



EXPLORATION OF RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT OF ADULT AND ELDERLY INDIVIDUALS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores religious development among adults and the elderly using a qualitative approach by combining in-depth interviews and library research methods. The primary objective is to understand holistically how religious dimensions evolve, adapt, and function in individuals' lives as they age. During adulthood, the findings indicate a shift from dogmatic religiosity toward a more reflective, independent, and personal form of belief. Adults tend to integrate religious teachings with life experiences, seek meaning behind significant life events, and apply religious values in their daily lives. Entering old age, religious development becomes increasingly profound and comforting. The focus gradually shifts toward existential reflection, self-acceptance, and spiritual preparation for the end of life.

A. INTRODUCTION

Life is a dynamic journey marked by various changes in physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and moral aspects at every stage of human development. Among these dimensions, religious development or spirituality often becomes the core foundation in shaping individuals' worldviews, values, and ways of coping with life's challenges. Understanding how this religious dimension evolves throughout the lifespan is a major concern within the field of psychology of religion, particularly during adulthood (approximately 30–50 years old) and old age (above 50 years old).

According to Desmita (2005:234), psychologists generally define early adulthood as beginning around the age of 20 and continuing until approximately 40–45 years old. Middle adulthood ranges from around 40–45 to 65 years old, while late adulthood or old age begins at approximately 65 years old and continues until death. Adulthood, commonly associated with the age range of 30–50 years, is often described as a period of career



development, family formation, and identity consolidation. Individuals in this phase encounter various significant challenges, such as managing work pressures, raising children, maintaining relationships, and facing midlife crises. These intense life experiences frequently trigger deeper reflections on the meaning of life, existential purpose, and the role of faith in navigating life's complexities. Beyond the age of 50, individuals gradually enter the elderly stage, a period characterized by other major life changes. Retirement, the loss of spouses or peers, declining physical functions, and increasing awareness of mortality become unavoidable realities. At this stage, religiosity often serves as an important source of coping, comfort, and meaning in life.

From the perspective of the psychology of religion, it can be said that changes in belief or religious consciousness in adults are not merely events that occur by coincidence, nor are they simply natural developments, but rather occurrences preceded by various processes and conditions that can be examined and studied, including those experienced during late adulthood or old age (Zakia, 2005:159). Therefore, it can be understood that the religious life of elderly individuals generally tends to increase. Based on research conducted by Robert H. Thouless (1992), it was found that elderly people generally tend to accept religious opinions from others. Furthermore, they become increasingly aware of the reality of the afterlife. Even the awareness of the existence of life after death grows up to 100 percent.

Although there have been several studies on religious development during childhood, adolescence, and old age, comprehensive exploration specifically comparing and examining the nuances of religious development between adults (30–50 years old) and the elderly (above 50 years old) still requires greater attention. This gap creates an opportunity to understand how transitions and specific life experiences within these age ranges shape, strengthen, or even change religious orientations and practices. Therefore, this study aims to explore in depth the religious development of individuals in adulthood (30–50 years old) and old age (above 50 years old), as well as to identify patterns, triggering factors, and the significance of religiosity in their life journeys.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed qualitative research, which is intended to understand the phenomena experienced by the research subjects and to produce descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from individuals and observed behaviors. It can be said that this research is descriptive and qualitative in nature, in which the researcher analyzes and describes the study objectively and in detail in order to obtain accurate results.



Theoretically, descriptive research is research that aims to collect information regarding the status of an existing phenomenon, namely the condition of the phenomenon as it is at the time the research is conducted, so that it only reveals facts through data analysis.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Hartati (2004:13), development can be interpreted as the changes experienced by individuals or organisms toward adulthood or maturity that occur systematically, in which the parts are interdependent, influence one another, and form a unified whole. In religion, humans experience religious development. Zakiah divides the stages of religious development in humans into four stages, namely childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. Meanwhile, religion is a form of recognition of the ability to develop oneself both physically and psychologically. Humans are referred to as potential beings because they possess several innate abilities, such as the potential of reason (mind), the potential of *qalb* (heart), and the potential of desire (*nafs*) that shape human life. All of these potentials can be developed according to the level of human relationships with supernatural powers that must be obeyed, as these supernatural powers control humans and influence their actions. Religion may also refer to teachings revealed by God through prophets and messengers.

