



## Interpersonal Communication of Employees in Services for the Elderly with Cognitive Impairments in the Harapan Kita Elderly Social Home

Sakinah, Budianto\*, Chairunnisah Putri Ayu Ningsih

Ilmu Komunikasi, Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik, UIN Raden Fatah Palembang

\*Email : [ksakinah229@gmail.com](mailto:ksakinah229@gmail.com)

---

### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received 14 Apr, 2026

Revised 19 May, 2026

Accepted 10 Jun, 2026

---

#### Keywords:

Interpersonal  
Communication, Elderly,  
Employees, Cognitive  
Impairment

---

### ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by the importance of interpersonal communication in services for the elderly who experience cognitive impairment, such as memory loss, difficulty understanding instructions, emotional changes, and slow communication responses. This condition requires employees to be able to adjust the way they communicate so that the services provided remain effective and able to create a sense of comfort for the elderly. This study aims to find out how employee interpersonal communication in services for the elderly with cognitive impairment and to find out the obstacles faced by employees in the communication process. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with data collection techniques through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The research informants consisted of employees and the elderly at the Harapan Kita Indralaya Elderly Social Home. The theory used in this study is Interaction Adaptation Theory by Judee K. Burgoon which explains that individuals will adjust their communication behavior based on the needs and conditions of the interlocutor in an interaction.

---

## INTRODUCTION

As they age, the elderly often face various conditions that can affect their quality of life. The disorders experienced are not only limited to physical aspects, but also include psychological, social, and cognitive conditions. Physical decline is usually characterized by weakening body strength, limited movement, and decreased organ function. From a psychological perspective, the elderly can experience emotional changes, feelings of anxiety, and loneliness. Meanwhile, social disturbances often arise due to reduced roles in society, limitations in interaction, and decreased support from families and the surrounding environment (Nazifa et al., 2025).

In 2024, an elderly person with the initials Z (65) was found dead at his home in East Ciputat, the victim had died for about five days because he emitted an unpleasant odor. The victim lived alone in his brother's house which was not taken care of. In June 2022, an elderly man with the initials TGH (60) died "alone" in the bathroom of his house in Bojonggede. Residents who lived near the victim's house smelled an unpleasant smell after his body was discovered. From the case, it is known that basically, elderly people still need attention and support from those closest to them, such as children, grandchildren, and other families (Scott, 2024).

Elderly people who still have families, such as children, grandchildren or other relatives, are lucky because there are still people who take care of them. However, those who no longer have a family so they have to live alone and independently, or those who have a family but the family finances are insufficient, or those who have children and grandchildren but they do not want to take care of their parents. Therefore, many parents are placed in nursing homes either voluntarily or because of coercive circumstances (Febrina, 2019).

Our hope for the elderly Indralaya is one of the places in South Sumatra Province, where the elderly can get care and support. But as they age, parents often experience cognitive impairment, which can affect their ability to communicate well. This condition requires a special approach to provide health services and care in the orphanage.

Our hope elderly social home located in Indralaya, Ogan Ilir Regency, South Sumatra Province is one of the Regional Technical Implementation Units (UPTD) that provides social welfare services for the elderly who need attention, care, and nurturing, especially those who no longer have families or experience physical, mental, and social limitations. This orphanage not only serves as a safe place to live for the elderly, but also becomes an important forum in building warm social interactions between residents and the employees who accompany them every day. This is where the role of interpersonal communication becomes very important, because through this communication emotional relationships, mutual trust, and comfort are formed which affect the quality of service received by the elderly (Kabeakan et al., 2024).

Interpersonal communication between employees and the elderly at the Harapan Kita Indralaya Nursing Home plays an important role in supporting the emotional and psychosocial well-being of the residents of the orphanage. However, in its implementation, the interpersonal communication has not been fully carried out optimally. There are still various challenges in building harmonious relationships, especially in interacting with the elderly who have cognitive impairments. Under certain conditions, the communication patterns that occur still tend to focus on delivering information that is functional, while the needs of the elderly to be heard, understood, and cared for emotionally have not been fully met.

