

## Understanding the Ideal End of Life for Older Adults in Cianjur, West Java: From a Religious and Cultural Perspective

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### Abstract

*This research explores the aspects of the ideal end of life for older adults in Cianjur, with a specific focus on the religious and cultural aspects that shape perceptions and practices surrounding this significant life stage, using a mixed-methods approach. The study involves 18 qualitative participants—consisting of 9 older adults and their respective families—and 160 quantitative participants that spread across Cianjur, West Java, Indonesia. The research specifically focuses on the Indonesian Sundanese Muslim population, exploring how their religious beliefs and cultural traditions influence preferences, practices, and support systems related to aging and the final stages of life, including views on death and the afterlife. By grounding the study within the local context, it provides insights into the interconnected roles of religion and culture in shaping end of life experiences. Through this exploration, the research offers valuable considerations for a religiously and culturally sensitive and holistic approach to caring for aging individuals and addressing end of life care in this unique community setting.*

**Keywords:** *Older Adult, End of Life, Good Death, Religion, Culture.*

### Introduction

Growing old encompasses more than just the increase in chronological age; it signifies a prolonged existential journey in preparing for and confronting death (San Filippo, 2006; Silverman et al., 2021). For older adults, this journey involves navigating complex physical, emotional, and spiritual transformations, often influenced by the surrounding cultural and religious contexts. Death, often regarded as the culmination of life, becomes a central theme in the narrative of aging. Throughout this narrative, individuals witness the transition from youthful strength to vulnerability in old age, leading to the contemplation of various fears, concerns, and hopes in the face of death.

Amidst these transitions, there exists a shared desire for a peaceful and dignified death, reflecting a life well-lived. The pursuit of a good death is a universal ideal, but its definition is significantly influenced by the values, teachings, and religious-cultural factors that shape our beliefs (San Filippo, 2006). The impact of these factors leads individuals to prepare for death by engaging in good deeds during old age as a provision for the afterlife (Seise, 2021). The anticipation of death also incorporates traditional practices, rituals, and ceremonies that serve as essential expressions of respect for the deceased and provide solace for the bereaved. These customs and norms establish a framework for navigating the transition between the world we live in and the afterlife, fostering a sense of continuity and spiritual fulfillment.

The concept of a good death is often closely linked to the practice of religious rituals and the maintenance of familial and communal harmony (Seise, 2021; Silverman et al., 2021). Such as in Cianjur, these practices include recitations of Surah Yasin, acts of charity, and ceremonies such as ‘kenduri’ or ‘tahlil’—gatherings held to pray for the soul of the deceased. These rituals not only reflect the integration of Islamic principles but also emphasize the significance of family and community support during the dying process.

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Furthermore, they highlight the delicate balance between adhering to religious prescriptions and preserving local cultural heritage, demonstrating the syncretic nature of Indonesian Islam (Seise, 2021).

Beyond the ceremonial aspects, the preparation for death is also deeply personal and spiritual. Older adults in Cianjur often dedicate their later years to religious devotion, engaging in practices such as prayer, fasting, and the remembrance of God. Their aim is to approach death with a peaceful heart and a soul prepared for the afterlife (Seise, 2021). This commitment to spiritual readiness reflects the Islamic worldview, which views death as a transition to the *barzakh* realm—an intermediary stage before the Day of Judgment (Seise, 2021). Such practices resonate with the broader belief that life on Earth is a test ordained by God, and a good death signifies the successful completion of this test.

The influence of Sundanese traditions further enriches this understanding by emphasizing harmony within families and communities. In Sundanese culture, a good death is often associated with dying at home, surrounded by loved ones, and leaving behind a legacy of positive relationships and moral integrity (“Authors”, 2022). This cultural ideal aligns with Islamic teachings that value the presence of family members during a person’s final moments, symbolizing love, support, and spiritual guidance. The act of reciting the ‘*shahadah*’ (declaration of faith) during a person’s dying moments is regarded as a testament to their faith and a sign of *husn al-khatimah*—a good ending (Seise, 2021).

Through an exploration of the intersection of religion, culture, and aging, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ideal end of life experience for older adults, particularly in Cianjur, West Java, Indonesia. By examining the religious practices, cultural norms, and individual aspirations that shape this ideal, the study contributes to a nuanced appreciation of how Indonesian society navigates the profound realities of aging and death. The findings emphasize the resilience and adaptability of local traditions in preserving spiritual and cultural identity amidst changing societal dynamics, offering valuable insights into the universal quest for a meaningful and dignified end of life.

