

# Activities, Adaptation & Aging

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ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: [www.tandfonline.com/journals/waaa20](http://www.tandfonline.com/journals/waaa20)

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To cite this article: Fitrina M. Kusumaningrum, Fatwa S. T. Dewi, Heny S. Pangastuti & Polly Yeung (02 Apr 2025): Successful Aging in Indonesia: The Journey Toward Expectations and Serenity, *Activities, Adaptation & Aging*, DOI: [10.1080/01924788.2025.2483589](https://doi.org/10.1080/01924788.2025.2483589)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01924788.2025.2483589>



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Published online: 02 Apr 2025.



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# Successful Aging in Indonesia: The Journey Toward Expectations and Serenity

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## ABSTRACT

Development of aging policies and activities needs perspective from older adults to ensure the inclusion of older adults' values and needs. The purpose of this study is to investigate the perspective on and experience in achieving successful aging from older adults who live in the community in Sleman Regency, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. A qualitative study using a phenomenological approach was employed to obtain the data from 21 community-dwelling older adults aged 60+ years-old and to analyze the data using Colaizzi's method of phenomenological data analysis. The analysis concludes that successful aging is a process of attaining serenity by managing expectations with adjustment, acceptance, and gratitude. The expectations include the autonomy and health, fulfillment of necessities, family attainments and relationship, and harmonious social relationship. Successful aging programs should support older adults' process in achieving expectations and improve their capacity to adapt and experience serenity as they age.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 24 November 2023  
Accepted 19 March 2025

## KEYWORDS

Successful aging; aging well; older adults; acceptance; gratefulness

## Introduction

Indonesia is a developing country in Southeast Asia that has a growing population of older adults. In 2024, older adults in Indonesia accounted for 12% of the total population and were predicted to increase to around 20% in 2045 (BPS-Statistics of Indonesia, 2024). To ensure that older adults can experience well-being and quality of life, older adults' perspectives should be taken into account in the development of policies and practice. However, a recent review by Lestari et al. (2021) identified that, although there is an

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increase of aging policies in some regions in Indonesia, these policies are influenced by the prevailing discourse of successful aging that characterizes successful agers as those who are healthy and active. This biomedical approach may set unrealistic standards for older adults in achieving well-being and disregard older adults' agency and capacity in achieving successful aging.

To bridge these discrepancies, older adults' perspectives in defining well-being and successful aging should be considered. However, there are limited studies that explored successful aging from older adults' perspectives in Indonesia. Several studies (Amalda et al., 2024; Oktaviani et al., 2022) explored successful aging using biomedical perspectives by identifying successful agers as older adults who have no chronic diseases and have active engagement with life. Several studies attempted to identify older adults' perspectives but did not explore the process that older adults experienced in aging well (Soetjningsih et al., 2019; Ulfa et al., 2019).

This study aims to explore older adults' perspectives regarding successful aging and how older adults adapt and achieve successful aging in Sleman Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, a province with the highest proportion of older adults in Indonesia. This study invites older adults who live in the community to provide a description of successful aging perceived by community-dwelling older adults.

### ***Theoretical framework***

Successful aging is a concept which was formerly developed by Havighurst (1961) to highlight a condition in which individuals experience satisfaction and happiness. After its conception in 1961, various concepts have followed to define aging well, such as active aging and healthy aging. While successful aging focuses on older adults' ability to achieve aging well, active aging and healthy aging concepts are more inclined to the role of environment and social relationships in shaping aging experiences (Rudnicka et al., 2020; World Health Organization, 2012). Therefore, this study focused on the concept of successful aging which has been further developed to incorporate various perspectives and may incorporate a more holistic view of aging well.

Successful aging is one of the aging well concepts that has evolved over time. From the Havighurst concept, Rowe and Kahn (1997) developed successful aging further by identifying successful aging as the condition where older adults experience low probability of disease and disabilities, good cognitive and physical function, and active engagement with life, described as having good social relations and engaging in productive activities. Using these perspectives, Rowe and Kahn divide the condition into "normal aging," where older adults may experience challenges regarding their successful aging condition, and "successful aging" to describe otherwise. Although this perspective is dominantly used to identify successful aging, this approach may marginalize

older adults who experience health and physical challenges (Liang & Luo, 2012; Stephens et al., 2015). In addition, this approach is mainly focused on identifying successful aging from the biomedical aspect, which may disregard the importance of the psycho-social aspect of successful aging.

Further studies then tried to develop an alternative definition of successful aging. Previous reviews (Kusumastuti et al., 2016; Zamudio-Rodríguez et al., 2021) identify other perspectives in exploring successful aging: the psychosocial perspectives and lay person's perspective. The psychosocial perspectives explore and define successful aging through various psychosocial indicators, such as quality of life, life satisfaction, and subjective well-being, among others. This perspective encourages a broader approach in understanding successful aging and becomes the base of a more holistic approach that acknowledges the role of life-course experience and social environment for successful aging. Although this approach is more applicable, it may also disregard older adults' agency to define successful aging, as this approach is designed to measure older adults' condition based on predetermined criteria that may be more holistic than biomedical approaches.

