



# Exploring Family Perceptions and Perceived Meanings of Natural Remedy Use in Elderly Pain Management in Nursing Homes: A Phenomenological Study

Ni Made Merlin

STIKES Maranatha Kupang, Indonesia

[nimadem Merlin2@gmail.com](mailto:nimadem Merlin2@gmail.com)

## Article Info

### Article history:

Received 30-03-2025

Revised 09-05-2025

Accepted 17-05-2025

### Keyword:

Phenomenology, Family Perceptions, Natural Remedies, Pain Management, Elderly Care, Nursing Homes, Cultural Meaning, Qualitative Research

## ABSTRACT

Pain management for elderly residents in nursing homes remains a crucial area in geriatric nursing, where cultural traditions and family involvement play significant roles in caregiving practices. While previous studies have explored various pain management strategies, the deeper meanings and experiences behind families' use of natural remedies for elderly care remain underexplored. The specific gap addressed by this study concerns how families perceive and experience the use of natural remedies for pain management, and what meanings they attach to these practices. Using a phenomenological approach, this study investigates the lived experiences and expectations of family members involved in the care of elderly residents utilizing natural remedies in nursing homes. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve family members selected through purposive sampling in Indonesia, and the data were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis to identify recurring themes. The results indicate that natural remedies are perceived as extensions of cultural heritage and emotional bonds, reflecting a desire for holistic care, family continuity, and personalized support beyond clinical efficacy. Families expressed both trust in traditional practices and concerns regarding their safety, highlighting a nuanced approach to integrating these remedies with modern medical care. These findings expand our understanding of pain management by emphasizing the importance of cultural sensitivity and family-centered approaches in elderly care. The study suggests future research should investigate similar experiences in diverse cultural and institutional contexts to further support holistic and effective pain management strategies.



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## INTRODUCTION

### Pain Management Challenges in Elderly Populations

Pain management in elderly populations represents a critical concern in nursing care worldwide, as advancing age is frequently accompanied by chronic illnesses and persistent discomfort. In many societies, especially those with rich traditions of holistic health, families often draw upon natural remedies—herbal treatments, traditional compresses, or plant-based concoctions—as a complement or alternative to conventional medical interventions. The use of such remedies in nursing homes reflects not only practical strategies for alleviating pain but also deeply rooted cultural values and caregiving practices that extend across generations.

### Family Role and Cultural Significance of Natural Remedies

Within this context, the role of family members in supporting the well-being of elderly relatives remains profoundly significant. Their decisions and expectations regarding the use of natural remedies are shaped by cultural beliefs, previous caregiving experiences, and the desire to maintain a sense of agency and continuity in their loved ones' care. For many, these remedies are imbued with meanings that go beyond pharmacological efficacy, symbolizing love, duty, and the preservation of family identity in the face of institutional care settings.

The relevance of this phenomenon is underscored by the emotional and social dimensions involved in elderly care. The subjective experiences and perceptions of families play a pivotal role in shaping health outcomes, satisfaction with care, and the overall sense of dignity and comfort experienced by elderly residents. As previous research highlights, the intersection of cultural tradition and modern healthcare often brings forth unique challenges and opportunities, particularly when natural remedies are considered alongside biomedical pain management strategies.

Given these complexities, there is a compelling need to explore the meaning and significance of using natural remedies in the management of pain among elderly nursing home residents, particularly from the perspective of families. A phenomenological approach is well-suited to address this need, as it emphasizes the importance of understanding lived experience and the deeper meanings individuals attach to their actions and decisions. By foregrounding the voices and narratives of family members, this study aims to illuminate the nuanced realities of pain management, bridging the gap between cultural practice and clinical care.

Research into the lived experiences of family members involved in the care of elderly residents has emerged as a crucial area within nursing and health sciences, particularly as it relates to understanding how families interpret and respond to the complexities of pain management in institutional settings (Biro et al., 2020) (Arslan et al., 2023). Studies have increasingly recognized that family perceptions and expectations toward the use of natural remedies are influenced by a web of cultural, emotional, and relational factors that cannot be fully captured through quantitative measures alone.

Methodological challenges persist, however, in capturing the depth and nuance of such subjective experiences. Traditional research approaches, especially those relying on surveys or structured questionnaires, often fail to access the rich, contextual meanings that underlie participants' actions and choices (Kim et al., 2022) (Wijaya et al., 2021). Quantitative data may describe patterns of remedy use or general attitudes, but they rarely reveal the significance these practices hold for families or the dilemmas and aspirations that shape their caregiving roles.