## Methods

This research used a mixed-methods sequential approach to provide a holistic investigation into the multidimensional understanding of the ideal end of life (Castro et al., 2010), with a particular focus on cultural and religious aspects among older adults in Cianjur. The qualitative dimension of the study involves investigating into the detailed narratives of older adults and their families through in-depth interviews. These interviews aim to gain detailed insights into the daily life experiences of older adults and to establish a comprehensive understanding of what constitutes the ideal end of life for them (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Furthermore, the qualitative aspect places significant key on unfolding the essential role played by religious and cultural aspects in shaping these perspectives. To complement these qualitative findings, a quantitative approach was implemented to validate and strengthen responses related to the identified themes. By synthesizing both qualitative and quantitative narratives, this research aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced depiction of the ideal end of life for older adults in Cianjur. The combined approach enables a more in-depth exploration and analysis of the intricate relationship between cultural and religious aspects and their influence on the perspectives of older adults regarding the end of life.

### *Data Collection Methods*

Data collection for this research was conducted from November 2022 to September 2023, and was conducted through two distinct approaches: qualitative and quantitative dimensions. In the qualitative dimension, in-depth interviews were employed, utilizing an open-ended question pattern to encourage participants to share detailed narratives about their personal experiences (Boyce & Neale, 2006). On average, the interview sessions lasted 45 to 60 minutes. This approach aimed to facilitate a comprehensive exploration of participant experiences, delving into holistic dimensions, including their hopes and desires for their later years, and the influence of cultural and religious factors on their experiences. The interviews were subsequently transcribed, initiating a coding process. Coding was utilized to discern emerging sub-themes, facilitating further interpretation and analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). In the quantitative

dimension, a survey was utilized, consisting of various questions designed to affirm and strengthen the findings that emerged from the qualitative themes descriptively (Castro et al., 2010).

### *Setting, Sample, and Eligibility Criteria*

The primary subjects of this study comprised nine older adults and their families or caregivers residing in Sindanglaya village, located in Cianjur, West Java, Indonesia. The selection of this location was driven by the intriguing phenomenon present in the village. Despite its proximity to a tourism place, the residents relatively isolated lives with minimal interaction with tourists. The residents, predominantly engaged in agricultural activities, spend considerable time working in rice fields and rarely engage with urban society due to economic constraints and a preference for rural life.

In the qualitative stage, inclusion criteria for older adult participants in the in-depth interviews were individuals aged 60 or older with the ability to communicate and express opinions effectively. Individuals affected by conditions like dementia or Alzheimer's, which could compromise cognitive abilities and the reliability of their opinions, were excluded. Caregivers or family members included in the qualitative stage were limited to those actively involved and accompany the lives older adults at home. While for the quantitative stage, inclusion criteria for survey participants were individuals aged 18 or older and had family members aged 60 or more living in the same household. Additionally, participants needed to reside within the Cianjur coverage area, particularly around the relevant villages. By the end of the research, a total of 160 datasets were obtained.

### *Ethical Aspects*

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Medicine, Public Health, and Nursing, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia (KE/FK/1412/EC/2022). Informed consent was obtained from all participants included in the research.

## **Results and Discussion**

### *Demographic Characteristic of Participants*

Based on the demographic characteristics of the participants as presented in **Table 1**, the study included a total of 9 older adult respondents and 9 of their family members. The largest segment of the older adults' group fell within the age range of 60-69 years old (22.2%). Meanwhile, the majority of the family members group fell within the age range of 30-39 years old (27.8%). The majority of the respondents were female (66.7%), and all participants identified as Sundanese. Furthermore, all participants identified as Muslim, and a significant proportion of older adults had experienced the death of their spouse. Additionally, a significant proportion of older adult respondents were living with their children (77.8%). Meanwhile, only a small portion of older adult respondents were living with their partner (11.1%), and some were living alone, especially after the death of their husband (11.1%).

**Table 1.** Demographic Characteristics of Qualitative Participants

Characteristic	Categories	Number (percent)
Age	30-39 years old	5 (27.8%)
	40-49 years old	3 (16.7%)
	50-59 years old	1 (5.6%)
	60-69 years old	4 (22.2%)
	70-79 years old	3 (16.7%)
	80-89 years old	1 (5.6%)
	90-99 years old	1 (5.6%)
Sex	Male	6 (33.3%)
	Female	12 (66.7%)
Marital statuses	Married	9 (50%)

	Single or unmarried	1 (5.6%)
	Widowed or widower	8 (44.4%)

**Note:** The total number of respondents was 18.

Meanwhile, the demographic characteristics of the participants in the quantitative results, as presented in Table 2, show that a total of 160 respondents were included in the study. The largest segment of this group fell within the age range of 35-60 years (45.6%). The majority were female (66.9%), while the ethnic background of the majority of the participants was Sundanese (37.5%). A significant proportion of participants identified as Islam (69.4%).

**Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Quantitative Participants**

Characteristic	Categories	Number (percent)
Age	18-35 years old	67 (41.9%)
	35-60 years old	73 (45.6%)
	>60 years old	20 (12.5%)
Sex	Male	53 (33.1%)
	Female	107 (66.9%)
Religion	Islam	111 (69.4%)
	Protestant/Catholic	44 (27.5%)
	Buddha	5 (3.1%)
Ethnic	Javanese	52 (32.5%)
	Sundanese	60 (37.5%)
	Others	48 (30.0%)

**Note:** The total number of respondents was 160.

### *Perception of Good Death*

The concept of a 'good death' can vary due to differences in the interpretation of death, which can be influenced by expectations, values, and other cultural factors ("Authors", 2024). This process of meaning-making shapes our understanding of what constitutes a 'good death' and a 'bad death' (Silverman et al., 2021). For example, perceptions of a good death could be influenced by religious factors, as religion provides a framework that binds society together and offers guidance about life and the afterlife (Walter, 2003). Despite the variability in interpretations, there are two essential similarities that emerge: a good death is generally seen as a gift; while a bad death is perceived as a punishment for one's actions during their lifetime. This belief in the phenomenon of a good death leads some people to welcome and celebrate it (San Filippo, 2006). Traditions such as funeral ceremonies and grieving practices are integral to commemorating someone's death, rooted in the belief that death is determined by God and that those who pass away transition to an eternal life by God's side ("Authors", 2024).

At least, there are various interpretations, such as death being accepted in the Islamic worldview or viewed as signs of a good ending to someone's lifetime, referred to as 'husn al-khatimah', which involves having all sins forgiven and acts of worship acknowledged (Nisa et al., 2021; Seise, 2021). As is the case with passing away while engaged in acts of worship. In the Islamic worldview, a good death is considered the highest level of death because a person is no longer questioned by the angels in the grave. This signifies the fulfillment of their good deeds during their lifetime. In the Islamic worldview, some aspects considered as forms of a good death include reciting the 'shahadah', the presence of a companion who continuously reads chapters of the Qur'an, passing away facing the Qibla or Mecca, and passing away at a sacred or holy time such as on Friday (Flaskerud & Lesser, 2017).

The form of a good death can also be shaped by various cultural factors. Different societies hold distinct beliefs and customs regarding death or end of life approaches, which can greatly influence their interpretation of what constitutes a good death or dignified passing. For instance, some cultures place

significant emphasis on familial involvement during the dying process and consider it an essential element of a good death; therefore, dying alone without family presence and involvement could be perceived as part of a bad death (“Authors”, 2022). In such societies, the presence of family members, the saying of farewells, and the involvement of loved ones in the care of the dying person are seen as essential aspects of a death that aligns with their cultural values. Another example is when the death of an older adult does not cause trouble for their children, thus avoiding their suffering or burden during this difficult time. This can be understood in terms of both financial and social aspects (Tayeb et al., 2010). This is directly related to the way older adults typically live with their children in the same household, relying on them for their daily needs. This pattern of dependency can lead to fears of being abandoned by their children in old age. Thus, facing death alone in old age can be understood as a form of a bad death (“Authors”, 2024).

In addition, the concept of a good death can also be understood as a process that occurs gradually or slowly. In this context, “gradual” is understood as not sudden or abrupt, which generally occurs due to known chronic diseases, such as cancer, dementia, and others (Walter, 2003). Therefore, a sudden death is considered painful, both physically and emotionally. In contrast, a more gradual process provides the opportunity for individuals and their families to prepare emotionally and practically for the inevitable outcome. The concept of a gradual death is deeply connected with the desire for closure, the opportunity to say proper goodbyes, address any unresolved issues and wishes, and make arrangements that align with their values and preferences. Meanwhile, the presence of the family in saying proper goodbyes reflects the existence of strong social support and affection in the individual’s final moments and emphasizes that the occurrence of death can be widely accepted by the family (“Authors”, 2024).

The phenomenon and experience of death do not only involve the individual and their family; it also includes the community and neighbors, particularly in terms of post-death ceremonies (Gafaar et al., 2020). If an individual has not received a positive impression within the community through acts of kindness and assistance, the community may be not as inclined to offer help and participate in preparing post-death ceremonies. Some applications of these post-death ceremonies can be seen in traditions such as ‘kenduri’, ‘tahlil’, or other similar traditions that are commonly practiced in Southeast Asian countries, particularly in Indonesia (“Authors”, 2024; Seise, 2021). These traditions are intended as a form of commitment to honor the deceased.