Zamudio-Rodríguez et al. (2021) identify that defining successful aging is challenging as the definition has evolved over time and incorporates a large amount of indicator. To bridge this challenge, the objective perspective, either from biomedical or psycho-social perspectives, should be complemented by older adults' perspective in viewing successful aging. The main approach to explore older adults' perspective of successful aging is by exploring how older adults define successful aging (Kusumastuti et al., 2016). This approach provides a more psychosocial nuance in successful aging definition, but it may not be enough to support older adults' needs because of the more diverse standards (Baltes & Baltes, 2017; Martinson & Berridge, 2015). The other approach is by exploring the maintenance and adaptation process throughout the life course. Grounded from Baltes and Baltes' (1990) study, this approach identified successful aging as the successful process in adaptation and achievement of older adults' goals (Kusumastuti et al., 2016). Studies using this perspective showed the important role of older adults' adaptation skills in successful aging, for example, resilience (Trică et al., 2024), mindfulness, and self-compassion (Soldá de Souza et al., 2024).

### **Literature review**

Various studies have explored older adults' definitions of successful aging and showed that older adults' definition of successful aging is culturally different. For example, in North America, older adults value positive attitude, while in the Asian and Oceanic regions, older adults value social engagement. However, there is limited evidence from Asia, which calls for further explorations, especially with regard to the

cultural context (Reich et al., 2020). In addition, studies exploring older adults' adaptation process of successful aging are also limited. Study by Nimrod and Ben-Shem (2015) found that the process of achieving successful aging starts at a younger age by building a stable environment, coping with various challenges and accepting changes and losses. Another study in Sweden by Hörder et al. (2013) identified that older adults viewed that successful aging is related to self-respect and achieved by maintaining activity with the outside world and keeping their mind from their own vulnerability.

Studies regarding older adults' perspectives in several regions of Asia (Amin, 2017; Detthippornpong et al., 2021; Halaweh et al., 2015) showed that older adults value familial relationships and financial security in viewing successful aging. In addition, the feeling of being a burden was also highlighted as a condition that older adults want to avoid. Studies by Chen et al. (2020) in Shanghai and Detthippornpong et al. (2021) in Thailand showed the importance of self-reliance to avoid this condition. These results highlighted the challenges that older adults may experience while living in communities and trying to rely on their own without burdening their social network.

In Indonesia, there are minimal studies which explore older adults' experience on successful aging. An early study of successful aging in Indonesia (Lamb & Myers, 1999) measured successful aging using independence in daily activities as the indicator. The study found that unskilled workers were more likely to experience successful aging than professional workers, which may highlight the role of sociodemographic aspects in successful aging in Indonesia. Longitudinal ethnography studies also found the important role of family in maintaining older adults' well-being (Hogervorst et al., 2021; Schroeder-Butterfill & Marianti, 2006). Studies by Rahmawati & Saidiyah (2016) and Soetjningsih et al. (2019) identified that older adults value their achievement in defining successful aging, which is not always about health. Further exploration should be conducted to explore older adults' perspectives, which cover not only about how older adults define successful aging but also older adults' strategies to achieve successful aging.

The majority of the Indonesian population are Muslims, who view that families are responsible to take care of older adults. Indonesian culture, especially in Javanese ethnic groups, has collectivistic attitudes and high tolerance to power differences, which may cause the community to avoid conflict and disagreement (Suharnomo & Syahruramdhan, 2018). In viewing well-being, Indonesians also have a unique perspective which values spiritual aspects (Maulana et al., 2018). Exploration of successful aging in Indonesia may provide a culturally sensitive view of successful aging. The exploration of older adults' adaptation process may also shed some light on how older adults

cope with various challenges living in a developing country that experiences rapid demographic transition.

### ***Objectives and scope of study***

This study aimed to explore older adults' perspectives regarding the meaning and older adults' adaptation process in achieving successful aging. As this study explores older adults' perspectives regarding the meaning of successful aging, this study did not have a confined definition of successful aging. However, this study viewed successful aging as a condition where older adults can gain a meaningful experience while living in the community.

## **Methodology**

### ***Study design and setting***

This qualitative study used a descriptive phenomenological approach, which originated from Husserl philosophy to provide the essence and structure of an experience through the process of bracketing the preconception (Giorgi et al., 2017). This approach can answer two major research questions: 1) How do older adults define successful aging? and 2) What are older adults' experiences in adapting and realizing successful aging?

