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Impact of age on life satisfaction of aged widowed living with family and in old age homes

Shabnam Ansari and Ragini Mishra

Abstract

Old age is beset with a host of problems relating to physical, psychological, economic and social zones of life. Health however remains a major issue to contend with in old age. For the individual, health determines his ability to perform those tasks which facilitate his participation in social and economic life. While society on its part depends on the good health of its members so that they are able to perform their roles adequately, be they in the economic upliftment or in community services. It is often observed that better the health, better is the adjustment to life which consequently leads to happiness and the zest to face challenges of life. Life satisfaction is an important factor in a person's welfare, and there is a close relationship between physical and mental health and life satisfaction. Evaluation of life satisfaction is confirmed as a valid step in the evaluation of the rehabilitation of the elderly people and determination of the effectiveness of the offering of health-care services for them (Niknamy *et al.* 2010). Keeping above points in mind a study was conducted in Ajmer, Jaipur, Bikaner and Kota District of Rajasthan State to explore impact of age on life satisfaction of aged widows and widowers living with family and in old age homes. A total of two hundred forty subjects were purposively selected. Out of two forty subjects 120 subjects (60 widows and 60 widowers) were selected who were residing in extended families and 120 subjects (60 widows and 60 widowers) were selected who were residing in old age homes. Life satisfactions Scale was used to assess the level of life satisfaction of aged widows and widowers. Data was analyzed in terms of frequency, percentage and Z test. It was found that there is no significant impact of age on life satisfaction of subjects of both categories i.e., widows and widowers. Whereas, highly significant impact was observed in the areas of personal status for widows and for health status of widowers.

Keywords: Life satisfaction, age, personal status, health status, old age homes, widows, widowers, ageing

Introduction

Old age, as a relative term, represents the advance stage of a human being's life. There is a substantial increase in the number of elderly persons across the globe in the past three decades and the 7.6% of the total population in India constitute of older adults (Help age India 2014)^[6]. The commencement and assessment varies according to the welfare level available in any society. At this point, social and cultural factors gain importance. Old age, with respect to law and employment, means the era, where the working performance and efficiency of a person decreases. Satisfaction is the feeling caused by the requirements and demands of people. Life satisfaction is one among a range of concepts that is assumed to reflect the conditions of 'a good life'. judgments is also addressed Findings are important in understanding what to expect of ourselves and others as we age, which daily activities are likely to be most difficult for older people and what factors are predictors of overall life satisfaction Good *et al.* (2008)^[2].

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Life satisfaction may be strongly influenced by the mental states, age and gender of the elderly amongst which mental state is very significant. During the entire life course the spouse offers a strong emotional support which becomes all the more significant during old age. Satisfaction with life is used in the sense of overall positive assessment by the individual concerned. This issue is considered by social sciences, such as sociology, psychology and economics, and as well as by the science of medicine. In recent years there has been an increasing interest in the evaluation of quality of life in the aged population.

A growing ageing population in any country carries great social, economic, and public health implications, which include higher expenditure on pension and health care, need for social security reforms, shrinking of workforce, and hence shortage of active persons who are able to support dependent older adults (Kalavar & Jamuna, 2011) [3]. The impact of socioeconomic factors on health has been investigated in many older populations. Studies conducted across various nations and populations acknowledged the inverse relationship between socioeconomic status and mortality, morbidity, and disability (Alam, 2006) [1]. Among the socioeconomic determinants, gender emerged as a key factor explaining the health status of older persons in developed and developing countries (Kalavar & Jamuna, 2011) [3]. Roy & Chaudhuri, (2008) [5].

Widowhood is generally considered a difficult period in one's life. Loss of identity, loss of economic power and the weakening of the family ties in present era usually aggravates their plight and may have psychological impact. Widowhood represents a decline in health, both psychologically and physically. Marriage has a protective effect on health. Research demonstrates that, atleast in the shorter term, the death of spouse cause lowered level of psychological wellbeing. Widowed older adults report higher level of mood anxiety disorders, lower levels of life satisfaction, and elevated levels of loneliness. Evidence shows that spousal death has the potential to cause feelings of worthlessness and reduced morale for older adults, which persist even after several years. Several studies have been conducted in India on elderly. But there is rarely any study specifically focusing on the impact of age on life satisfaction of aged elderly and their level of life satisfaction. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to find out the impact of age on levels of life satisfaction of aged elderly.

Materials and Method

A total of two hundred forty subjects were purposively selected from different cities of Rajasthan state viz. Ajmer, Jaipur, Bikaner and Kota of comprising of aged widows and widowers. Out of two forty subjects 60 widows and 60 widowers selected from extended families and 60 widows and 60 widowers from old age homes. The subjects' belonged to middle socioeconomic strata. Life satisfaction scale with seven major aspects i.e. personal status, health status, financial status, routine activities, personal achievement, familial relationship and social relationship, was constructed and validated for the research.