In contrast, a ‘bad death’ or in the Islamic worldview term as ‘su al-khatimah’ is understood in several ways. Firstly, it is seen as a death that occurred unwillingly or late in carrying out worship during one’s lifetime. Secondly, it results from living a life without self-respect, causing the individual to feel unprepared and realizing that they have not done much good during their life. Additionally, a bad death is one where the individual does not remember their faith or God when facing death (Seise, 2021). It can also encompass deaths resulting from sinful actions, suicide, or bad behavior shortly before death. Lastly, a bad death includes deaths that are both physically and causally painful, including those attributed to supernatural or magical causes such as black magic (Rassool, 2020).

#### *Perception of Good Death on Older Adults in Cianjur*

In their pursuit of a ‘good death’, closely tied to their religious beliefs and practices, the older adults in Cianjur diligently prepare themselves by strengthening their faith and accumulating good deeds. Consequently, older adults in Cianjur dedicate a significant amount of their time in their later years to actively engage in religious activities, such as reciting the Quran, ‘dhikr’, daily prayers, fasting, and participating in religious gatherings at Mosques or Madrasas. Through these actions, they aspire to approach God in a state of pleasing rather not detested, firmly believing that their lifelong good deeds will be acknowledged by God and leading to a good death itself. This behavior can be traced back to the Islamic worldview (Seise, 2021), where death is considered, a transitional stage leading to another life, known as the realm in-between in the grave or the ‘barzakh realm’. In this perspective, before their earthly existence, every human being is believed to reside in the soul world or the ‘arwah realm’. It is only after passing through this intermediate world that God will raise all humans from their graves on the Day of Judgment. At that time, they will be sorted based on their deeds, determining whether they will enter heaven or hell as the final destination in the journey of life. It is a fundamental belief that every human being possesses a

spiritual essence, and life on Earth serves as a test ordained by God. This test evaluates whether humans become consumed and attached to the physical aspects of existence and forget to maintain a continuous connection with God (Seise, 2021).

“I often visit the mosque and read the Quran at home. All good deeds serve as preparation, yes, for our provisions in the afterlife... I feel it is very important to maintain a good relationship with God in order to pass away peacefully [good death].” (Older Adult 1, 70 years old, man)

“As I grow older, I know I must constantly improve my faith and deeds, so that when my time comes, I will not be afraid. I want my death to be peaceful, and I believe the key is to continue doing good, even in old age.” (Caretaker 1, 50 years old, women)

Furthermore, the commitment to spiritual preparation is complemented by post-death rituals designed to honor and pray for the deceased, seeking relief and forgiveness for their sins. This ritual includes a recitation activity called ‘tahlil’ which is carried out over several days, as well as a commemoration one year after the death known as ‘haul’. During the tahlil process, family members and other guests gather to recite and read Surah Yasin together. Surah Yasin is regarded as the heart of the Quran, and it is believed that reading Surah Yasin’s verses is equivalent to reciting all the surahs in the Quran ten times (Seise, 2021). Additionally, there is a hadith that suggests Surah Yasin can be read and dedicated to the deceased, during visits to graves, or when praying for the sick (Seise, 2021). In the Indonesian Islamic tradition, it is customary to read Surah Yasin every Friday night, to offer prayers for the deceased’s family and to seek healing for those who are unwell.

**Table 3. Characteristics of Good Deaths**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Number (percent)</b>
Death that occurs from natural causes (not due to black magic, witchcraft, etc.)	134 (83.8%)
Death that results from having an alliance with supernatural beings (pesugihan, agreements, etc.)	46 (28.7%)
Death that has carried out the death ritual procession according to local customs (animal slaughter, sacrifice, etc.)	68 (42.5%)
Death that is celebrated/prayed for after the burial procession according to existing customs (kenduri, tahlil, etc.)	132 (82.5%)
Death with a good relationship with extended family (lineage, family, etc.)	144 (90%)
Death with respect/elderly by the extended family (lineage, family, etc.)	136 (85.0%)
Death with being well-known in the community	140 (87.5%)
Death with faith in God (religious)	148 (92.5%)
Death in a state of prayer/worship	132 (82.5%)
Death after having previously confessed sins	109 (68.1%)
Death after receiving the sacrament/final prayer	109 (68.1%)
Death that occurs without extreme pain (the dying process is not painful, no shortness of breath, convulsions, etc.)	132 (82.5%)

Death is not a disgrace/against religion (suicide, etc.)	127 (79.4%)
Death with assets/savings that can be inherited	117 (73.1%)
Death who has prepared the distribution of inheritance/will	112 (70%)
Death does not leave a burden/debt on children/family	143 (89.4%)
Death who has achieved their dreams/aspirations	125 (78.1%)
Death who has successfully financed their children's education to graduation	137 (85.6%)
Death while maintaining a positive relationship with children/family (no unresolved issues/conflicts, etc.)	143 (89.4%)
Death while maintaining a positive relationship with the community (no unresolved issues/conflicts, etc.)	142 (88.8%)
Death that has married off their all children during their lifetime	128 (80%)
Death who has already had grandchildren during their lifetime	119 (74.4%)
Death occurring while surrounded by children/grandchildren	136 (85%)
Death occurring at home (not in a hospital, health center, etc.)	99 (61.9%)

