, and anxiety. Volunteers often serve as the first point of contact, providing a "safe space" for the elderly to share their stories, as one volunteer explained:

> *Sometimes I come just to sit and listen to grandma's stories. She talks about her youth, her grandchildren, or her loneliness. After chatting, she feels calmer, and she says her heart feels lighter. (Interview with Andhika, 2025)*

Interactions like this demonstrate the function of communication as a mechanism for emotional release (emotional ventilation). Through active listening and non-judgmental attitudes, volunteers help older adults feel valued as individuals. Research by Yuan et al. (2025) confirms that emotional support from younger generations contributes directly to an increase in older adults' subjective well-being.

Emotionally, seniors feel the direct impact of empathetic communication. The relationships that are built make seniors feel that they are cared for as individuals, not just objects of assistance. This is confirmed by a senior source:

> *I feel happy when volunteers come, not just to give me medicine, but to chat. They ask how I am, listen to my problems, and I feel like I am not alone. (Interview with Witriani, 2025)*

This response shows that emotional relationships create a sense of worth. The study "by shows that emotional relationships built through empathetic communication have a direct

effect on improving mental health and strengthening the self-concept of older adults. By applying the principles of Person-Centered Communication (PCC), volunteers successfully fostered self-confidence in older adults (Yuan et al., 2025).

Finally, interpersonal communication plays a role in building social networks and preventing isolation. Volunteers act as bridges that encourage older adults to re-engage in social activities. One volunteer explained his strategy:

> *When you talk to grandma and grandpa, they want to join in activities. Sometimes they feel shy when asked directly, but if you invite them gently through conversation, they are willing to get involved. (Interview with Tiara, 2025)*

This demonstrates the role of communication as a medium for social integration through the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) approach, in which volunteers adjust their tempo and style of speech to make older adults feel comfortable (Gasiorek & Giles, 2013). This active social involvement is a significant predictor of older adults' happiness and quality of life (Wu et al., 2025). Overall, good quality of both verbal and nonverbal communication significantly improves the satisfaction and psychosocial condition of older adults in community-based services (Sharkiya, 2023; Manchha et al., 2025).

Based on findings in the field, interpersonal communication functions as a non-medical "social monitoring" system. Through informational and instrumental support in SST theory, routine communication between managers, volunteers, and the elderly enables early detection of changes in the physical condition of the elderly. Consistent informal conversations serve as a bridge for managers to learn about health complaints that may not be formally communicated. This analysis reinforces the view that effective communication between caregivers and the elderly can improve health compliance and prevent medical problems from developing more seriously (Wardani, Nur Aini, et al., 2025).

From a mental and emotional perspective, interpersonal communication plays a crucial role in reducing psychological burdens, stress, and loneliness. By applying the PCC principle, volunteers provide a "safe space" for seniors to release their emotions (emotional ventilation). Person-centered communication ensures that each individual feels valued and validated, rather than being positioned as an object of social assistance. Active listening practices by volunteers have been shown to improve subjective well-being and strengthen the self-concept of older adults in intergenerational relationships (Yuan et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2025).

In social terms, interpersonal communication acts as a medium of integration to prevent social isolation among older adults in urban environments. Using the CAT theory approach, volunteers accommodate or adjust their communication style, such as speaking tempo and word choice, to make older adults feel comfortable and equal in their interactions. These adjustments minimize the psychological distance between generations, encouraging older adults to be more confident and actively involved in community activities. The quality of these empathetic interactions is a key predictor of the quality of life and sense of security of older adults in community-based services (Gasiorek & Giles, 2013; Sharkiya, 2023; Manchha et al., 2025).

This series of findings confirms that the effectiveness of interpersonal communication at Grandma's Foundation serves as a strategic biopsychosocial intervention. The integration of social support (SST), person-centered care (PCC), and communication adaptation skills (CAT) creates a service ecosystem that not only meets physical needs through early detection but is also fundamentally capable of restoring the dignity and psychosocial well-being of the elderly. Thus, interpersonal communication in this institution is not merely a process of exchanging messages, but a holistic service instrument that consistently mitigates the effects of aging and social isolation in urban environments.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of Interpersonal Communication in Grandma's Foundation Social Services

The results of the study show that there are a number of factors that support and hinder the process of interpersonal communication between managers, volunteers, and the elderly at Grandma's Foundation. One of the main supporting factors is the existence of an empathy-based organizational culture, which directly increases the sensitivity of volunteers in communicating. Fauzi stated:

> *From the beginning, we emphasized to volunteers that they are not only helping physically, but they must also be able to listen. Here, we teach communication from the heart, not just as a*

task. (Interview with Fauzi, 2025)

This emphasis on empathy is in line with the findings of Nembhard et al. (2023) which prove that empathy training and reinforcement in healthcare directly contributes to improving the quality of interactions and outcomes of care for elderly patients.