We conducted the study in Sleman Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, from August 2019 to March 2020. Yogyakarta is a province that has the highest proportion of older adults in Indonesia (BPS-Statistics of Indonesia, 2021). As a special region, Yogyakarta is ruled by a sultanate (a monarch system) from the Islamic Mataram kingdom (Nugroho et al., 2021); thus, the people, especially the older adults, still adhere to Javanese cultures and traditions. These communities are representing a way of life that prioritizes a peaceful life through a respectful social relationship and humble and calm manners (Irawanto et al., 2011). Sleman Regency is an administrative region situated at the base of Mount Merapi, an active volcano in Java Island. In 2021, about 35% of the households in Sleman Regency were at risk of poverty. Around 14% of the Sleman Regency population were older adults, with almost half of them (49.2%) were working (BPS-Statistics of Sleman Regency, 2022).

### ***Participants and selection of participants***

The study participants were community-dwelling older adults aged 60 years or older selected purposively following these criteria: 1) lawfully residing in Sleman Regency for at least 6 months, 2) living at home (not in an assisted

living home), and 3) independent or partially independent in activities of daily living (ADLs) (World Health Organization, 2006). These criteria were used to obtain various descriptions of experiences from the participants who lived in the community.

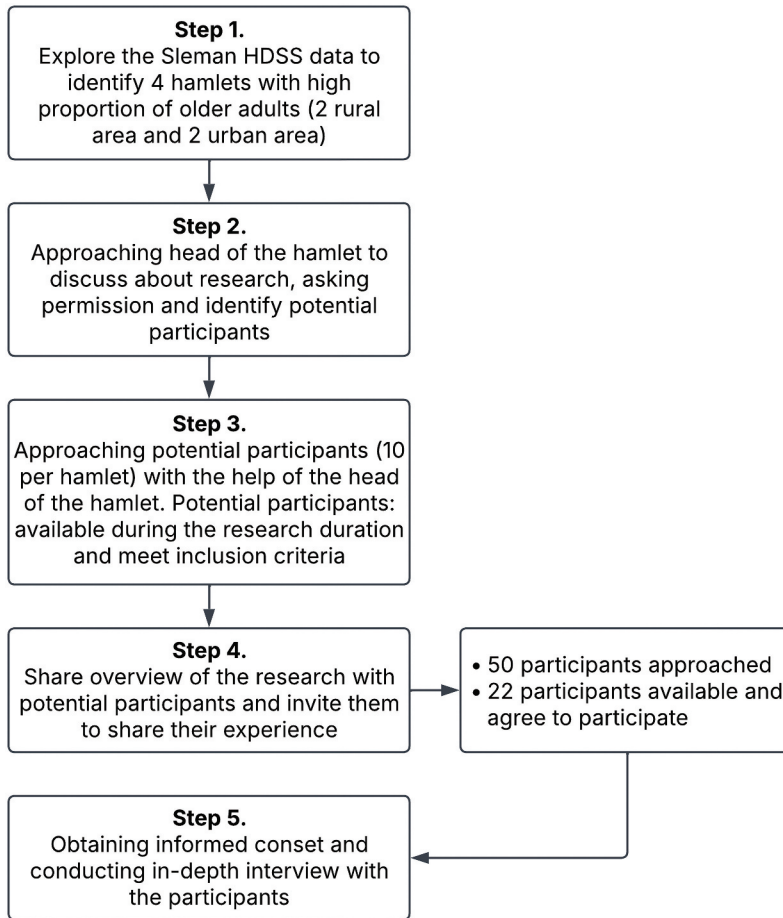
The selection process of the participants was conducted in several steps. First, we contacted the Sleman Health Demographic and Surveillance System (Sleman HDSS), a surveillance system developed by the Faculty of Medicine, Public Health and Nursing (FM-PHN), Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia (F. S. T. Dewi et al., 2017), to identify four hamlets in their study area with a high proportion of older adults (two in urban and two in rural area). Second, we approached the head of the hamlet to ask for older adults' condition in their area and the possibility to conduct research. From the four heads of hamlets that we approached, all provided permission to conduct research in their area.

Third, we discussed the aim and strategies to approach participants with the head of the hamlet. The head of hamlet then provided a list of potential participants in their area, and we tried to approach the participants with the help of the head of hamlet by visiting their house. Potential participants were those who were available during the time of the visit and met the inclusion criteria. Fourth, we shared the overview of the research to potential participants and invited them to participate in the research. We approached around 10 older adults in each hamlet and around 5 or 6 older adults were available and agreed to participate in the research. Initially, 22 older adults were invited, but only the data of 21 older adults were involved in the analysis because one older adult was fully dependent on ADLs (Figure 1).

### **Data collection**

The data were collected by a researcher and two assistants, who were experienced in qualitative research and native in Indonesian and Javanese language. We conducted an in-depth face-to-face interview using the key questions started from participant's perspective on successful aging followed by probing questions. Participants were invited to bring a support person to attend the interview if they wished, but none was needed. As the term "successful aging" is not widely used in Indonesia, this study used the term "aging well" to form the interview discussion. The average duration of each interview was 52 min. The demographic characteristics of the participants are given in Table 1.

