

LONELINESS OF ELDERLY LIVING IN VELLORE DISTRICT

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Abstract

Loneliness is the unpleasant and subjective experience that occurs when a person's network of social relationships are significantly deficient in either quality or quantity. This is one of the serious psychological deficiencies that is prevalent among elderly. Therefore investigator is keen in assessing the level of loneliness among elderly in Vellore district. This study is conducted to assess the level of loneliness and back ground variables related to loneliness. Normative survey method is adopted in the present study. The sample is 284 elderly people living in Katpadi taluk in Vellore district. The investigator prepared loneliness scale to measure the loneliness of the elderly which consist of 20 statements. The study revealed that 50 percentages of elderly are highly lonely, 41.54 percentages of elderly are moderately lonely and only 8.46 percentages of elderly feel low loneliness. The marital status and living style of elderly are some of the influencing factors of loneliness. The investigator has given the following suggestions: resisting the escape behavior, placing the past as a primary parent, being positive performer, accepting as a part of personal growth and considering as a familiar experience. The above suggestions are to help an elderly to accept and navigate way to go through loneliness rather than providing tips to avoid it.

Key words: Loneliness, lonely

Introduction

Loneliness is one of the complex and common problem among the elderly. This is a common unpleasant emotional response to isolation. Loneliness typically includes anxious feelings about a lack of connection or communication with other people. This is caused by social, mental, emotional and physical factors. Experience of loneliness is due to many reasons such as life events may cause it, such as a lack of friendship relations during childhood and adolescence, or the physical absence of meaningful people around a person.

Many people experience loneliness for the first time when they are left alone. It is also a very common to feel lonely as the consequence of a breakup, divorce, or loss of any important long-term relationship. In these cases, it may stem both from the loss of a specific person and from the withdrawal from social circles caused by the event or the associated sadness. Loneliness is a painful warning signal that a person's social relations are deficient in some important way. It is impossible to eliminate this common human experience

Importance of the Study

Loneliness is the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relationships are significantly deficient in either quality or quantity. This shares three specific characteristics of loneliness. First, loneliness results from a deficiency in a person's social relations. Loneliness occurs when there is a mismatch between a person's actual social relations and the person's needs or desires for social contact. Sometimes loneliness results from a shift in an individual's social needs rather than from a change in their actual level of social contact. Second, loneliness is a subjective experience. People can be alone without being lonely, or lonely in a crowd. Third, the experience of loneliness is aversive. Although loneliness may be a spur to personal growth, the experience itself is unpleasant and distressing. This is one of the serious psychological deficiency that is prevalent among elderly. Therefore investigator is keen in assessing the level of loneliness among elderly in Vellore district.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the level of loneliness among elderly living in Vellore
2. To identify the back ground variables related to loneliness

Method of Study

Normative survey method is adopted in the present study.

Sample of the Study

For the present study the universe consists of elderly people living in Vellore district in Tamilnadu state. The investigator used multi stage sampling method in choosing the sample. Vellore district consists of nine taluks having 763 villages consisting of 5,36,160 households. From the nine taluks, Katpadi taluk has been chosen as the prospective population of the study. Katpadi taluk has 19 villages consisting of 8,948 elderly people. The sample has been drawn from these four villages namely Sevoor, Arumparuthi, Kugaiyanallore and Sembarayanallore by lottery method. These four villages have 1419 elderly population. Assessing the number of elderly living in these four villages, the investigator decided to chose 20 percentage of elderly from each of the four villages that is every fifth elderly person from the electoral list. Hence arriving at 284 elderly people from the four villages from Vellore district

Data Collection

The investigator decided to use personal interview method to collect data as the elderly respondents are mostly illiterate or less educated. For this purpose an interview schedule was constructed and validated. The interview schedule was pre-tested among 20 respondents from other villages. Based on the response of the elderly some questions were modified and then schedule was finalized. The finalized schedule was used for actual data collection. Data collection was held during September and October 2017. It took about an hour for each interview.

Tool Used

The investigator prepared a scale to measure the loneliness of the elderly. The scale consists of 20 statements having responses namely: never, sometimes and often. Each of these statements has scores of one, two and three. The scores are reversed for positive statements.

Descriptive Analysis

Analysis of the Level of Loneliness Scores Among Elderly

One of the important objectives of the present study is to assess the level of loneliness scores among elderly.

Table No.1 Levels of Loneliness Scores of Elderly

Category	N	%
High	142	50
Moderate	118	41.54
Low	24	8.46
Total	284	100

From the Table No. 1 it is clear that 50 percentages of elderly people are highly lonely. It is found that 41.54 percentages of elderly people are moderately lonely. It is evident that 8.46 percentages of elderly people have low loneliness.