Religious development is a dynamic process that shapes individuals' beliefs, spiritual values, and ritual practices throughout their lifespan. It is not merely a legacy inherited from the environment but rather a complex interaction between internal factors (cognitive, emotional, and personality aspects) and external factors (social, cultural, and life experiences). Understanding how religiosity develops helps us to understand an important dimension of human identity and the meaning of life.

1. Religious Development in Adulthood

a. Definition of Adulthood

The term "adulthood" originates from the Latin word "*adultus*," which means having grown into complete strength and maturity or having become an adult. Therefore, adults are individuals who have completed their growth and are ready to assume their roles in society alongside other adults. Adulthood is a stage characterized by emotional stability, firmness of heart, and strong faith. According to the Islamic perspective, adulthood is a phase in which individuals possess a deeper level of awareness and emotional, moral, spiritual, and religious intelligence. Upon reaching adulthood, individuals demonstrate



psychological maturity; the expression “I live and I know for what purpose” illustrates that adults already possess responsibility and awareness of the meaning of life.

In simple terms, a person can be considered an adult when they have achieved complete physical growth and psychological maturity, enabling them to live and function alongside other adults. In American culture, an individual is generally not considered to have reached adulthood until the age of 21. Meanwhile, in Indonesian culture, a person is officially regarded as an adult after marriage, even if they have not yet reached the age of 21. Psychologists generally determine that adulthood begins around the age of 20 and continues until approximately 40–45 years old.

b. Religious Development in Adulthood

Religious development in adulthood is a process that is far more complex and personal compared to childhood or adolescence. At this stage, faith is no longer merely imitative but becomes a profound spiritual journey, reflection, and integration with all aspects of life. In line with age development, religious attitudes in adulthood generally have the following characteristics:

- 1) Accepting religious truths based on mature thought and careful consideration, not merely following others.
- 2) Tending to be realistic so that religious norms are more frequently applied in attitudes and behavior.
- 3) Having a positive attitude toward religious teachings and norms, and striving to study and deepen religious understanding.
- 4) The level of religious obedience is based on consideration and responsibility so that religiosity becomes a realization of one's way of life.
- 5) Being more open-minded and possessing broader insight.
- 6) Being critical toward religious teachings so that religious commitment is based not only on rational consideration but also on conscience.
- 7) Religious attitudes tend to reflect individual personality types, indicating the influence of personality in accepting, understanding, and practicing religious teachings.
- 8) There is a visible relationship between religiosity and social life, resulting in greater concern for religious social organizations.

Ramayulis (2002:79) explains that the religious behavior of adults is generally based on responsibility, independence, conscience, and mature consideration, rather than merely following others.



c. Stages of Religious Development in Adulthood

1) Early Adulthood (20–40 Years Old)

At this stage, individuals are occupied with career development, marriage, and family life. Religious development is marked by the emergence of a critical attitude toward previously accepted beliefs, as individuals begin to compare and evaluate their belief systems with other alternatives. Morality and the application of religious values become important focuses, although challenges may still arise in applying them amid the demands and busyness of life.

2) Middle Adulthood (40–60 Years Old)

Religious interest generally increases during this stage. This may occur because life responsibilities become less demanding or because individuals begin to reflect more deeply on the meaning of life and existence. Individuals start to develop a more complex and nuanced understanding of religious beliefs. They become able to accept paradoxes and contradictions within belief systems without feeling disturbed by them. This stage is often referred to as “Conjunctive Faith,” according to James Fowler, in which individuals are able to integrate various experiences and perspectives into their beliefs.

