
Research Papers



LONELINESS AMONG ELDERLY PEOPLE

Smt. Chaitra Vikram Rajadnya

Assistant Professor , The New College, Kolhapur.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the difference in level of loneliness among elderly individuals staying with their children and staying away from their children. The study was conducted on 60 elderly people in the age group of 65-80, 30 staying with their children and 30 staying away from their children. The UCLA-3 was used to measure loneliness. Data was analyzed by using student t-test. The difference between mean loneliness scores of elderly individuals staying with their children and staying away from their children was found statistically significant ($t=6.1699$, $p<0.05$). However, no significant gender difference was found in loneliness scores.

KEYWORDS: Loneliness, Elderly.

INTRODUCTION

People over the age of 60 and older are the fastest growing segment of the Indian population. With the rapid changes in demographic indicators over the last few decades, it is certain that India will move from being a young country to an old country over the next few decades. Presently India has around 90 million elderly and by 2050, the number is expected to increase to 315 million, constituting 20 percent of the total population. (Report on the status of elderly.....)

The 2005-2006 National Family Health Survey in India examined living arrangements by household, which is defined by having separate cooking facilities even if older parents and adult children live in adjacent structures. The survey found that more than four out of five (78 percent) Indians ages 60 and older lived in the same

household with their children, while about 14 percent lived with only a spouse and 5 percent lived alone. This represents a doubling of the share of older Indians living with only a spouse or alone since the early 1990s (Today's Research on Aging). These changes in living arrangements may have created many psychological problems among elderly including loneliness.

Loneliness is defined as an individual's subjective experience of a lack of satisfying human relationships, and thus loneliness is a negative feeling causing distress to an individual. According to Weiss, loneliness can be divided into experience of emotional isolation or of social isolation. Emotional isolation represents the subjective response to the absence of a close and intimate attachment figure, e.g. the lack of a loved one or a spouse. Social isolation can be defined as a situation where a person does not have a social network or is dissatisfied with the present social network. (Savikko, 2008)

Karen Kassa (2004) studied the prevalence of loneliness in a group of elderly people over 80 years of old and the socio-demographic, health-related and social predictors for experiencing loneliness. A significant correlation was demonstrated between a feeling of loneliness and self-perceived health, low vision and poor hearing, low activity of daily life function, loss of a spouse, low social network, no hobbies, and possession of a safety alarm.

Savikko (2008) found loneliness more common in the oldest age groups, among women and widows. It is also found that loneliness is associated with low level of education, poor income and former physically heavy work.

Loneliness is also found more common among respondents living alone or in a residential home than among those living with someone else or in their own homes.

HelpAge India surveyed 500 older people in Delhi and Mumbai, and found that loneliness and isolation are the scourges of too many old people's lives. A study also revealed a link between low income and isolation and loneliness.

HYPOTHESIS:

1. Loneliness is higher among elderly individuals staying away from their children than elderly individuals staying with their children.
2. There is no significant difference between male and female subjects with respect to their loneliness score.

METHOD

Sample:

The sample comprised of 60 elderly individuals (30 staying with their children and 30 staying without their children) randomly drawn from Kolhapur city. In each group, male to female ratio was 1:1. Only one individual from each household was selected. Widowers were excluded from the study. Participants were contacted through Senior Citizen's Committee. The purpose of the study was explained to them and then instructions were given. The data was collected in group.

Material:

In data collection, UCLA-3 scale along with socio-demographic data form which was prepared by the researcher for the purpose of this study, was used.

UCLA-3 Loneliness Scale (Russel, Peplau & Cutrona): It is a 20 item instrument designed to measure self-reported experiences and behaviours theoretically related to loneliness. Respondents indicate on a 4-point scale ranging from never (1) to often (4) how often each statement is true for them. The scale yields a single score reflecting self-report of current loneliness. Russell et al (1980) reported a good reliability for the test.

Results and Discussion:

Table 1. Mean and SD and t value of elderly on Loneliness (N=60)

Category	Mean	SD	df	t value
Elderly staying with their children (n=30)	35.79	4.33	58	6.1699*
Elderly staying without their children (n=30)	42.68	4.32		

*p<0.05

Table 2. Mean, SD and t value of Male and Female elderly on Loneliness (N=60)

Gender	Mean	SD	Df	t value
Male (n=30)	38.32	5.96	58	1.2827
Female (n=30)	40.16	5.12		

The analysis of the obtained data by the application of t-test revealed significant difference between elderly staying with their children and staying without their (Table 1). It was found that elderly individuals staying with their children score lower on loneliness ($t= 6.1699$, $p\leq 0.05$) as compared to elderly staying without their children.

These results are in consonance with previous researches (Kassa, 1998; Savikko, 2008). As reported by Aile and et al. (2004), men and women living in family environment had higher life satisfaction compared to those living in nursing home. It may be said that family is still the primary source of support for the elderly in India.

No significant differences were found in loneliness of male and female subjects (Table 2). Although female subjects scores slightly higher on loneliness than male subjects, differences in their mean scores are not significant. However, Savikko (2008) found loneliness more common among women.

CONCLUSIONS:

As a result of the research carried out, it was found that mean scores of loneliness of elderly individuals staying without their children were higher than mean scores of loneliness of elderly individuals with their children. It may be concluded that joint family system is more advantageous for elderly.

LIMITATIONS:

1. The sample size is too small and further investigation is needed with large size of sample.
2. Variables such as number of social contacts, economic dependency, health status which may contribute loneliness are not taken into

consideration in this study.

REFERENCES:

- Aile and et al. (2004). A study on the satisfaction of elderly individuals living in family environment and nursing home. Turkish journal of Geriatrics, 7(1), 33-36.
- HelpAge India Survey (2008). Loneliness among older people in India.
- Kassa Karen (1998) Loneliness in old age: Psychosocial and health predictors. Norwegian Journal of Epidemiology; 8 (2): 195-201
- Report on the Status of Elderly in Selected States of India (2010)
- Savikko, N. (2008). Loneliness of older people and elements of an intervention for its alleviation. as accessed on 1/8/2011
- Today's Research on Aging. (2010). India's Aging Population, issue 25.