In addition to an empathetic culture, emotional closeness between volunteers and the elderly is also a strong supporting factor. One volunteer shared:

> *Once we talk often, the elderly share their stories before they get sick. So we can understand earlier what they are feeling. (Interview with Tiara, 2025)*

This shows that interpersonal trust is a form of communication capital. This condition is reinforced by the findings of Dong et al., (2024) which show that informal social support through close communication has a significant effect on the mental health of older adults and provides psychological protection in dealing with everyday problems.

Interpersonal communication also faces a number of obstacles. The main factors are age differences and speaking styles, which often cause communication gaps between generations. A volunteer admitted:

> *Sometimes we have to repeat ourselves several times because the elderly have difficulty understanding. But there are also volunteers who speak too quickly. (Interview with DA, 2025)*

This is in line with the concept of elderspeak, which is an unconscious pattern of condescending communication that often arises when speaking to older adults. Shaw et al., (2022) found that overly simplistic or patronizing speech patterns can lower older adults' self-esteem and cause resistance in interactions.

In addition to physical and cognitive barriers, there are also psychological barriers that arise from the elderly themselves. One elderly person said:

> *I sometimes feel embarrassed to ask for help. I'm afraid the volunteer children will get tired if they keep helping me. (Interview with Witriani, 2025)*

This obstacle shows the tendency of older adults to hold back their needs for fear of being seen as a burden. These findings are consistent with research by which proves that older adults tend to withdraw from communication if they feel they do not want to be a social burden. This obstacle shows that communication is not only influenced by the abilities of volunteers, but also by the psychological factors of older adults themselves.

Another barrier is the volunteers' lack of preparedness in understanding the ethics of communicating with the elderly. The manager stated:

> *Not all volunteers have experience. Some speak too casually, while others do not understand how to respect the elderly with appropriate language. (Interview with Ahmad Fauzi, 2025)*

This finding is in line with the study, which emphasizes that workers and volunteers in elderly care services need Communication Partner Training to avoid miscommunication and build effective and equal communication relationships.

Supporting factors for interpersonal communication at Grandma's Foundation include an empathy-based organizational culture, emotional closeness between volunteers and older adults, and informal social support embedded in daily interactions. Managers consistently emphasize that volunteers are not only responsible for providing physical assistance but also for being emotionally present for older adults, creating a warm, respectful, and open communication climate. This culture encourages volunteers to adjust their speech, nonverbal behavior, and interaction strategies according to the conditions of older adults, reflecting the principles of a person-centered approach. Regular and sustained interactions further strengthen emotional bonds and mutual trust, enabling older adults to share personal experiences and concerns more openly. Such relational intimacy enhances empathic accuracy, allowing volunteers to better understand the emotional and psychosocial needs of older adults.

Despite these strengths, several obstacles affect the quality of interpersonal communication. Differences in age and communication style between volunteers and older adults may lead to miscommunication, particularly when volunteers speak too quickly or use unfamiliar terms. These challenges are compounded by sensory and cognitive declines among older adults, such as hearing loss or memory limitations, as well as psychological barriers, including feelings of embarrassment or fear of being a burden. These conditions may reduce openness and limit the depth of interaction. In line with Communication Accommodation Theory, inadequate adjustment or over-accommodation can increase social

distance and undermine communication effectiveness. These findings highlight the need for structured, empathy-based, and intergenerational communication training programs to systematically enhance the quality of interactions in elderly social services.

Another obstacle originates from the volunteers themselves, particularly their limited experience and lack of communication skills in interacting with older adults. Not all volunteers have educational backgrounds or prior training in therapeutic or elderly-oriented communication, resulting in varied interaction styles. Some volunteers may unconsciously use *elderspeak*, such as patronizing tones or excessive simplification of language, which can undermine older adults' self-esteem. From the perspective of *Communication Accommodation Theory* (CAT), insufficient or inappropriate accommodation whether under-accommodation or over-accommodation creates psychological distance and reduces communication effectiveness. To address this issue, managers at Grandma's Foundation provide basic training in empathetic communication and direct mentoring, enabling volunteers to refine their communication styles, enhance interpersonal sensitivity, and foster more equal and dignified interactions.