As a result, the essential nature of family members' experiences—the motivations, concerns, and hopes embedded in their interactions with elderly relatives and care staff—often remains only partially understood. These limitations underscore the necessity for phenomenological methods, which prioritize exploration of meaning and the articulation of experience in the participants' own voices, allowing researchers to approach the phenomenon holistically and authentically.

Despite the widespread reliance on established practical approaches in managing pain for elderly residents—such as standardized pharmacological protocols or routine care procedures—these methods often overlook the deeper subjective experiences and cultural meanings that families associate with alternative practices like natural remedies (Chang & Lee, 2019). While such approaches provide a necessary foundation for clinical safety and efficiency, they tend to reduce the complexity of family involvement to measurable outcomes, missing the intricate motivations, concerns, and hopes that shape families' choices and expectations (Biro et al., 2020). As previous studies have shown, quantitative and survey-based methodologies rarely succeed in uncovering the richness of lived experience, thereby limiting our understanding of how families make sense of their roles and decisions within the nursing home context (Wijaya et al., 2021) (Kim et al., 2022).

To address this limitation, a phenomenological method offers a compelling alternative by allowing for an in-depth exploration of the essential meanings embedded in family members' perceptions and expectations. Such an approach makes it possible to illuminate the nuanced realities that often remain hidden within traditional frameworks, thus providing a more holistic and authentic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Recent studies have explored family and caregiver experiences in nursing homes, highlighting the influence of culture, tradition, and personal beliefs on care practices (Biro et al., 2020; Chang & Lee, 2019). Much of this literature recognizes that pain management for elderly residents is shaped by more than medical protocols alone. Theories of caregiving, cultural continuity, and person-centered care often serve as the foundation for understanding how families participate in health decisions.

However, previous research has often been limited by survey-based or quantitative methods, which do not fully capture the meanings embedded in daily care experiences. This leaves a need for deeper insight into how families interpret and make sense of their choices in pain management.

This article adopts a phenomenological approach to address these limitations. By focusing on lived experience, this method allows for an in-depth exploration of the meanings, hopes, and concerns that families attach to the use of natural remedies in nursing home settings. The choice of this approach is grounded in its capacity to reveal the essence of subjective experience, answering the knowledge gap identified earlier. Through careful thematic analysis of interview data, the study uncovers unique perspectives that would otherwise remain hidden. The result is a more holistic and authentic understanding of family roles in elderly care.

The structure of this article begins with an introduction and general background, followed by a review of relevant literature and theoretical context. The methodological section outlines the phenomenological approach, data collection, and analysis procedures used. The results present key themes derived from family narratives, while the discussion interprets these findings within the broader context of elderly care and cultural meaning. The article concludes by summarizing the main insights and suggesting directions for future research.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Study Design**

A qualitative research design employing the phenomenological approach was adopted to explore the subjective experiences and expectations of families regarding the use of natural remedies in pain management for elderly residents in nursing homes. Phenomenology was chosen for its focus on uncovering the essence of lived experiences and the meanings individuals attach to specific phenomena. This design enables an in-depth examination of the ways in which families interpret, perceive, and make sense of their involvement in the use of natural remedies for elderly pain management. An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was specifically applied, characterized by its emphasis on understanding both the participants' experiences and the meanings they construct in relation to those experiences.

### **Participants**

Participants consisted of family members of elderly individuals residing in selected nursing homes who had direct involvement or experience with the use of natural remedies for pain management. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that individuals included in the study had relevant knowledge and engagement with the phenomenon under investigation. Inclusion criteria comprised adults aged 25 years and older, having at least one elderly relative living in the nursing home, and a demonstrated history of participation or decision-making in the application of natural or traditional remedies for pain relief. Individuals unable to communicate effectively or lacking direct experience with the use of natural remedies were excluded. The study involved twelve participants, ranging in age from 32 to 67 years, with a balanced representation of gender and varying educational backgrounds.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in a private and comfortable setting within the nursing home or via secure online platforms, depending on the participants' preferences and health considerations. An interview guide was utilized to ensure the exploration of key topics while allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences and perceptions. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. Additional field notes were made to capture non-verbal cues and contextual factors relevant to the interviews. Efforts were taken to foster an open and trusting atmosphere, enabling participants to share their narratives candidly. Where necessary, the interview protocol was adjusted to accommodate individual needs or clarify meanings.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). This process involved a series of systematic steps, including the verbatim transcription of interviews, iterative reading of transcripts, identification of significant meaning units, and the development of codes that represented recurring patterns. Major themes were generated inductively, capturing the core experiences and expectations expressed by participants. The software NVivo was utilized to facilitate data organization and coding. Constant comparison and cross-case analysis ensured that emerging themes reflected both shared and unique aspects of participants' experiences. Through this approach, the essential meanings underlying the families' perceptions and expectations were distilled.