**Note:** The total number of respondents was 160.

Additionally, another perspective on the concept of a good death involves the notion that the older adults should not be a burden to their children, rooted in the assumption related to ageism (Kang & Kim, 2022). There's a prevailing belief that older adults' individuals may only be seen as burdens to the families who care for them. Naturally, as they age, they wish to alleviate the burdens carried by their families, ensuring that those who provide care for them do not harbor resentment or abandonment in their old age. As a result, maintaining positive relationships with their children and extended family members is vital for older adults. Consequently, making the presence and support of the family hold great significance in interpreting a good death among the older adults in Cianjur. In addition to the deeply rooted Sundanese tradition that places importance on the family's function and role, the family's presence during the older adults' final moments and at the time of their passing is regarded as a positive sign. This aligns with quantitative results (see Table 3.), with 89.4% of participants agreeing that to ensure a good death, older adults must have and maintain positive or good relationships with their families. This signifies that the older adults are, to some extent, cherished by their family members. In their last moments, the family is there, accompanying them, and guiding them in reciting the profession of faith or 'shahadah' (Seise, 2021). This act symbolizes their continued remembrance of God and the religion they hold dear until the end of their journey. However, this would be different if the older adults have a negative or bad relationship with their families, as in such cases, it is likely that many of their children, grandchildren, or relatives won't be present to accompany them during their final moments.

"I do not want to burden my children [it the later years]; I want them to remain calm and happy... Having a supportive family, who comes when I need them is very important to me." (Older Adult 2, 77 years old, man)

"For me, I always feel happy when the children are nearby, as they consistently provide me with support... For me, the most important thing is to maintain a good relationship with both the children and family, it will mean a lot in the end." (Older Adult 3, 63 years old, women)

Meanwhile, the perspective on a good death and its correlation with doing good deeds can be understood as a viewpoint shaped by moral and religious teachings that stress the importance of selflessness and compassion (Seise, 2021). This viewpoint sees a good death as the culmination of a life well-lived-in service to others, reflecting the core values of humility and generosity. Individuals who engage in lifelong good deeds are often remembered for their positive impact on their communities, and their legacy resonates long after their passing. From a moral and religious standpoint, the concept of a good death is intricately linked to one's moral and ethical conduct throughout their life. Acts of kindness, charity, and assistance to those in need are seen as a direct manifestation of these teachings. The belief is that a life devoted to helping others is a life lived in alignment with higher principles and moral imperatives. This aligns with quantitative results (see Table 3.), with 88.8% of participants agreeing to that a good death can also be achieved if older adults maintain good relationships with their community or neighbors. A good death is associated with individuals who, during their lifetime, performed acts of kindness and helped others, without exhibiting stinginess or arrogance, or by consistently engaging in lifelong good deeds. The legacy of such lifelong good deeds can profoundly influence how a person is remembered and celebrated as they approach the end of their life, not only within their family but also within their community. These acts of goodwill create a positive impact on the lives of those around them and contribute to a sense of fulfillment and purpose in their final moments.

Based on this, the community recognizes and values the contributions of those who have engaged in lifelong good deeds, and as a result, they are not only inclined to remember and revere such individuals but are also more willing to participate in and support post-death ceremonies. The community comes together to honor and celebrate the life of someone who has lived in accordance with these values, reinforcing the idea that the impact of their good deeds lives on through the collective memory and actions of the community. In this context, a good death is not solely an individual experience but also a communal one, highlighting the significance of one's contributions to society.

Another aspect of the interpretation of a good death for older adults in Cianjur involves the idea that death should occur gradually or as a slow process. This aligns with the quantitative result (see Table 3.), where 82.5% of participants agreed that a good death only happens if those who are dying do not experience excruciating or painful pain, generally do not feel short of breath, or have convulsions. It's understandable that sudden and rapid deaths are emotionally painful for both the older adults and their families. Therefore, a death that unfolds slowly is often seen as a positive sign. As explained in a study by Seise, the presence of family members who accompany and witness the gradual process of death is immensely comforting for both the departing individual and their loved ones (Seise, 2021). Families take great care to ensure the accuracy of the moment of passing, sometimes using a mirror to check for signs of life, such as condensation under the nose. If there is still steam, it indicates that the person is in the moment of taking their last breath or 'sakaratul maut'. This form of confirmation provides reassurance that the person's soul has peacefully departed from their body, alleviating any concerns for the family during these final moments.