We used a semi-structured in-depth interview guideline when conducting the interview. We started the interviews using the Indonesian language (Bahasa) and switched into Javanese if the participant was more comfortable to speak in



**Figure 1.** Diagram of the process in selecting participants.

**Table 1.** Study participants' characteristics.

No.	Characteristics	Groups	n	%
1.	Gender	Men	11	52.4
		Women	10	47.6
2.	Age	60–69	10	47.6
		70–79	6	28.6
		80+	5	23.8
3.	Occupation	Retired	8	38.1
		Labour/farmer	6	28.6
		Merchant/service	3	14.3
		Not working	4	19.0
4.	Living arrangement	Alone	1	4.8
		With husband/wife	5	23.8
		With children	8	38.1
		With children and husband/wife	7	33.3

Javanese. Data collected were recorded through field notes and audio recordings with the participants' permission. The data saturation was discussed between researchers and research assistants, by identifying whether there were new themes or information appearing in the latest data collection.

### ***Data analysis***

The phenomenological data analysis in this study used Colaizzi's method (Beck, 2019). The analysis process comprises several steps. First, the interviews were transcribed and read to identify the overall views of the experiences. Second, significant statements were extracted, and formulated meanings or codes were generated from the available significant statements. Formulated meanings were generated from significant statements by the researcher and research assistant independently. Third, the researcher and a research assistant conducted several meetings to discuss the suitable codes if some differences occurred. The discussions were held in regular meetings to ensure the analyses were in line with the study objectives. In total, around 221 formulated meanings were generated from 189 significant statements. Fourth, the formulated meanings were then grouped into sub-themes based on the research questions that this study tried to answer. Fifth, the subthemes were concluded into an overarching theme by identifying the potential contribution of each subtheme in describing and providing the structure of the meaning of successful aging.

The researchers were using OpenCode 4.03 to help the data organization (ICT Services and System Development and Department of Epidemiology and Global Health, University of Umeå, Sweden, 2015). Colaizzi's method involves the validation of the findings through participants' feedback. However, we omitted this step as this study was expected to provide a pure description of phenomena. Giorgi (2008) argued that because the analysis has gone through a phenomenological analysis, the validation should be done by the same process, which is mainly conducted by experts. Therefore, to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, we asked two reviewers from the social medicine and nursing background, and we kept an audit trail of the study process.

### ***Ethical considerations***

Before the data collection, the researchers visited the potential participants to inform the study objectives, procedure, risk, and benefit, and asked for written informed consent if they agreed to participate. This study had been approved by the Medical and Health Research Ethics Committee (MHREC), FM-PHN at Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia (KE/FK/0774/EC/2019) in July 2019.

## Findings

This study aimed to describe older adults' perspective regarding the meaning and older adults' experience in achieving successful aging. We used a descriptive phenomenology approach to answer the 2 main research questions on how older adults define successful aging and how older adults adapt to successful aging. The findings of each research question are presented below, followed by the description of an overarching theme to conclude participants' perspective regarding successful aging.

### *Older adults' perspectives of successful aging*

Participants in this study identified that successful aging is related to their various expectations, which include autonomy and health, fulfillment of necessities, family's attainments and relationship, and harmonious social relationship. These expectations are dynamic, as participants describe that they may have various expectations in their life. Once an expectation is fulfilled, then other expectations may arise. The subthemes that correspond to this research question include: 1) expectation and serenity; 2) autonomy and health; 3) fulfillment of necessities; 4) family's attainments and relationship; 5) harmonious social relationship. The results of these subthemes are presented below:

#### *Expectation and serenity*

Success is perceived by participants as the attainment of expectation, which varies between older adults. Some of those expectations are related to their autonomy and health, family's condition, or relationship with the community, as expressed by one of the participants:

Success, for me, is not viewed as having a lot of wealth, because that is relative [...] if I say 'successful,' it is like if I have a wish that my children could go to college, finish their study, have manners, useful in the community, at least that are achieved, it is successful, although modest (women, 70 years old)

Some participants explained that attaining these expectations made them experience a peaceful state of mind ("*ayem*," "*tentram*" or "*tenang*"). This state of serenity also became the aim for the process in achieving successful aging, which includes the practice of adjustment, acceptance, and gratitude.

I live with my family peacefully because I accept everything with content, without any complaints. Even for foods, drinks and everything, I never (complain). Daily necessities, praise be to God, I can reach, so I never feel worried (men, 80 years old)

The following subsections will describe various expectations that were mentioned by participants and the process to achieve these expectations and experience serenity.

### ***Autonomy and health***

Most of the participants mentioned their concern of being a burden for others, especially for their children. This concern became the basis of their views regarding autonomy and health for successful aging. Participants explained that by being independent and healthy, they did not always require assistance or care, which sometimes made them feel uncomfortable especially when the assistance or care was delivered in an unacceptable manner. Other participants also mentioned their expectation for a brief duration of illness and “easy” death so that they will not burden their family further.