### **Ethics**

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional research ethics committee prior to the commencement of the study. Written informed consent was secured from all participants after they were fully informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the research process, with all data stored securely and accessible only to authorized personnel. The study adhered to internationally recognized ethical standards for research involving human participants.

## **RESULTS**

### **The Meaning of Natural Remedies in Family Caregiving Narratives**

Family members described natural remedies as more than just alternative pain management options; they perceived them as extensions of personal care, tradition, and familial responsibility. Many participants recounted how the use of herbal or natural treatments evoked memories of caring for elderly relatives at home, long before institutionalization. One participant shared,

“When I see my mother using herbal oils or traditional compresses, it reminds me of how we took care of her at home. It feels like bringing a piece of home to the nursing home, and it makes me feel closer to her even when I cannot be there all the time.”

This sense of continuity with past caregiving roles emerged as a significant source of comfort and emotional connection for families. The use of natural remedies was often seen as a way to uphold family identity and cultural heritage within the structured environment of the nursing home.

### **Trust and Concerns Regarding Efficacy and Safety**

A prominent theme involved families' trust and concerns regarding the efficacy and safety of natural remedies. While many expressed confidence in traditional treatments, particularly those that had been passed down for generations, there were also significant reservations about their limitations and possible interactions with prescribed medications.

One family member noted,

“We trust the remedies we have always used, but sometimes I worry if they are safe with all the medicines my father is taking now. The nurses are helpful, but we still feel uncertain about what is best.”

This ambivalence highlighted the need for clear communication between healthcare professionals and families, as well as the desire for collaborative decision-making in pain management strategies for elderly residents.

### **Expectations of Holistic and Compassionate Care**

Families held distinct expectations for the integration of natural remedies into the broader framework of care. For many, the use of natural remedies signified not only a hope for effective pain relief but also an aspiration for holistic and compassionate treatment approaches.

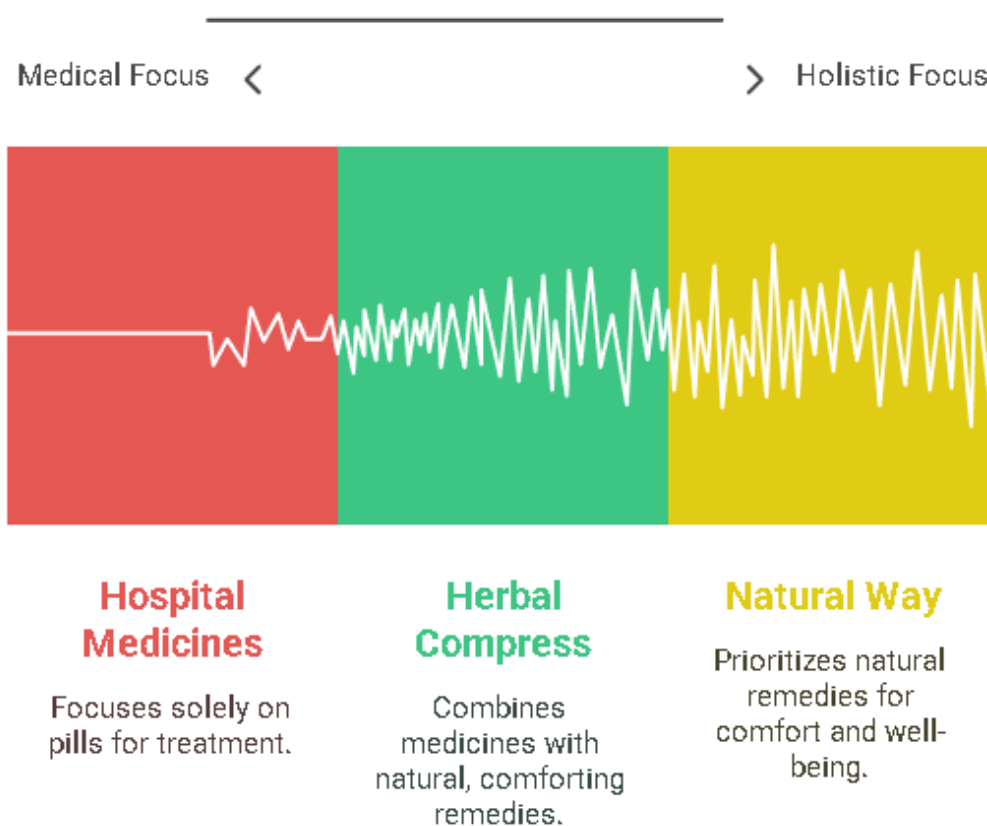
A participant explained,

“I hope the staff do not just focus on medicines from the hospital. Sometimes the natural way is what comforts my grandmother the most. She feels seen and understood when the nurses use herbal compresses or teas, not just pills.”