Result and Discussion

Assessment of life satisfaction of aged widows and widowers living with family and in old age homes:

The findings of the present exploration reveal that widow's widowers living with family had moderate level of life satisfaction while widows' widowers and widowers living in

old age homes had low level of life satisfaction. Fig. 1 clearly depicts that widows and widowers living with family and in old age homes had low level of life satisfaction regarding their personal status. The reason for lower life satisfaction in personal self was due to inadequate ability of subjects to fulfill their needs, and to carry out their work which probably increased their dependency on others thus affecting their self-esteem and their self-efficacy. Moreover, the respondents felt that their importance amongst others had decreased which created a sense of incompleteness about themselves. The results on health status were observed to be moderate for both widows and widowers living with family and in old age home. As depicted in fig 1 Krishnamchari *et al.* (2010) [7]. in his research reported that due to ageing elderly people are more prone to the disease like cardiovascular disorder, diabetes, joints pain which significantly affect their activity, and their satisfaction from life. But the results of present research reveal that most of the subjects received sufficient care and services, either from family or from institution which contributed to their moderate satisfaction in the area of health status. The result get support from Khanna (2001) [8], who reported that subjects who received proper care and support were having better adjustment than those who lacked proper care and support. The results on financial status (Fig.1) shows that widows living with family were having moderate satisfaction and widowers living with family were observed to be highly satisfied with their financial status. Further the figure depicts that widows and widowers living in old age home had low level of life satisfaction with respect to their financial status. The latter may be explained because majority of widows and widowers did not have adequate financial resources to meet their basic amenities. The result gets support from Huoliqin (2002) [11], who reported that life satisfaction was strongly related to economic sufficiency. Aggarwal (2003) [9], also reported that income level is directly related to the life satisfaction in such a way that aged people with high income have higher level of satisfaction and positive attitude towards aging than aged with lower income level. Chaddha (1991) [10], also points out that the aged living with family scored much higher level of life satisfaction than those living in institution. Widows and widowers living in family were having moderate and high level of life satisfaction respectively towards routine activity. Widows and widowers living with family were satisfied with their daily routine and were found to have proper support from their children and grandchildren. They spend their time with their family members and friends which contributed positively towards satisfaction in the area of routine activities.

Data in the fig.1 shows that widows and widowers living in old age homes had moderate level of satisfaction for routine activities. Advancing age affects the activity pattern of elderly. As the age increases, the elderly become less active due to physical deterioration but support from caretakers resulted in moderate satisfaction for carrying out routine activity. Data in the fig.1 also reveals that widowers living with family were found to have high level of satisfaction and Widows from the same setting showed moderate level of satisfaction with their personal achievement. Life satisfaction in widowers towards personal achievement i.e. job satisfaction and achievements in life was found to be high. The financial independency, capacity of the family to provide love, care, support and respect, accessibility of servants for help, and availability of social support system contributed to satisfaction in familial and social relationship. Further, life satisfaction was found to be lowest in widows living in old

age homes towards personal achievement. The widows living in the old age home reported that they did not achieve what they wanted or deserved from their lives. They also shared that they did not have a sound future plan nor had a bright past, thus were less satisfied with their personal achievements. Fig. 1 depicts that widows living with family had moderate level of life satisfaction in their familial relationships, the reason could be because women in general are more sensitive and elderly women being closely involved in day to day family interactions get emotionally affected greater especially in absence of spouse. Therefore this could be the reason for moderate level of life satisfaction in the elderly widows. The result further shows that widowers were having high level of life satisfaction regarding their familial aspect. Interactive support from their children and grandchildren as well as their social hub and relative support system together were contributing to high satisfaction for familial relationships. In contrast Widows and widowers living in old age homes were

observed to have low level of life satisfaction in context with familial relationships. Most of the widows believed that they did not experience a happy family life as they wished to have; they did not receive support and attention as they wanted to have. Majority of widows and widowers living in old age homes reported that their children wanted to live their lives independently without any interference; they did not have time to look after; and they perceived them as economic and physical burden which made them feel rejected and unwanted. Fig.1 indicates that widows and widowers living with family were found to have high level of life satisfaction (81.67%) the reason was found to be close tie with the family, neighbours and society since the social setting in which a person inhabits is one of the major reason of life satisfaction experienced by an individual. Further, loss of spouse mostly creates a vacuum which gets partially fulfilled in social settings and in maintaining social relationships.