I wish, when I am taken by the Almighty, it will be easy [...] I ask when I pray, for not having many illnesses. Do not let my children and grandchildren be burdened, I just asked for that, every time I pray (women, 76 years old)

The other reason that participants associated successful aging with autonomy and health was because, by being independent and healthy, someone can do and enjoy their activities. For some participants, these activities include working to provide for their daily necessities and fulfilling their religious obligations.

### ***Fulfilment of necessities***

Some participants credited the fulfillment of basic necessities, such as food and shelter, as part of successful aging. Participants explained that they were still trying to fulfill their own daily needs because they did not want to burden their children, as their children were also struggling with financial problems. Some participants also mentioned the importance of financial security as part of successful aging. The awareness that participants had financial security and basic necessities within their reach made them feel peaceful and adequate.

I feel like my life, have children, wife, house, pension funds, and have neighbours that respect each other, appreciate each other, is enough, what else do I want? (men, 73 years old)

### ***Family attainments and relationship***

Some participants explained that success in older adults is also related to their children’s attainments and conditions. These conditions include their children’s education, occupation, marital status, and manners or behavior in the community. These attainments are perceived as the results of their efforts in taking care of and educating their children.

Successful agers definitely can take care of children which are mandated to them, can get them to school, can educate, until they get a job, something like that [...] what else do we want, children, right, to success, if they are not successful, it is useless to become a human (men, 61 years old)

In addition, maintaining a good familial relationship is also perceived as a success. Some participants explained that having a good relationship with children, where they can feel their children's affections, made them happy and peaceful. Participants also emphasized that the effort to maintain a good family relationship is reciprocal. The children will repay older adults' kindness by caring and fulfilling older adults' needs. Therefore, it is important to also be kind to their children, by limiting their complaints or helping their children whenever they can.

### ***Harmonious social relationship***

Another aspect of successful aging is harmonious social relationships, especially with the neighborhoods, because someone will always need the help of others. What the participants do in the neighborhood will be given back to them. Participants maintained this relationship by helping neighbors, attending village meetings, or visiting neighbors who held rite of passage ceremonies (marriage, childbirth, death, etc.). Some participants admitted prioritizing and trying their best to fulfill these social obligations.

A good old age is when we live harmoniously with the neighbours. If we are reluctant to greet the neighbour, it will be bad [...] for example, when we just hear that a neighbour passed away, we come to help cleaning, someday when we die, others will help to bathe the corpse, get the water, something like that. But if there is someone dead, we never come, then someday, the role is reversed, if something happens, nobody will come (men, 85 years old)

Some participants also felt happy and satisfied when they are still useful and needed in the community, for example, when they were given some responsibilities or discussed some decision related to the neighborhood. One participant also credited having a "good name" in the community as one of their expectations. Other participants shared that they tried to avoid conflict in the community to maintain harmony in the neighborhood.

### ***Older adults' process to adapt and achieve successful aging***

Participants adapt and achieve successful aging using various strategies, including adjustment, acceptance, and gratitude. Participants shared that they were still trying to fulfill some expectations and experience a peaceful mind. To avoid being a burden for others, some participants practice self-reliance by understanding their conditions and managing their health through healthy diet and stress management. Some participants also adjusted their activities, so it did not restrain their health. Adjustment of expectations was also practiced to experience a peaceful mind.

Before, I wanted to live in my former house, there, I had a pond, well, now, it is not achieved, it is okay [...] if someday I die, I imagine there would be many people that would mourn, and the mourner would pay tribute to my life, that is what I want (men, 73 years old)

Participants also believed that God had planned everything. These beliefs were used to manage expectations and experience a peaceful mind. With these beliefs, participants could accept their conditions, while also asking for God's help and trying their best to change the situation.