In addition to volunteer-related factors, communication barriers are also influenced by the biological and psychological conditions of older adults, as well as systemic constraints within the service structure. Sensory decline, memory loss, and reduced attention span require communication adjustments in terms of pace, intonation, repetition, and emotional presence, as emphasized in the *Person-Centered Communication* (PCC) framework. When such adjustments are insufficient, communication may be disrupted and older adults may feel undervalued or cognitively underestimated. Furthermore, some older adults tend to withhold their needs due to psychological barriers or cultural norms of shame, limiting the effectiveness of social support. From a *Social Support Theory* (SST) perspective, this challenge is compounded by limited interaction time caused by unstructured volunteer schedules, which hinders the continuity and depth of emotional support. These findings indicate that interpersonal communication barriers in elderly social services are shaped not only by individual competencies but also by systemic factors that affect the sustainability of intergenerational interaction and support .

Implementation of Research Findings as the Basis for Developing Context-Based Urban Communication Training Modules

These research findings indicate that interpersonal communication plays a central role in the success of social services at Grandma's Foundation, thus requiring systematic efforts to formulate it into a training module for volunteers. This module needs to be designed based on the characteristics of effective communication for the elderly in urban areas, which have different challenges compared to rural areas. The manager said:

> *We need communication standards so that new volunteers are not only enthusiastic, but also know how to talk appropriately to the elderly. If there is a module, it will definitely be easier to standardize the approach. (Interview with Fauzi, 2025)*

This shows the need for formal training-based standardization for volunteers. The communication training module needs to include three main competencies: (1) empathetic communication, (2) intergenerational communication, and (3) communication that is responsive to the emotional changes of older adults. This is in line with the findings of Burton et al. (2025), which confirm that Communication Partner Training (CPT) is an effective approach to improving the communication skills of elderly caregivers, especially in the context of urban community services. The CPT module has been proven to reduce misunderstandings, increase trust, and improve elderly compliance in service programs.

The training module needs to include material on adapting communication in an urban context because older adults in cities face more individualistic patterns of social interaction and often experience relational isolation. One volunteer said:

> *We often meet elderly people in South Tangerang who live alone, with their children busy working. So sometimes they are very quiet, even refusing to talk at first. (Interview with Andhika, 2025)*

This finding is in line with the research by which states that older adults in urban areas are more vulnerable to loneliness and therefore require a gradual and trust-based communication approach.

The training module should also cover avoiding elderspeak and respectful language training, as condescending communication styles have been shown to be psychological

barriers in caregiver-elder relationships. This is consistent with the findings , which show that overly simplistic or patronizing speech patterns can lower the self-esteem of elders and increase communication resistance. Therefore, volunteer training should include techniques for adjusting intonation, choosing polite diction, and active listening strategies.

To ensure the sustainability of the program, the communication module must also include strategies for reflection and self-evaluation, as volunteers work in a dynamic environment and often encounter emotional changes in the elderly. This is supported by the study, which states that empathy-based communication training is only effective if it is accompanied by continuous evaluation and communication supervision. By incorporating evaluative components, the training module becomes not only an initial guide but also a long-term learning tool.

Research findings show that the effectiveness of social services at Grandma's Foundation is highly dependent on the quality of interpersonal communication between managers, volunteers, and the elderly. Therefore, the implementation of the research results needs to be realized in the form of a communication training module that can systematically improve the capacity of volunteers. This training module must be developed based on the characteristics of interactions that arise in the field, such as the elderly's need for empathy, clear communication, and emotional presence. Thus, the module is not merely teaching material, but a standard guideline that can standardize volunteer communication practices in the context of complex urban services.

The first component that must be included in the module is empathetic communication training. Based on field findings, many older adults respond positively when volunteers use active listening strategies, provide emotional validation, and show acceptance without judgment. Therefore, the module should emphasize competencies such as active listening skills, open-ended questioning techniques, and ways to show empathy through verbal and nonverbal language. This is in line with person-centered communication, which is an important theoretical basis for volunteer-elderly interactions. This training will help volunteers build strong and deep interpersonal relationships with the elderly.