With this background, a research entitled Interpersonal Communication of Employees in Services for the Elderly with Cognitive Impairment at the Harapan Kita Indralaya Elderly Social Home is relevant to be carried out. This study aims to understand how interpersonal communication is established between employees and the elderly who experience cognitive impairment in the process of daily services in social institutions. In addition, this study also aims to look at various factors that affect the smooth communication and its impact on the quality of service and comfort of the elderly. Through this study, it is hoped that a more complete picture can be obtained of the communication practices that take place in the orphanage, so that the results can be considered for managers and service personnel.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Qualitative approaches are often used to understand complex and dynamic social, cultural, or communication phenomena, focusing on the experiences and perceptions of individuals or groups. This approach was chosen because the phenomena studied are not numbers or statistics, they are complex social and emotional relationships that can only be explained through an understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the elderly. The researcher wants to show how interpersonal communication in daily interactions between employees and the elderly, how communication forms trust, emotional comfort, and how interaction has an impact on improving the quality of services provided in orphanages.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Interpersonal Communication Conditions of Employees in Elderly Services with Cognitive Impairment**

#### **The form of communication that occurs**

##### **Verbal communication**

In the context of this study, the elderly with cognitive impairment have different communication needs than individuals in general. They need to convey messages that are simple, clear, not rushed, and accompanied by repetition. This need arises due to limitations in memory, understanding, and the ability to process information. Therefore, employees indirectly adjust the way of communication to suit these conditions, for example by using short sentences, avoiding complex terms, and repeating instructions gradually.

##### **Nonverbal Communication**

Nonverbal communication has a very dominant role in services to the elderly with cognitive impairment. Forms such as voice intonation, facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, and touch are the main means of conveying meaning and building emotional relationships. Employees actively adjust their nonverbal behavior based on the conditions and responses of the elderly, so that the communication that occurs is adaptive and dynamic. From the perspective of interaction adaptation theory, nonverbal communication is an important part of the interpersonal adjustment process that aims to create effective, comfortable, and empathetic interactions for the elderly.

#### **The impact of communication conditions on services**

##### **The level of comfort and security of the elderly**

From the perspective of interaction adaptation theory, this condition shows that employees are actively adjusting their communication behavior to create a comfortable balance of interactions. When seniors show signs of anxiety or confusion, employees respond with gentler and more supportive communication. This adaptation process results in more harmonious interactions and has a direct impact on increasing the sense of security of the elderly.

In this case, the researcher assumes that the comfort and security of the elderly are the result of communication that not only focuses on the delivery of messages, but also on emotional and relational aspects.

---

---

Employees who are able to show empathy through verbal and nonverbal communication tend to be more successful in creating a conducive service environment.

### **Employee barriers in conducting interpersonal communication with the elderly who have cognitive impairment**

#### **Barriers stemming from the condition of the elderly**

##### **Decreased Memory**

In overcoming these barriers, employees implement several adaptive communication strategies. First, employees repeat instructions consistently by using the same sentences to make them easier to recognize by the elderly. Second, the message is conveyed by linking it to routine activities, such as mealtimes, worship, or other daily activities, so that the elderly are easier to remember through habit patterns. Third, employees use nonverbal communication aids such as hand gestures, pointing, or giving direct examples to make the message easier to understand. In addition, employees also maintain patience in communicating and do not show a hasty attitude when the elderly forget the instructions given.

In this case, the researcher assumes that the strategy shows that employees have carried out a fairly good communication adaptation process in dealing with the limitations of the elderly's memory. While these barriers can't be completely eliminated, they can be minimized through repetitive, simple, and consistent communication. Thus, it can be concluded that memory decline is the main obstacle in interpersonal communication so that services continue to run effectively.

##### **Difficulty understanding instructions**

In overcoming these barriers, employees implement several communication strategies. First, deliver instructions gradually and not all at once, so that the elderly can understand each part of the message better. Second, use simple and easy-to-understand language, and avoid sentences that are too long or complex. Third, slow down the tempo of communication so that the elderly have time to process the information provided. Fourth, use nonverbal communication such as body movements, direct examples, or light touches to clarify the message. In addition, employees also provide opportunities for the elderly to respond and are not in a hurry to expect answers.

In this case, the researcher assumes that the strategy shows that employees have tried to adjust communication to the condition of the elderly optimally. Difficulty in understanding instructions is indeed a fairly complex obstacle, but it can be minimized through an adaptive and patient communication approach. Thus, it can be concluded that difficulty understanding instructions is a communication barrier related to the cognitive limitations of the elderly in processing information. From the perspective of interaction adaptation theory, this obstacle requires employees to adjust the way of delivering messages to suit the abilities of the elderly, so that communication can run more effectively and service remains optimal.

#### **Barriers Originating from Employees**

##### **High Workload**

In this case, the researcher assumes that a high workload not only affects the duration of communication, but also the quality of the interaction that is established. Communication tends to be functional or simply conveys information, without any deepening of meaning or stronger emotional interaction.

In overcoming these barriers, employees can implement strategies in the form of more effective time management, integrating communication in every service activity, and prioritizing communication in situations that require special attention. In addition, coordination between employees also needs to be improved so that the workload can be divided more evenly.