Analysis of marital status of the elderly

One of the important objectives of the present study is to assess the marital status of the elderly.

Table No.2 Marital Status of the Elderly

Category	N	%
Unmarried	2	0.7
Married	188	66.2
Widow/widower	94	33.1
Total	284	100

From Table No. 2, it is clear that 66.2 percentages of elderly people are married. It is found that 33.1 percentages of elderly people are either widows or widowers. It is evident that 0.7 percentage of elderly people are unmarried.

Analysis of the Living Style of Elderly

One of the important objectives of the present study is to assess the living style of elderly.

Table No.3 Living Style of Elderly

Category	N	%
All in one house	37	13
Living with son	91	32
Living with daughter	32	11.3
Living with spouse only	81	28.5
Living with others	05	1.8
Living alone	38	13.4
Total	284	100

From Table No. 3 it is clear that 28.5 percentages of elderly people are living with their spouse only. It is found that 32 percentages of elderly people are living with their sons. It is evident that 13.4 percentages of elderly people are living alone and 1.8 percentages of elderly people are living with others.

Discussion and Suggestions in Dealing with Loneliness

Loneliness is part of the human condition. Everyone experiences it. It may be caused by circumstances that are easy to identify, such as moving away from family, or when good friends grow apart. One may even feel lonely due to one's own decision like leaving an unhealthy relationship. Loneliness can be painful, and there's no magical remedy for it. Yet it shifts our awareness and can offer new and important insights. The following are the suggestions to help an elderly to accept and navigate way to go through loneliness rather than providing tips to avoid it.

1. Resist the Escape Behaviours and Develop Relationships

Elderly people impulsively engage in escape behaviors, like eating, drinking, smoking, quitting, shopping to avoid the uncomfortable feeling of being lonely. These behaviors offer only short-term relief and often regret them later. But it is essential to develop a sense of contentment and acceptance of our loneliness without an urgent need to alleviate it. One needs to cultivate the ability to stay with ourselves even though we're uncomfortable. This is the key to growing and developing healthy relationships with others and with oneself.

2. Place Past as a Primary Parent

Life is totally dependent on others. Our bodies are tuned to bond for survival. Orchestras of neuro-chemicals are activated between parent and child that help to maintain a secured bond. The emotional distress of being left alone acts as an alarm and motivates us to draw others close and hold on literally for dear life. Elderly expects caregivers to provide food, water, warmth, and protection. The helpless childhood feelings can resurface when one feels lonely. The attachment alarm can be set off by the departure of a partner. Their absence can trigger our bodies to go into a sort of chemical withdrawal that can be very painful emotionally. It can create a nauseating experience of being lonely and feel like going to die. It is found that many adults and elders fear of being alone. It's important to recollect and recall that one is grown-up now with more choices and far less dependent on others. The alarm is obsolete and no longer precise. As a child, one can be abandoned but as an adult one could be merely left with many choices. It should seldom be life threatening.

3. Be positive and Performing

In the evening of one's life, when one is lonely, it's natural to ask questions like: Why did this happen to me? or, why do I feel so lonely? It can actually strike us down, create a rabbit hole of blame and criticism and make us feel worse. Every 'why' makes us feel worse and makes us more resistant to change. But while asking 'what' keeps us to discover new information, perform and be positive.

4. Accept as part of Personal Growth

Most of the life changes are often made alone. Time in solitude leads us to realization that elderly are constantly with others. Having the capacity to be with yourself and stand for what you believe in, even if you're lonely, is a necessary stage if you want to go from a relationship or

situation. There's often a feeling of loneliness between letting go of the familiar and reaching with faith for something new.

5. Normal and familiar experience

Human life is conditioned to look outside for happiness and to quell the feeling of loneliness. It's not possible for others to completely satisfy us with their total presence and loving attention. There's an inherent loneliness, 'the flavor of separation,' even in the closest relationships. There's a part of us that simply can't be filled by another person, because each one is unique and separate. One must take care of oneself and hold our own feelings as adults that it can connect with others not from desperation, but from deeply knowing and accepting ourselves.

Conclusion

Loneliness can also play an important role in the creative process. Temporary or prolonged loneliness can lead to notable artistic and creative expression. This does not imply that loneliness itself ensures this creativity. But it may have an influence on the subject matter of the artist and more likely be present in individuals engaged in creative activities. Some of the effective ways to combat loneliness are clubs, leisure retreats at market places, community prayers, participating in community works, participating in village / religious functions and religious retreats. These activities can reduce loneliness and its effects of depression. Loneliness is common in older people and is associated with adverse health consequences both from a mental and physical. There needs to be an increased focus on initiating intervention strategies targeting loneliness to determine if decreasing loneliness can improve quality of life and functioning in the elderly.

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