The second component is intergenerational communication training. Differences in age, language style, and communication preferences can create barriers in interactions between younger volunteers and older adults. The module needs to provide knowledge about the dynamics of cross-generational communication, including avoiding elderspeak, adjusting speaking tempo, choosing appropriate diction, and strategies for gradually building trust. This training is also important to prevent miscommunication and increase the trust of older adults in volunteers. The application of Communication Accommodation Theory in the module will help volunteers understand when to make adjustments and when to avoid excessive accommodation (Gasiorek & Giles, 2013).

The third component that needs to be included is techniques for dealing with the psychological barriers of older adults. Research shows that some older adults feel embarrassed or reluctant to express their needs for fear of being seen as a burden. Therefore, volunteers need training on identifying nonverbal cues, strategies for initiating conversation, and ways to create an emotionally safe environment for older adults. The module also needs to include skills for dealing with older adults who show signs of anxiety, loneliness, or emotional instability. This will enable volunteers to provide more comprehensive and responsive psychosocial support tailored to the needs of individual older adults.

The final component is a communication evaluation and supervision system. To ensure the sustainability of service quality, the training module must be equipped with self-evaluation instruments for volunteers, regular reflection sessions, and supervision from managers. This approach is in line with the recommendations of various international studies that emphasize that communication training will be effective if accompanied by continuous monitoring and coaching (Nembhard et al., 2023). Periodic evaluations will help volunteers understand their skill development and identify new challenges that arise in interactions with the elderly. Thus, the training module not only provides initial preparation but also serves as a long-term learning tool that adapts to the dynamics of urban social services.

Research findings consistently show that the success of interpersonal communication between volunteers and older adults is greatly influenced by the volunteers' ability to apply the principles of Person-Centered Communication (PCC) (Liao et al., 2023). Therefore, empathy training is a key component of the module, with a focus on developing active

listening skills, the use of respectful language, and emotional presence in interactions. This training not only aims to foster polite communication, but also to instill awareness that urban seniors often experience a loss of emotional connection, so interpersonal communication is a form of respect for their dignity.

In addition, research findings that show the importance of adjusting communication styles to the sensory and cognitive conditions of older adults make Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) the basis for developing intergenerational training materials. Volunteers need to be equipped with the skills to adjust their speaking pace, word choice, facial expressions, and gestures so that messages are conveyed effectively without making older adults feel belittled (C. Shaw et al., 2022). This training is particularly relevant in an urban context, where volunteers and older adults often come from very different social backgrounds and life experiences.

Analysis based on Social Support Theory (SST) shows that interpersonal communication also functions as a form of social support that can reduce emotional stress and loneliness in older adults (Dong et al., 2024). Therefore, training modules should include skills for providing emotional support and psychosocial reinforcement through calming, appreciative, and non-judgmental communication. This is particularly important for urban older adults who tend to be more withdrawn, have fewer family networks, and are vulnerable to social isolation (Díaz Llobet et al., 2024).

Findings regarding various communication barriers also indicate the need for specific material on communication adaptation when dealing with elderly people who are passive, sensitive, or resistant to assistance. In an urban context, elderly people often live in an individualistic culture, so volunteers must be able to engage through empathy-based communication and a gradual approach. Finally, the limited duration of interactions due to volunteer schedules requires a system of ongoing mentoring and communication evaluation. Thus, the training module should not only contain theory and techniques, but also a structured volunteer coaching scheme to ensure that communication practices remain consistent and their impact can be measured.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that interpersonal communication is a key element in the success of community-based social services for older adults at Grandma's Foundation, South Tangerang. The communication dynamics among administrators, volunteers, and older adults serve not only as a mechanism for program coordination but also as a medium for addressing the psychosocial needs of older adults through empathetic, supportive, and meaningful relationships. These interactions enable older adults to feel valued, heard, and actively involved within the community, thereby contributing to the reduction of loneliness and social isolation in the context of urban life.

The findings further reveal that volunteers' communication practices are consistent with the principles of Person-Centered Communication (PCC) by adapting communication styles to the emotional and cognitive conditions of older adults, as well as with Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) through appropriate cross-generational communication accommodation. From the perspective of Social Support Theory (SST), interpersonal communication functions as the primary mechanism for providing emotional, informational, and instrumental support, all of which positively influence the psychosocial well-being of older adults. Overall, this study confirms that interpersonal communication is not merely a process of message exchange but a strategic instrument for developing social services for older adults that are humane, participatory, and responsive to the complex needs of the aging population in urban settings.

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