"When I fell and was unable to walk, it was incredibly challenging. However, I knew I needed to be strong to keep on living.. If I could pass away without pain, surrounded by my family, that would be a *good end* [good death]." (Older Adult 4, 71 years old, women)

"A slow death is better. If death occurs suddenly, it can be difficult for everyone involved. However, when it comes gradually, we have the opportunity to prepare ourselves, making it easier to accept." (Caretaker 1, 50 years old, women)

Conversely, the notion of a 'bad death' among the older adults in Cianjur is intimately connected to the reluctance to engage in worship and neglecting to perform good deeds throughout their lives. It is believed that those who have been negligent in their religious practices and have failed to accumulate good deeds may experience extreme agony as they approach the moment of their last breath. This agony may manifest as severe pain or even rattling sounds, making it incredibly challenging for them to recite the profession of faith due to the overwhelming suffering they endure (Seise, 2021). The struggle in recalling their faith or God during the process is considered a sign of a 'bad death' owing to their inability to remember their spiritual beliefs when facing the end of life. This perspective aligns with quantitative research findings (see



Table 3.), with 92.5% of participants agreeing to a good death can only be achieved if they die while firmly holding on to their faith in God or maintaining their religious convictions. It illustrates the significance of religious beliefs in shaping the perspectives of a ‘good death’ and a ‘bad death’ in Cianjur. In this society, the two concepts are inseparable, and the fear of a ‘bad death’ serves as a strong motivator for individuals to maintain their religious commitments and lead virtuous lives throughout their aging process. This connection between religious faith and the quality of one’s death highlights the cultural and spiritual dimensions that influence end of life experiences.

Furthermore, among the older adults in Cianjur, death attributed to black magic or ‘sühr’ as a consequence of forming alliances with jinn is regarded as a ‘bad death’. This perspective is deeply rooted in Islamic religious beliefs (Pramudyah & Amin, 2023), which firmly stated that it is impermissible for a human being to betray God and seek assistance or favors from entities other than God. Engaging in efforts to ally with jinn or practice black magic is viewed as an attempt to deceive God and request assistance from sources other than the divine, which is considered a contrary to Islamic teachings itself as ‘shirk’ behavior. Shirk entails various actions, such as attributing partners to Allah, invoking entities besides God, depending on beings other than Allah, unquestioningly following authorities other than Allah, and seeking assistance or shelter from sources other than Allah, whether they are living or deceased (Rassool, 2020). This religious doctrine, which is central to the belief system in Cianjur, holds that such actions are not only a betrayal of one’s faith but also a manifestation of arrogance and a rejection of God’s power and authority. This aligns with the quantitative results (see Table 3.), with 83.8% of participants agreed that a good death is a natural one, not caused by black magic; while only 28.7% of participants believe it does not result from attempts to make contracts with jinn through ‘Pesugihan’. It’s important to note that in certain cultures and religions, black magic holds a significant place in their belief systems. What we are trying to do is not question the legitimacy of these black magic beliefs. Instead, we acknowledge that in societies where people hold strong beliefs in supernatural forces, denying the existence of such forces could be equivalent to rejecting reality. From an Islamic perspective, denying this is equivalent to disregarding the ultimate truth as confirmed by the Qur’an and Hadith, which testifies to the reality and validity of this supernatural phenomenon (Rassool, 2020).

“If you do not live your life properly and neglect your duties to God, death can be painful. I have witnessed others who were unable to recite the shahadah due to their wrongdoings... No one should engage in black magic, as it is contrary to God’s will. Those who die from such practices are considered to have led a bad life, and their death is seen as a form of punishment.” (Caretaker 1, 50 years old, women)

Therefore, this perspective leads us to the idea that a bad death in Cianjur is not only determined by the circumstances of death itself, but also by the ethical and moral choices made during one’s lifetime. It describes the interconnection between religious beliefs, ethical behavior, and the quality of death in this cultural context, where individuals try to avoid practices that contradict their faith, as they believe such actions could lead to a bad death and spiritual consequences. The concept of a bad death, therefore, is not limited to the physical realm but extends deeply into the realms of morality and spirituality, making it increasingly complex.

#### *Important Factors of Religion and Culture for Older Adults in Cianjur*

In the context of discussions about death, religious activities and traditions play a significant role, especially in interpreting for a good death. Achieving a good death is contingent on individuals actively seeking good deeds, both in their social interactions and spiritual life. On a positive note, the profound interconnection between religion and culture in Cianjur ensures that there is no sense of injustice when it comes to honoring the older adults at the end of their lives. It is a guarantee that all their needs will be met with support from both their families and the broader community. This social and spiritual safety net provides comfort and reassurance to the older adults and their families during the often challenging and emotionally charged period of approaching death.