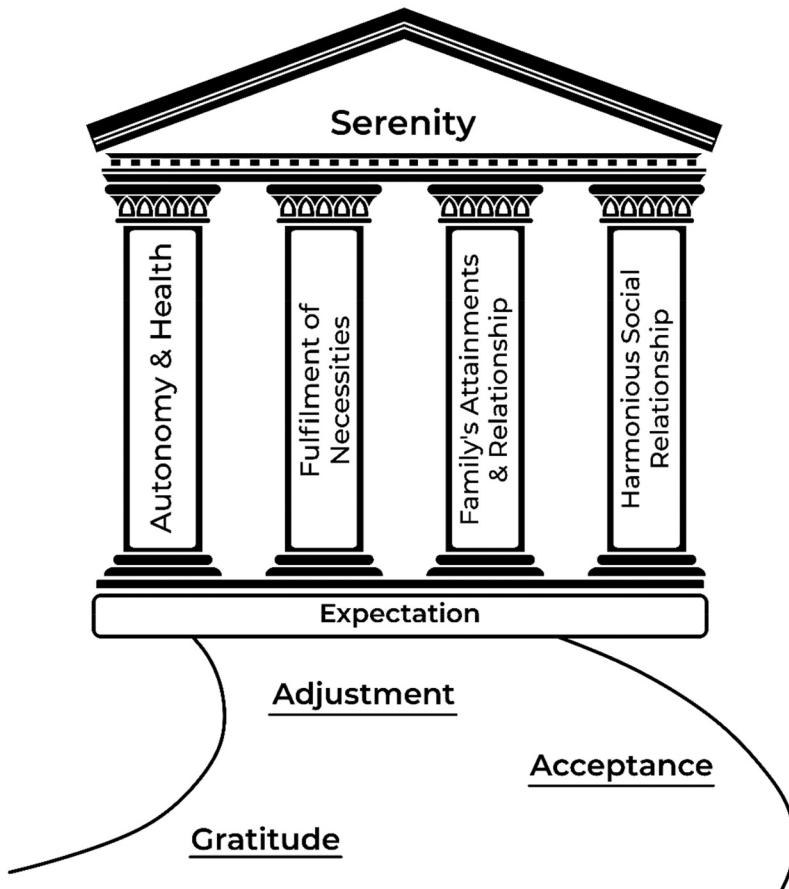
As long as we believe, as long as we do *salat* (a ritual prayer for Muslims), it is like we are with Allah. These beliefs are used, so our heart is steady. So, when, for example, I have complaints, and I feel overwhelmed, I pray, every day, for my health, for my family, so there is no need to do anything, accept God's will, our heart will be peaceful [...] If someday I am given an illness, I believe that I must also be given the cure, as long as I try (women, 60 years old)

Another aspect that was also important was gratitude. Participants explained that practicing gratitude helped them to feel peaceful and adequate regarding their life. Practicing gratitude also helped them to appreciate the good things and manage their situation as best as they could.

I feel troubled regarding my financial, but it's ok, for me, my talent, my strength is just like this. It is already written; my strength is just this much. Praise be to God, the main thing is I am given a good health, I am enjoying my condition, and just wish that someday I will not burden my family. Requesting this, requesting that, I won't do that [...] God willing, for me, what I want is not like that. I mean, just as it is. Because, what else can I do if the income is so low? What can I ask if the money is tight? (men, 69 years old)

***Overarching theme: “achieving expectations through adjustment, acceptance and gratitude: a journey to serenity”***

The analyses resulted in an overarching theme that defines the meaning and process of successful aging: “Achieving expectations through adjustment, acceptance and gratitude: A journey to serenity.” Participants in this study identified that successful aging is related to their various expectations, which include autonomy and health, fulfillment of necessities, family's attainments and relationship, and harmonious social relationship. In realizing these expectations, participants went through a process of adjustment while also practicing acceptance and gratitude. Realizing expectations through these processes helps older adults to experience peace of mind and serenity in their old age. We illustrated this overarching theme as a pathway toward a destination. The pathway symbolizes the process to reach successful aging. The destination represents the meaning of successful aging, which consists of various expectations in order to reach serenity.



**Figure 2.** Illustration of successful aging.

This illustration is presented in [Figure 2](#). The overarching theme in this study was developed from several subthemes: 1) expectation and serenity; 2) autonomy and health; 3) fulfillment of necessities; 4) family's attainments and relationship; 5) harmonious social relationship; and 6) the process of adjustment, acceptance, and gratitude. The details of subthemes and formulated meanings are presented in [Table 2](#).

## Discussion

This study aims to explore the meaning and process of attaining successful aging from older adults' perspectives in Sleman Regency, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. We illustrated successful aging as a journey to serenity by achieving expectations and practicing adjustment, acceptance, and gratitude. These expectations include autonomy and health; fulfillment of necessities; family's attainment and relationship; and harmonious social relationship. The result of this study emphasized the influence of social, cultural, and spiritual aspects on

**Table 2.** Subthemes and Formulated Meanings.

Subthemes	Formulated meanings
Expectation and serenity	Success is achieving expectations Realizing expectations results in peaceful mind Practicing adaptation to experience serenity Peaceful mind is a priority
Autonomy and health	The fear of being a burden Uncomfortable when being served Brief duration of illness and death Health as a mean to do and enjoy activities The wish to keep fulfilling religious activities
Fulfillment of necessities	Trying to fulfil daily necessities Peaceful when basic necessities are accessible Mental burden due to financial problems Financial security as an aspect to feel adequate
Family's attainments and relationship	Successful older adults can take care of their children Success if children are success and have good manner Good familial relationship Children will repay older adults' kindness Peaceful when children are caring and healthy
Harmonious social relationship	Success is having good relationship with neighbors Do good, have good The feeling of usefulness and honour Afraid to cause conflict in the community
The process of adjustment, acceptance, and gratitude	Self-reliance, healthy diet, and managing stress Adjusting activities and expectations Accept their condition and believe in God's plan Practicing gratitude to feel satisfaction

older adults' perception of successful aging, which is important for future policies and programs, especially in Asian communities where the data are limited (Reich et al., 2020).