3) Late Adulthood (Above 60 Years Old)

At this stage, the tendency to surrender to or accept destiny becomes more dominant. Interest in religion may remain strong and may even increase, as this period is characterized by reflection and preparation for death. Life becomes more focused on essential matters, and simplicity becomes more prominent. Religious beliefs serve as a source of strength and comfort in facing physical and social changes.

d. Factors Influencing Religious Development in Adulthood

1) Internal Factors

a) Self-Capacity

Self-capacity refers to intellectual ability (reasoning) in accepting religious teachings, and differences can be seen between individuals who possess stronger and weaker capabilities. Those who are able to accept teachings rationally will understand and practice religious teachings properly, even if what they practice differs from traditions that may already be deeply rooted in society. On the other hand, individuals who are less capable of accepting teachings rationally tend to depend more on the surrounding community.

b) Experience

The broader a person’s experience in the religious field, the more stable and consistent they will be in carrying out religious activities. Meanwhile, individuals who have limited and



narrow experiences may encounter various difficulties in practicing religious teachings properly and consistently. In general, the internal factors that influence the development of religious consciousness include heredity, age level, personality, and an individual's psychological condition.

2) External Factors

The potential possessed by humans is generally referred to as religious nature (*fitrah keagamaan*), namely the tendency toward belief in the oneness of God. As a potential, it requires influences originating from outside the individual, such as guidance, nurturing, training, and education. External factors considered influential in the development of religious consciousness can be seen from the environment in which a person lives. Generally, these environments are divided into three categories: family, institutions, and society.

Religious attitudes are reflected in individuals' patterns of life. Such attitudes are maintained as part of their identity and personality through a firm commitment to practicing the teachings of their religion. As a result, these religious attitudes may lead to excessive obedience and selective adherence to religious teachings that provide inner satisfaction based on rational consideration. Religious attitudes in adulthood tend to have a broader perspective grounded in the values individuals choose to uphold. In addition, these attitudes are generally based on a deeper understanding and broader comprehension of religious teachings. For adults, religiosity has become a way of life rather than merely following others.

2. Religious Development in Old Age

a. Definition of Old Age

The elderly (*lanjut usia*) represent the final stage in the human life span. This stage begins at the age of 60 and continues until death. Old age is characterized by changes involving declines in physical, psychological, and social conditions that interact with one another. According to Law No. 4 of 1965, elderly individuals are those who have reached the age of 55, are unable to earn a living independently to meet their daily needs, and depend on support from others (Wahyudi in Nia Aprina, 2014). Prayitna (in Nia Aprina, 2014) defines the elderly as individuals aged 56 years and above who have no income and are unable to support their basic daily needs independently. According to Jalaluddin (2010), elderly individuals are those who have reached the age of 65. At this stage, they begin to face various problems. The first problem is the decline in physical abilities and



strength, reduced activities, and frequent health problems that may cause them to lose enthusiasm in life.

b. Age Classification of the Elderly

Nia Aprina (2014), in her citation, classifies elderly age as follows:

- 1) Classification of the Elderly According to the Ministry of Health:
 - a) Early elderly group (55–64 years old), consisting of individuals who have just entered old age.
 - b) Elderly group (65–70 years old).
 - c) High-risk elderly group, namely individuals aged 70 years and above.
- 2) Classification of the Elderly According to the World Health Organization (WHO):
 - a) Middle age (45–59 years old).
 - b) Elderly (60–74 years old).
 - c) Old (75–90 years old).
 - d) Very old (above 90 years old).

c. Religious Development in Old Age

Religious development in old age is often considered a very profound and reflective phase. At this stage, individuals tend to be less occupied with worldly matters and become more focused on the search for the meaning of life, self-acceptance, and preparation for the end of life. Religiosity can become a significant source of strength, comfort, and peace. This stage of old age generally begins at the age of 65. During this period, individuals usually face various problems. The initial problems can be described as follows: in old age, there is a decline in physical abilities, reduced activities, and frequent health problems, causing elderly individuals to tend to lose enthusiasm in life. According to findings in the psychology of religion, religious life among the elderly tends to increase. A study involving 1,200 participants aged between 60 and 100 years showed a growing tendency to accept religious opinions. Meanwhile, acknowledgment of the reality of the afterlife only reached 100% after the age of 90.

- 1) Religious Attitudes in Old Age
 - a) The tendency for increased enthusiasm in religious matters is often associated with a decline in sexual drive. According to this view, elderly individuals experience frustration in the sexual domain due to decreasing physical abilities. Such frustration is considered the only factor shaping religious attitudes. This view is rejected by Thouless, who argues that such



an explanation is overly exaggerated.