“The community supports one another, particularly during times of loss, by providing assistance to families to ensure that everything is in order, such as during a funeral. This sense of community is essential in ensuring that no one is left alone during difficult times.” (Older Adult 4, 71 years old, women)

“Death is not only a personal matter but a communal responsibility. We believe that when someone passes away, their needs and rituals should be honored by the whole community, ensuring that no family is left to face the financial burden of these rituals alone.” (Caretaker 1, 50 years old, women)

Following the passing of an older adults individual, the responsibility for bathing the deceased falls upon their children, often assisted by a knowledgeable expert in the ritual of corpse preparation. This comprehensive process encompasses gathering materials for bathing, providing burial attire, conducting funeral prayers, and overseeing the burial site. Importantly, this entire process is executed without placing any financial burdens on the family. The community comes together to ensure that the rituals are performed with dignity and respect, reflecting the deep respect for those who have passed away.

“When a family member passes away, the community does not hesitate to help. People come together to handle the funeral arrangements, such as washing the body and preparing everything needed for the burial. This is how the community’s shows respect for the deceased.” (Older Adult 2, 77 years old, man)

Furthermore, the community plays a crucial role in supporting the bereaved family during these challenging times. Neighbors establish their own support networks to ease the financial burdens on the grieving family. This support extends beyond covering expenses related to shrouds and burial arrangements; it also includes expressions of condolences which known as ‘cinta mayit’. In the concept of ‘cinta mayit’, the community is required to contribute 10 thousand rupiah (IDR) or 0.64 dollar (USD) per month for each household, which is then used to procure funeral necessities, including cotton and burial cloths, funding the use and upkeep of Mosques facilities for funeral services, and the burial of the deceased—from body-washing, being prayed, and burial at the cemetery. If they cannot afford to donate money, they can contribute practical items such as rice, tea, coffee, cooking oil, etc. These acts of solidarity emphasized the community’s commitment to supporting one another during times of loss as they visit the homes of grieving families. This tradition reinforces the belief that the duty of the living is to assist the deceased and alleviate their burdens to the greatest extent possible. The tradition of ‘cinta mayit’ is practiced in the village, where it is given to all individuals who pass away, irrespective of their family’s wealth. Thus, most older adults feel supported by the existence of this bereavement program, if they were to pass away, their surviving family members would not need to worry about making burial arrangements. All these fees are managed by the neighborhood unit or ‘RT’.

“The tradition of ‘cinta mayit’ assists with any other arrangement and funeral expenses. Community members contribute money and other items to ease the financial burden, thereby relieving the grieving family of economic stress.” (Older Adult 3, 63 years old, women)

“In our village, when someone passes away, everyone contributes. We all support one another, whether it’s money or rice. This practice ensures that no one is left with a burden after losing a loved one.” (Caretaker 2, 33 years old, man)

In addition to the concept of ‘cinta mayit’ for those who have passed away, the process of paying final respects to the deceased also involves a series of traditions, usually in the form of group prayers or ‘tahlil’. These customs are generally observed for a consecutive period of 7 days. However, there is a slight variation in how these 7 days are determined. Some believe that the day the individual passes away should be included, while others do not count it. Generally, the tahlil custom is observed for up to 7 days, with variations allowed based on the family’s circumstances. If the family wishes to continue beyond 7 days, they can choose to perform group prayers together on the 40th day after the death, then on the 100th day, and in the subsequent years on the exact date of the death or ‘tepung pupus’ (the anniversary of the day of death). This aligns with the quantitative result (see **Table 3.**), that 82.5% of participants agreed that a death is considered a good death if the family has celebrated or prayed for after the burial procession following local customs, such as ‘tahlil’ or ‘kenduri’. While it’s important to note that Islamic teachings do not impose

an obligation to perform recitations or tahlil for the deceased (Seise, 2021). However, the synergy between religion and culture has led to a fresh perspective wherein grieving is not solely the concern of the family but extends to the broader community. Consequently, all members of the community collaborate in offering prayers for the peaceful transition of the departed soul to the God presence, aspiring for their eternal abode in heaven. This collective effort serves as a symbol reaffirming that challenges can be overcome together within the faith and culture. In this context, the idea of grieving transcends familial boundaries and becomes a communal responsibility.