One of the interesting results in our study is that older adults viewed successful aging as related to expectations, such as health and autonomy, fulfillment of necessities, family's attainment and relationship, and good social relationship, which are varied between individuals. This result shows that successful aging should not be viewed as a set of indicators, but rather as a process to identify and achieve older adults' own expectations. Therefore, approaches supporting older adults' process to achieving expectations and values may help successful aging in Indonesia in the future. The examples for these approaches include Sen's capability approach, which aims to identify someone's values and supports their capability to achieve the value (Sen, 2007; Stephens et al., 2015) or Selection, Optimization, and Compensation (SOC) model, which promotes older adults' skills to identify the challenge and focus the resources to more achievable goals (Alonso-Fernández et al., 2016; Carpentieri et al., 2017). By utilizing these approaches, successful aging programs may support and acknowledge older adults' needs rather than only focusing on the biological and physiological aspects of aging.

Our study also found that older adults expect to experience serenity or peace of mind through the attainment of expectation and the process of

adaptation. A previous study in China (Lee et al., 2013) identified that peace of mind is a concept of well-being that is more representative in Asian culture. Defined as an internal state of peace and harmony, peace of mind is known to correlate with life satisfaction (Sophie et al., 2022) and argued to be the core component of well-being (Sikka et al., 2023). In line with this, our study showed that the concept of peace of mind is also important for older adults in Indonesia. Future studies may explore this concept further by identifying the interrelationships between this concept and the overall well-being of older adults in Indonesia.

Older adults' expectations in this study are holistic, covering the physical (health), economic (fulfillment of necessities), and social aspects (family and social relationship). This result corroborates the study by Maulana et al. (2018) about the meaning of well-being in Indonesia. In their study, Maulana et al. (2018) identified that Indonesians identify well-being as the fulfillment of basic needs (material and life necessities), social needs (familial relationship), and positive worldview (covering aspects of gratitude and spirituality). These aspects are also found in the study about successful aging and aging well in Asia. For example, health and autonomy are mentioned as an aspect of successful aging in China (Chen et al., 2020) and Palestine (Halaweh et al., 2018). The importance of the fulfillment of basic necessities and financial security was also found in the studies in Singapore (Feng & Straughan, 2016) and Bangladesh (Amin, 2017). The needs to preserve older adults' social and familial relationships are also prominent in the Middle East, Asian and Oceania countries (Reich et al., 2020).

Older adults' wish for not being a burden to the family became the reason for their expectation for health and autonomy. In addition, our study also found that assistance or care could cause uncomfortable feelings, especially when older adults are being too dependent or when the care is provided in an unacceptable manner. Pedroso-Chaparro et al. (2020) found that perceived burden is correlated with depressive symptoms, even for healthy older adults. Uncertainty of care expectation and negative relationship between older adults and family caregivers may also add to psychological demands associated with receiving care from family members (Almira et al., 2019; Lilleheie et al., 2021). Therefore, discussion between older adults and family caregivers is needed while also respecting older adults' autonomy in making decisions.

However, there is also a challenge of limited caregivers for older adults in Indonesia because younger generations are more likely to work and move out (Schröder-Butterfill & Fithry, 2014). This condition may threaten older adults' familial relationship. Studies in developing countries showed that due to limited time and resources, family members often relied on the family system to find resources and knowledge in giving appropriate care (Mayston et al., 2017). In another regency in Yogyakarta, Schröders et al. (2021) also identified the same condition, with the worst case being older adults who were left in the

assisted living home. These changing dynamics of familial relationships need to be considered for successful aging in Indonesia. Family's role in older adults' care should be acknowledged and supported, for example, by improving the skills, providing professional support, and developing approaches to help maintain the relationship between family members and older adults.

Our findings also highlighted the role of socio-cultural values for older adults in Indonesia, as our respondents mentioned their expectation to have a harmonious social relationship. Some of our respondents even admit to avoiding conflict in the community to maintain harmony in their neighborhood. The Indonesian community, especially Javanese, values harmony by minimizing conflict and controlling impulses to achieve peacefulness (Irawanto et al., 2011). The importance of harmonious social relationships is also found in previous studies on well-being (Maulana et al., 2018) and chronic disease prevention (F. T. Dewi et al., 2010). In this community, community leaders are the respectable parties to guide the community and maintain harmony (Irawanto et al., 2011). Therefore, to avoid disrupting the harmony in the community, aging issues should be promoted as one of the community's agenda by involving the community leaders to identify and promote the importance of aging issues.