##### **Limited Number of Employees**

Based on this, the researcher assumes that this condition causes communication to be more general and less attentive to the specific needs of each elderly. This has the potential to cause gaps in message understanding, especially for the elderly with more severe cognitive conditions.

To overcome these barriers, employees implement strategies such as dividing tasks based on senior groups, increasing teamwork, and utilizing group activities as an effective means of communication. In addition, a simple and consistent communication approach can also help reach more seniors in a limited time.

##### **Time Constraints in Service Implementation**

Strategies that can be done to overcome this obstacle include using time more efficiently, such as communicating while accompanying elderly activities, and choosing the right time to conduct more in-depth communication. Thus, communication can continue even in time constraints.

##### **Physical and Emotional Work Fatigue**

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that obstacles that come from employees include high workload, limited number of employees, limited time, and work fatigue. These barriers show that interpersonal

communication is not only influenced by the condition of the elderly, but also by the readiness and condition of employees as communicators. From the perspective of interaction adaptation theory, employees are required to remain able to adjust communication despite facing various limitations. Therefore, adaptive communication strategies and good work management are key in increasing the effectiveness of communication in elderly services.

## CONCLUSION

Interpersonal communication carried out by employees takes place verbally and nonverbally and is adaptive. Verbal communication is carried out through the use of simple language, repetition of messages, soft voice intonation, and speech tempo adapted to the condition of the elderly. Meanwhile, nonverbal communication such as facial expressions, eye contact, touch, and gestures have an important role in reinforcing the meaning of messages and building emotional closeness.

Interpersonal communication not only serves as a conveyance of information, but also as a means of building emotional relationships. Employees not only deliver instructions, but also try to create a sense of security, comfort, and respect for the elderly. Empathetic communication has been proven to increase the trust and comfort of the elderly in carrying out daily activities in the orphanage. An effective communication approach requires adjustment (adaptation) to the cognitive condition of the child. Employees are required to adapt the way of communication to the ability of the elderly, such as repeating information, simplifying messages, and using a patient and attentive approach so that communication can be understood well.

There are various obstacles in interpersonal communication, both in terms of the elderly and employees. From the elderly's side, the main obstacles include memory loss, difficulty understanding instructions, and limitations in conveying and understanding messages. Meanwhile, from the employee side, obstacles include limited amounts of manpower, high workload, time constraints, and work fatigue that can affect the effectiveness of communication. The quality of interpersonal communication has a significant effect on the quality of service. Good communication can increase comfort, sense of security, and involvement of the elderly in orphanage activities. On the other hand, suboptimal communication can cause confusion, anxiety, and even make the elderly withdraw from social interactions.

## SUGGESTIONS

For the orphanage manager, it is hoped that it can improve the quality of service by providing special training to employees related to interpersonal communication techniques, especially in dealing with the elderly with cognitive impairments. In addition, there is a need for additional manpower so that the employee workload is more balanced and communication can be carried out more optimally.

For orphanage employees, it is expected to continue to improve interpersonal communication skills by prioritizing patience, empathy, and consistency in interacting with the elderly. The use of simple language, repetition of messages, and nonverbal approaches need to be maintained and improved in order for communication to be more effective.

## REFERENCES

- Adawiyah, M. (2023). Adaptation of Nonverbal Interaction for Disabled People (Qualitative Descriptive Study on Sign Language Learning of Deaf and Hearing Teachers at the Indonesian Sign Language Center Yogyakarta). Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, Yogyakarta.
- Aesthetics, Magfirah, N. (2018). Interpersonal communication. In Umsida press. 211-Article Text-5458-1-10-20210824
- Anggraini, C., Ritonga, D. H., Kristina, L., Syam, M., & Kustiawan, W. (2022). Interpersonal communication. *Dehasen Multidisciplinary Journal (MUDE)*, 1(3), 337–342. <https://doi.org/10.37676/mude.v1i3.2611>
- Ardila, R., & Sudahri. (2025). Interpersonal Communication in Building Tolerance between Religious Communities. 11(9).
- Aryati, D. P., & Fatimah, S. (2024). The Relationship of Loneliness with the Quality of Life of the Elderly Living in Elderly Social Service Homes. 17(1), 18–26.
- Asri, Y., Zakaria, A., Yunita, Nurma, H., & Rakhmawati, R. (2024). Gerontic Nursing Textbook (K. Lestari, Budi & Y. Fitri (eds.)). Yogyakarta.
- Gea, Y. K., Raharjao, S. T., Ginanjar, G., & Basar, K. (2024). Analysis of the Elderly Social Service Program at the Tresna Werdha Budi Mulia 3 Jakarta. Consider using the Gospel of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 183–194.
- Haiga, Y., & Chaniago, R. S. (2024). *Dementia*. III(5), 283–291.
-