“After a person passes away, prayers are held, such as tahlil for seven days. It is the community’s way of ensuring that the deceased is remembered and to address the spiritual needs of the family.” (Older Adult 1, 70 years old, man)

“In our village, when someone dies, we remember the good things they did. Their kindness lives on in our hearts. We make sure to attend the tahlil, because it’s our way of showing respect and gratitude for their life.” (Caretaker 2, 33 years old, man)

However, despite all of that, the community in this study faces economic challenges, which can render final acts of respect, such as tahlil, a significant financial burden on the grieving family. The family, as part of the grieving process, is tasked with covering the expenses associated with hosting guests who gather for prayers. These expenses encompass the costs of food, beverages, cigarettes, and coffee, which, in accordance with local customs, are considered essential. Even though from a religious perspective, the provision of food for guests is viewed as an act of charity or ‘sedeqah’ in the name of the deceased, this practice can put a considerable financial burden on the grieving family. The belief that these acts of kindness contribute to good deeds and will reach the deceased in the form of spiritual light in the grave and illuminating their path (Seise, 2021), emphasize the importance of these traditions in the community. However, it also highlights the delicate balance between cultural and religious practices and economic realities. This financial aspect adds another layer to the cultural and religious dynamics surrounding death in Cianjur. On one hand, it reflects the community’s commitment to maintaining the religious and cultural traditions of honoring the deceased, driven by the deep respect and love for the deceased. On the other hand, it highlights the economic strains that some families may face in fulfilling these obligations, potentially leading to financial stress during an already emotionally challenging time.

Meanwhile, the community’s tradition dictates that neighbors and the community should contribute ‘takziah’ as a condolence offering in the form of monetary contributions, groceries, or join together to prepare everything needed. This collective effort aims to alleviate the financial burden on the grieving family, a practice deeply rooted in their cultural and religious values (Seise, 2021). However, it is essential to recognize that the cumulative costs associated with tahlil can be substantial, often accumulating up to tens of millions of rupiah (IDR), or approximately 636 dollars (USD), or even more, based on interviews conducted in this study. While the assistance provided by the community through takziah is a meaningful gesture and demonstrates the community’s willingness to support grieving families, it may not always adequately alleviate the economic strain experienced by the family. The financial burden can still be quite significant, particularly for families experiencing economic challenges or with low socioeconomic status.

This raises important questions about the effectiveness of the communal support system in alleviating financial stress. While the intention is to help and show solidarity with the bereaved, there’s a risk that the practice may inadvertently place a burden on others in the community. It becomes a matter of great importance to address these financial disparities and to consider how to balance the tradition of offering support with the practical realities faced by community members. In essence, the discussion surrounding the financial aspects of community support during times of grief emphasizes the need for a nuanced and sensitive approach. It calls for a deeper understanding of the economic challenges faced by some members of the community and thoughtful consideration of how to ensure that the tradition of offering charitable support remains inclusive, respectful, and genuinely beneficial for all, without imposing undue financial strain on those who are already vulnerable. This aspect adds complexity to the community’s collective response to death, highlighting the importance of empathy, adaptability, and equity in the face of economic disparities.

## Conclusion

In Cianjur, the concept of end of life and its practices are not only about fulfilling religious duties but also about manifesting the collective sense of duty and love for the departed. This cultural and religious approach to death highlights the interconnectedness of the community, where everyone has a role in ensuring a smooth and honorable transition from life to the afterlife. Also, it illustrates how the concept of a ‘good death’ goes beyond the individual and extends to the entire community’s commitment to uphold religious and cultural values during the end of someone’s lifetime. This profound integration can be traced back to religious principles, particularly within the Islamic faith, which played an important role in shaping these practices. It’s important to reconsider that what we observe in Cianjur is not merely a product of Islamic influence—not merely a matter of religion coexisting with culture—but rather a profound reinterpretation of cultural norms under the influence of Islamic beliefs. The Cianjur case illustrates that these two aspects—religion and culture—are inseparable, interconnected, and mutually reinforcing. The synergy between religion and culture in Cianjur represents a unique and harmonious coexistence where religious beliefs have not diminished cultural traditions but have been integrated into them. In essence, the community’s cultural practices and religious beliefs have become connected to form a distinct approach to end of life rituals, fostering a strong sense of unity and shared responsibility among the community members.

Apart from that, based on this research, we can understand that religious and cultural frameworks not only offer comfort, but also establish a moral compass for navigating the complexities of life and death. Although practices and traditions often serve as a source of comfort and reassurance, allowing individuals to find meaning and purpose in their final moments. These practices influence expectations related to family involvement, decision-making processes, and the expression of grief, shaping the ideal end of life. A collaborative approach to caring for older adults during their final stages is emphasized, fostering a sense of community and support. However, individual interpretations of a good death can vary based on personal beliefs and values, and the study conducted was limited to the scope of the Cianjur community in West Java, Indonesia, which is predominantly influenced by Islam.

## Acknowledgement

We would also like to acknowledge the PHC staffs, local government (Pemda) and all participants in this study for their invaluable contributions. We would also like to acknowledge Fajar Nurcahyo, the research assistant who collaborated with the lead author in preparing the data from the Cianjur, Indonesia location.

## Funding

This research received no external funding.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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