Social support network and life satisfaction among elders in Mangalore Taluk: an implication for social work intervention

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted in rural Mangalore taluk of Daskhina Kannada district of Karnataka state to explore the pattern of social support system and life satisfaction elders and to seek the scope for social work intervention in this case. A simple random sample of 60 elders was covered from the study area. The data were collected through pretested semi-structured questionnaires and data were analyzed by using percentages and proportions. Out of 60 respondents, 45(75%) elders were married and living with their family members. The Family members were quoted as most important social support network factors for life satisfaction in the case of 48(80%). It was found that 42 (70%) respondents were not anxious about the future, since the respondents are economically sustainable and position in the family is comparatively good.

Introduction

Ageing is multidimensional change involving the physical psychological as well as social aspects for an individual. Old age is generally the chronological age, a universal phenomenon and a challenge to everyone, who reaches it irrespective of occupation, skill or learning (Tungdim et al. 2002). It can be described as a progressive deterioration of the physical and mental function resulting in a simultaneous decline in both the capacity of body to maintain homeostatic balance as well as adaptability of the individuals to various stresses thereby consequently increasing the chances of illness and mortality (Dey, 2003). Old age is called "dark" not because the light fails to shine but because people refuse to see it (Gowri 2003).

Ageing Scenario in India

India like many other developing countries in the world is witnessing the rapid aging of its population. Urbanization, modernization and globalization have led to change in the economic structure, the erosion of societal values, weakening of social values, and social institutions such as the joint family. The traditional sense of duty and obligation of the younger generation towards their older generation is being eroded. The older generation is caught between the decline in traditional values on one hand and the absence of adequate social security system on the other (Gormal 2003). Demographic trends since the second half of the last century in many developing countries have shown an unprecedented increase in the 60-plus population in absolute as well as relative terms.

The rapid social and economic change in these countries has potentially profound implications for the future of the elderly. At the global level the number of elderly persons is projected to increase from 606 million in2000 to 1.9 billion in 2050. The increase is expected to be dramatic in the less developed regions where the number of older people will increase from 375 million in 2000 to 1.6 billion in 2050 (United Nations,2002). India has one of the fastest growing populations of elderly persons in the world (Rajan, 2000; NSSO, 1998). India's population increased from 361 million in 1951 to 1027 million in 2001 and the number of older people increased from 19 million (5 per cent of the total population) to 77 million (7.6per cent of the total population) during the same time period. It is projected that the elderly population in India will increase to 169 million by 2025 and to 324 million by 2050 (United Nations, 2002).

Life Satisfaction and Successful Ageing

Living arrangements and life satisfaction among elders are interlinked aspects. Diener (1984) defined life satisfaction as "a cognitive judgmental global evaluation of one's life. It may be influenced by affect but is not itself a direct measure of emotion". Life satisfaction continues to be an important construct in the psycho-social study of aging. It is one of the commonly accepted subjective conditions of quality of life and seems to be one of the facets of successful aging, both of which are key concepts in aging (Iyer 2003).

Living arrangements are influenced by a variety of factors, including marital status, financial well-being, Health status, and family size and structure, as well as cultural traditions such as kinship patterns, the value placed on living independently or with family members, the availability of social services and social support, and the physical features of housing stock and local communities.

In turn, living arrangements affect life satisfaction, health, and most importantly for those living in the community, the chances of institutionalization. One's living arrangements are dynamic; they change over the life course, adapting to changing life circumstances.

Old age is a universal phenomenon which is not a uniform experience among senior citizens. Some persons achieve a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction in their old-age, while others turn bitter and lament the decline of their physical abilities and social significance. Erickson (1982) asserts that old people review their past life and if they feel that most goals of their life have been fulfilled, they feel satisfied. Conversely, a feeling that not much has been achieved brings a sense of despair among the aged; because, it may be too late to make amends.

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Social Support Network and Life Satisfaction among Aged

Aging takes place within a social context, with the individual belonging to a variety of kinship and social groups at each phase of the human cycle. The extent to which the older adult is enmeshed within this social network of family, friends and neighbors greatly affects their experience of aging (Rikhi & Chadha, 2004). Social network analysis is one of the many ways that the social life of the elderly can be examined. Ideally social networks can be defined as, all the people with whom the individual interacts, typically including persons who they live with as well those in categories of social identities such as neighbors, friends and colleagues at work (Van Willigen & Chadha, 1999). The study conducted by Altmaier (1996), found that social support was significantly related to life satisfaction of elders. Several studies have examined the relationship between social support and life satisfaction among the elderly. Most of this literature has indicated a positive relationship between social support and life satisfaction.