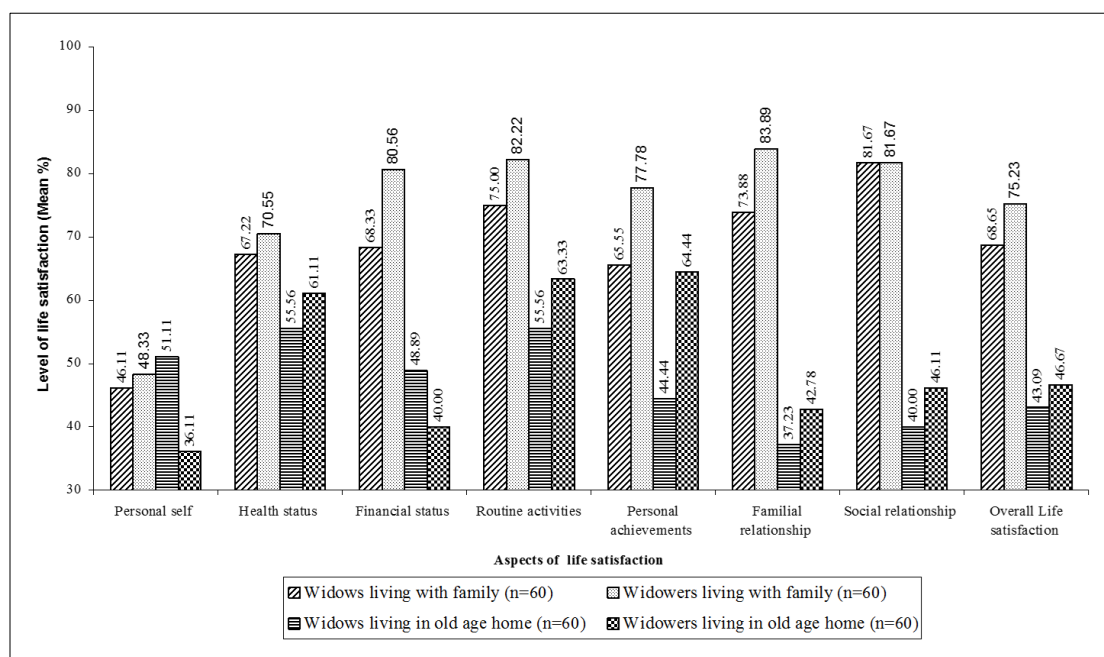


Fig 1: Life satisfaction of aged widows and widowers living with family and in old age homes

Impact of age on life satisfaction of Aged widows and widowers living with family and in old age home:

To assess the impact of age on life satisfaction of Aged widows and widowers living with family and in old age home Z value was calculated as given in table.1. The overall results in the table depicts that no significant impact of age was found on life satisfaction of subjects of both categories i.e., widows and widowers. Highly significant impact was observed in the areas of personal status for widows and for

health status of widowers. The reason might be that with increasing age the elderly widows’ role within the family and society gets affected, which had a deep impact on their self-esteem and self-identity. Further the subjective wellbeing may decline in old age, especially among the oldest old due to debilitating health condition, functional impairment and personal losses as depicted by Smith *et al.* (2002). These findings get supported from present research specifically amongst widowers.

Table 1: Z’ value depicting impact of age on life satisfaction of Aged widows and widowers living with family and in old age home:

Aspects of life satisfaction	Widows	Widowers
	60-70 yrs (n ₁ =60) and 71-80yrs (n ₂ =60)	60-70 yrs (n ₁ =60) and 71-80yrs (n ₂ =60)
Personal status	2.98**	1.14
Health status	1.72	3.29**
Financial status	0.79	0.96
Routine activities	0.39	1.07
Personal achievement	2.17*	0.54
Familial relationship	0.44	0.61
Social relationship	0.12	0.68
Overall	0.14	0.99

*Denotes significant at 5% level of significance

**Denotes significant at 1% level of significance

Conclusion

Ageing is period is loss, which may be identified like loss of physical abilities, loss of intellectual processes, loss of work role and occupational identification (Retirement), loss of intimate ties, such as death of spouse, friends and other acquaintances. The major adjustment to be made includes adjustment to physical changes, retirement, loss of spouse and post-child rearing period (Empty nest syndrome), and grand parenthood. If favorable factors such as satisfaction of needs, retention of old friendships, positive social attitudes, etc. are present, they Foster ego integrity of the person. However without adequate support to sustain and bear the losses the older adult (Aged widows and widowers) is unalterable to a profound sense of insecurity. Despair and disgust can take over the person, including the feeling, time is running outland there are no alternatives possible at this late date. Serious personality breakdown in old age may lead to criminal behavior or suicidal tendencies. Elderly people need better physical health care and psychological care to nourish their well-being. Due to frail health condition, lack of adequate care and acorn by the family members, negligence by care givers, busy life schedule due to urbanization, elderly people are getting neglected. As a result they, become more vulnerable to physical and mental ailments. Thus it can be concluded that it might be due to the fact that with increasing age the elderly widows' role within the family and society gets affected, which had a deep impact on their self-esteem and self-identity. The aged requires special attention, care facilities and a totally different environment from others. There are rare programmers to train the people taking care of the aged. The existing programmers for senior citizens are not in line with their needs and problems. This calls for the analysis and understanding the needs of the aged. Further the subjective wellbeing may decline in old age, especially among the oldest old due to debilitating health condition, Families should be protected and encouraged to continue care-giving adapted to the needs and preferences of widowed.

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