In coping with challenges, older adults believed in God's plan and that humans should accept these plans, be grateful, and strive toward their goals. These beliefs were rooted in the Indonesian cultural and religious beliefs regarding fate, free will, and adherence to the deity (Geertz, 1976; Irawanto et al., 2011). A study in Africa found that religious fatalism (acceptance of events beyond someone's control) may not always be disempowering, because someone may have a free will to change their condition (Hag Hamed & Daniel, 2019). Some studies found the benefit of these beliefs for subjective well-being and quality of life (Butler & Ciarrochi, 2007; Chopik et al., 2019); however, without religious beliefs, fatalistic attitudes (accepting conditions without any effort to change) may be detrimental to life satisfaction (Joshnloo, 2022). These results, therefore, highlight the importance of resilience through cultural and religious values for older adults in achieving successful aging. Older adults' beliefs should be taken into account in the discourse of successful aging in Indonesia, especially with the help of religious leaders.

## **Conclusions and recommendation**

### **Conclusions**

This study has shown that successful aging in Indonesia is a process to attain serenity by managing many expectations through adjustment, acceptance, and gratitude. Successful aging programs should move beyond biological and physiological aspects and support older adults' process in identifying their

**Table 3.** Key Findings, Contribution to Scientific Knowledge, and Implications.

<p>Key Findings</p> <p>–</p> <p>Older adults perceived successful aging as a process to achieve expectations to gain serenity Older adults' expectations regarding successful aging comprise not only physical aspect but also autonomy, mental aspect, and harmonious social and familial relationship Older adults adapt and achieve their expectations through gratitude, adjustment, and acceptance</p> <p><b>Contribution to Scientific Knowledge</b></p> <p>–</p> <p>This study showed the process of successful aging is aimed to gain serenity, highlighting the important perspective of psycho-social model in defining successful aging. This study also showed that successful aging is a dynamic process that involves older adults' agency and adaptability to identify their expectations and strategy to achieve those expectations. This study highlighted the importance of gratitude and acceptance as the strategy to adapt and achieve successful aging.</p> <p><b>Key Implications</b></p> <p>–</p> <p>It is essential to integrate older adults' perspectives in policies and activities, as their perspectives regarding successful aging may incorporate not only the biomedical aspect but also psycho-social and cultural aspects. Successful aging concept, especially in Asian cultures such as Indonesia, should be explored through the lens of socio-cultural perspective to ensure culturally appropriate activities to promote successful aging. The concepts of resilience, serenity, and gratefulness are potential to be explored in the future study, especially through a socio-cultural lens, in Indonesia and Asian community.</p>
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expectations and achieving serenity. In Indonesia, collaboration between experts and community or religious leaders to promote successful aging is needed.

### ***Practical and theoretical implications***

Taken together, the results of this study provide the following implications for successful aging policy and activities, especially in Indonesia. First, because older adults' perspective of successful aging is covering many expectations to reach serenity, promoting older adults' adaptation skills to achieve their expectations and peace of mind is essential for successful aging activities and policies in Indonesia. Second, families' support and social harmony should be considered by supporting families' efforts in providing care, promoting inter-generational relationships, and promoting a harmonious and peaceful environment. Third, the collaboration between experts and community leaders, including religious leaders, is important to improve the adaptation process in achieving successful aging for older adults in Indonesia. Fourth, older adults' adaptation process is benefited from cultural and religious values; therefore, it is important to use socio-cultural approaches in promoting resilience to support successful aging. Detail of key findings and implications can be found in [Table 3](#).

### ***Limitation and future directions***

This study highlights the exploration of successful aging from older adults' perspective using a phenomenological approach to provide the

structure of experience which acknowledges sociocultural context. We also identified aspects, such as peace of mind and harmony, which may be overlooked in the studies in Western countries, adding to the growing need of a more culturally appropriate approach to promote aging well.

However, this study did not explore the perspectives of older adults who experience challenges regarding their physical conditions or older adults who live in an assisted living home. In addition, as Indonesia consists of various ethnic and tribes, the results of this study may only represent those with similar cultural background (Javanese community). As this study was using a qualitative approach, these results may only be relevant for communities with the same cultural background. The selection of the participants that was facilitated by the head of the hamlet at limited duration of the research may have also limited participants that were known by the head of the hamlet and available during research duration.

A further study is needed to explore older adults with different cultural backgrounds and physical health challenges to enrich and map the description of successful aging in Indonesia. In addition, further exploration regarding older adults' resilience with regard to social and cultural values is needed to promote strategies to adapt and achieve successful aging.

## **Acknowledgments**

We would like to acknowledge the respondents of this study for their kindness to share their stories, Sleman HDSS and Faculty of Medicine, Public Health and Nursing, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, for their support during the data collection, and Ms Mufarridah Layalia and Ms Husna Widyastuti who assisted in the data collection process.

## **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## **Funding**

This work was supported by the Direktorat Riset dan Pengabdian Masyarakat, Kementerian Riset, Teknologi dan Pendidikan Tinggi, Republic of Indonesia under Grant Number [2908/UN1.DITLIT/DIT-LIT/LT/2019].

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## Data availability statement

The Excel data containing the coding, categories, and themes that were used to support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author (FMK) upon request.

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