Objectives:

The present study is a sincere attempt to examine the socio-economic, demographic and gender differentials in living arrangements among the rural elders of Mangalore taluk, Karnataka and to understand the role performance of the elders in the family, and to analyse the pattern of social support network system and life satisfaction among the rural elders. In this backdrop the effort has been made to investigate the strategies for the welfare of the elderly and the issue in social work perspective.

Material & Method

The study was undertaken in Mangalore Taluk of Dakshina Kannada District which is the coastal district of Karnataka state. A descriptive study was conducted by selecting 60 elders through simple random sampling from the rural villages of Mangalore Taluk during February to April 2011. The study was based on both primary and secondary data. A pretested semi structured questionnaire included information on socio-economic profile of respondents, their role performance in family set-up and opinion on social support system which required for elderly population as well as suggestions by the respondents to overcome these problems. The data thus collected were statistically analysed.

Major Findings

Socio-Economic Profile of the Respondents

The data given table 2 reveals that majority of (70 percent) respondents were between the age group of 60 years to 69 years who are in their young-old age. More than half (52 percent) of the respondents were male in the study. It was seen that 75 percent of the respondents were married and living with their family members. Whereas the education of the respondents is considered nearly 44 percent of the respondents were illiterates and rest (56 percent) were literates. Among the respondents majority which is 74 percent were involved themselves in various occupations to lead their life. Nearly 22 percent of the respondents were not having any income and they mainly depend upon their family earnings. Regarding income of the respondents, 32 per cent of them were had monthly income less than Rs.5000/-, followed by 48 per cent and 18 per cent in the income range of Rs. 5000-10000 and Rs. 10000 and above respectively. It was found that very less respondents which is 22% having no income.

Role Performance of the Respondents

The data in the following table indicates the status of the respondents in the family. The table clearly shows that the majority of 70 percent of the respondents are living with their married sons, which is the tradition of our India. In Indian families the elder member of the family is considered as the head of the family so the data depicts that the majority of 72 percent of the elders in the family were treated as the head of the house hold. But still we can see the shift has taken place and the mantle of the head of the household goes to the earning member of the family. The data clearly shows that 70 percent respondents in the study were the decision makers of the family, and another 72 percent respondents said that they do not have any of the major personal responsibility of theirs such as looking after the family, daughter's marriage, education of children etc.

Social support network system and life satisfaction

Family members were quoted as most important social support network factors for life satisfaction in the case of 80 percent of the respondents. Most of the respondents felt that they were respected and looked after well in their family. Almost 96.6 percent of the respondents were satisfied with their life because they experienced lot of tough times in their life. The respondents felt that there is need of interpersonal interaction among family members and according to that family care is utmost needed and important in old age. The family attachment and involvement in the family is high among elders in this period which will lead to the life satisfaction among the elders.

Implication for Social work intervention

Social work is a profession for those with a strong desire to help in improving people's lives. Social workers help people function better in their environment, deal with their relationships, and solve personal and family problems. The constant growth, demands, and changes in health care have had a serious impact on the viability and need for social workers in all areas including settings of health care and welfare and development. Access to timely, comprehensive, and equitable health care for individuals varies considerably, with significant percentages of many segments of population having only limited access to health care. Ensuring rights to survival, development, protection and participation to children from the scope of social work profession. Social workers have a formal role as educators. Social workers gain knowledge and expertise in the health practice setting from other professionals and from formal education, work, or teaching experience. They have the knowledge and skill to implement the principles of learning theories in education programs, activities, and resources. They communicate and collaborate with departments and other staff to foster client education.

A social worker should understand elderly client's life situation and encourage them as an individuals. Emphasis on maintaining inner harmony, thinking about the present and trying to forget the past and responding positively to the present moment, helps in avoiding hypertension and stress among elders. Counseling the elderly in order to strengthen their support systems; especially the depressed lonely and these lack initiative to live. Promotion of social recreational services (group sessions) to the elderly in the institution will help them to improve their health and quality of life. It is increasingly important for social workers to become knowledgeable about aging (Rosen & Zlotnik, 2001) and the role of ethnicity in the aging process.