Such statements reflect a broader expectation that care in nursing homes should recognize the emotional and cultural dimensions of pain management, fostering a sense of respect and personalization in the treatment of elderly residents.

In summary, the lived experiences and perspectives of families regarding the use of natural remedies in pain management for elderly nursing home residents revealed deeply rooted values of tradition, emotional connection, and the pursuit of holistic well-being. While families appreciated the comfort and cultural resonance of natural remedies, they also articulated concerns about safety and expressed hopes for greater collaboration with healthcare providers. These findings underscore the importance of addressing not only physical symptoms but also cultural and emotional needs in elderly care.

**Holistic care expectations range from medical to natural remedies.**



**DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study reveal that family members perceive the use of natural remedies in pain management for elderly nursing home residents as deeply meaningful, reflecting values of tradition, emotional connection, and holistic care. These meanings, expressed through the lived experiences of families, address the central research question regarding how families interpret and make sense of their roles and decisions in supporting elderly relatives through natural approaches to pain relief.

This research contributes significant insight into the complexity of family involvement in elderly care. The study demonstrates that families’ perceptions and expectations are not solely driven by clinical outcomes but are rooted in longstanding cultural practices, a desire for compassionate care, and the pursuit of dignity for their loved ones. By using a phenomenological approach, the study

provides a nuanced understanding that moves beyond general attitudes or frequency of use; it uncovers the underlying hopes, concerns, and dilemmas families face as they navigate the intersection of tradition and modern healthcare. These insights directly respond to the knowledge gap identified in the introduction, illuminating the multifaceted experiences that shape pain management decisions in nursing homes.

Comparison with previous literature underscores both convergence and extension of current knowledge. Consistent with findings from Biro et al. (2020) and Chang & Lee (2019), this study supports the view that care practices in institutional settings are shaped by cultural and familial meanings, not merely by medical protocols. The present findings also complement the work of Kim et al. (2022) and Wijaya et al. (2021), which highlighted the limitations of quantitative methods in revealing the subjective significance of caregiving practices. By adopting a phenomenological lens, this study enriches theoretical understanding by revealing the emotional and cultural dimensions that quantitative surveys often miss, thus offering a more holistic account of the experiences and aspirations of families engaged in the care of elderly residents.

The implications of these findings are multifaceted, offering both scientific and practical insights into the integration of natural remedies in elderly pain management. Socially and culturally, the study underscores the importance of recognizing family traditions and the symbolic value attached to natural remedies in caregiving. Such recognition can inform nursing home policies and staff training, encouraging a more personalized and culturally sensitive approach to care that values emotional connection and family involvement. On a broader scale, these results highlight the need for healthcare systems to engage with families as partners, acknowledging their unique perspectives and supporting them in making informed choices that honor both tradition and medical safety.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be noted. The qualitative and phenomenological nature of the study, while allowing for deep exploration of subjective experience, also restricts the generalizability of the findings. The research was conducted within a specific cultural and institutional context, with a relatively small number of participants, which may not represent the full diversity of family experiences across different settings. Furthermore, reliance on self-reported narratives could introduce recall bias or social desirability effects. These limitations do not diminish the value of the study but rather provide a framework for interpreting the findings within appropriate boundaries.

Future research can build on these insights by exploring family perceptions and experiences across varied cultural backgrounds, institutional types, and geographic locations. Longitudinal studies may provide a deeper understanding of how family expectations and practices evolve over time, especially as elderly residents' conditions change or as families gain more exposure to different pain management options. Further, mixed-methods research could help bridge the depth of phenomenological insights with the breadth of quantitative approaches, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between tradition, family involvement, and effective elderly care.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study explored the perceptions and expectations of families regarding the use of natural remedies in pain management for elderly residents in nursing homes, addressing the need to understand the deeper meanings behind caregiving practices. The findings reveal that natural remedies hold significant cultural, emotional, and relational value for families, extending beyond simple clinical efficacy. Through a phenomenological approach, the study uncovers how these remedies symbolize continuity of care, family identity, and holistic support, which are often overlooked in conventional healthcare models. By capturing these subjective experiences, the research fills important gaps left by previous quantitative and protocol-driven studies. The results highlight the importance of culturally sensitive and family-centered approaches in elderly care, offering practical insights for healthcare providers and policy makers. Future research should consider broader populations and diverse cultural settings to further enrich our understanding and to enhance the integration of traditional practices within modern care environments.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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