- b) According to William James, an extraordinary level of religious life appears to be found in old age, when sexual life has already declined. This view is consistent with the reality of elderly individuals who tend to become more diligent in worship. They begin to prepare themselves for life in the hereafter.
- c) Other studies suggest that one of the factors determining religious attitudes in old age is depersonalization. This research was conducted, among others, by M. Argyle and Elle A. Cohen (Sururin, 2004: 89–90).

2) Factors of Religious Development in Old Age

Theoretically, the development of religious awareness is in line with increasing age. Thus, hypothetically, it can be formulated that “the older a person becomes, the more stable their religious awareness will be.” However, this assumption is not always correct, because in real life, many adults still show attitudes and behaviors that are not in line with or even contradict religious values. Forms of crime, criminality, or moral decline that are reported daily by mass media (television, newspapers, and magazines), such as theft, robbery, corruption, murder, drug trafficking, and gambling, are generally committed by adults (among officials, bureaucrats, and ordinary members of society).

These conditions occur because many factors influence an individual’s religious life journey, including those in old age. These factors are as follows:

- a) The diversity of religious education received during childhood, where some individuals received it and others did not.
- b) The diversity of experiences in applying religious values in daily life, whether in the family, school, workplace, or society, ranging from intensive practice, occasional practice, to no practice at all.
- c) The diversity of social interactions with colleagues or coworkers, where some are religiously obedient while others disregard or even disrespect religious values.
- d) The diversity of attitudes toward life problems experienced, where some individuals are patient and accept them with resilience, while others experience frustration or even depression in facing them.
- e) The diversity of life orientations, where some are materialistic-hedonistic (living solely for worldly pleasure without considering halal-haram or right-wrong values), while others are moral-religious (making religion the



foundation of their behavior). (Lubis, 2019)

3) Positive Dimensions of Religiousness in Old Age

Religiousness in the elderly is often positively correlated with:

- a) Psychological Well-being: Elderly individuals who are religious tend to have lower levels of depression and anxiety, as well as higher life satisfaction.
- b) Resilience: Religious belief can serve as a strong coping mechanism in facing stress, loss, and difficulties in old age.
- c) Quality of Life: Through religious moral and ethical values, the elderly can find purpose and meaning in life, which contributes to a better quality of life.

Overall, religious development in adulthood is not merely a linear growth but rather a personal journey involving reflection, adaptation, and the integration of beliefs with life experiences. Religion can serve as a source of emotional support, a moral foundation, and a way to seek deeper meaning and purpose in life.

Meanwhile, religious development in old age is a rich and often transformative spiritual journey. Religion can provide a framework for facing life's challenges, seeking meaning, and finding peace in the later stages of life.

D. CONCLUSION

The exploration of religious development in adulthood and old age shows that religious aspects undergo deepening and expansion of meaning along with increasing age. In adulthood, individuals begin to reflect more deeply on spiritual values and practice religious teachings in a more conscious and personal way. Religion is not only viewed as a ritual obligation but also as a source of meaning, life direction, and a coping mechanism in facing complex life challenges, such as identity crises, work pressures, and social relationship dynamics.

At this stage, the search for life meaning and identity formation, as well as experiences such as career, marriage, and family life, become important catalysts for spiritual deepening. Religiosity is not limited to rituals but becomes increasingly integrated and reflected in daily actions and values.

Entering old age, religious development tends to become deeper and more calming. The focus shifts from worldly activities toward existential reflection, the search for inner peace, and preparation for the end of life. The religious dimension becomes more prominent as part of the process of seeking inner tranquility and preparing for death. Religious and spiritual activities serve as the primary means of coping with loneliness,



physical decline, and social dependence. Religiosity in the elderly tends to be more intrinsic and transcendental, playing a role in improving psychological well-being and overall quality of life.

Overall, it can be concluded that religiosity in adulthood and old age serves as an important foundation for psychological well-being, resilience, and overall quality of life. It is not merely about adherence to dogma but rather about building a deep personal relationship with the Divine, finding life purpose, and experiencing peace at every stage of life.

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