Establishing the function of social networks in life satisfaction of elderly people is significant. At the senior centers, interventions that are aimed at enhancing life satisfaction could place greater emphasis on developing small group activities that encourage intimacy and friendship. Carefully designed small groups may strengthen relationships among the senior centers' participants. Understanding the contributing factors to successful aging will serve to inform both public policy development and more effective design of services for elderly.

Family support is an important factor for the better psychological well being of elderly. Home bound elderly have more advantages than the institutionalized elderly in respect to daily activities, level of satisfaction, social support and source of financial support. In order to strengthen the social support network the social worker has to work with the families and need to create awareness among families of elderly about healthy life-style. The members of the family should be sensitized about the minute things which makes difference in the lives of the elderly such as accompanying them with a short walk, spending precious time with the elderly, being patient to the elderly, understanding the emotions of the elderly, helping elderly to find a friend whom they can share their feelings, creating an employment opportunity for healthy elders to spend their time, simple physical and mental exercise greatly contribute to the well-being and happiness of elders in the family. Organizing self-help groups of elderly are needed for dealing with psycho-social problems like loneliness. Social workers should take up sensitization programmes to enable elderly to enhance their skills for better adjustment. Resident Welfare Associations could increase participation of elderly in various community affairs.

Conclusion:

Aging in the new millennium will be greatly influenced by both global and region specific factors. It was assumed that the elderly were well taken care of, safe in the custody of the well-integrated family system in India. The family as a single unit is undergoing changes leading to significant adjustments in accommodating and caring for older adults in the family, making them more vulnerable to illness and psychosocial strains in the absence of familial support network. Therefore, mobilizing additional resources for geriatric care as well as monitoring physical and mental health behaviors will emerge as a major responsibility for social work professionals in India. Effort must be taken to strengthen the informal support systems and elderly should be taken care within the family system. These efforts would not only be economically sound but also socially desirable. Thus essential ingredient for life satisfaction is the social support network system among elderly.

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Table-1: Demographic Scenario of Ageing from 1995-2050 in India

Years	Population(60+) In Million	% of Total Population	Growth Rate (%)	
			Total Population	60+ Population
1950	19	5.6	2.0	2.0
1975	38	6.2	2.1	2.9
2000	77	7.6	1.5	2.7
2025	169	12.5	0.8	3.2
2050	324	20.6	0.4	2.2

Source: United Nations, 2002. World Population Ageing 1950-2050

Table-2: Socio-Economic Profile of the Respondents

Social Variables	Responses	Frequency n=60	Percent
Age	60 - 69	42	70%
	70 - 79	14	24%
	80 +	4	6%
Sex	Male	31	52%
	Female	29	48%
Marital Status	Married	45	75%
	Widow/widower	15	20%
Education	Illiterate	26	44%
	Primary	24	40%
	S.S.L.C	10	16%
Occupation	Not working	19	32%
	Coolie	24	40%
	Agriculturist	16	26%
	Security Guard	5	8%
Monthly Income	No Income	13	22%
	< Rs.5000	19	32%
	Rs.5001-Rs.10000	29	48%
	Rs. 10001-Rs. 15000	11	18%

Table-3: Role Performance of the Respondents

Role Performance	Responses	Frequency n=60	Per cent
Living with	Married son	42	70%
	Married daughter	5	8%
	Unmarried Children	13	22%
Head of the Family	Self	43	72%
	Son	16	26%
	Husband	1	2%
Decision Maker	Self	42	70%
	Son	18	30%
Personal Responsibility	Yes	17	28%
	No	43	72%

Table-4: Opinion about Social support network system and life satisfaction

Opinion	Response	Frequency N=60	Percent
Comfortable people	Family members	48	80%
	Friends	12	20%
	Institutions	-	-
Feeling of the respondents	Respected	28	46.6%
	Looked after well	22	36.7%
	Neglected	10	16.7%
Life satisfaction	Highly satisfied	20	33.3%
	Satisfied	38	63.3%
	Not at all satisfied	2	3.4%