

Social Work Interventions in Successful Ageing

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Abstract

Population ageing and prolongation of life is the result of overall reduction in the rate of mortality and fertility. Population ageing is in other words an indicator of the degree of socioeconomic development of a society. The cut off age at which an individual is considered to be part of the elderly population is unanimously agreed as 60 years in many countries of the world. An increase in the population of elderly is a matter of concern because of its implications in the physical and functional well being of older adults, also due to issues of social isolation and abuse. Increasing age is often linked with multiple problems and related multiple causes for each problem. The role of Geriatric Social Worker here is quintessential in helping older persons remain mobile and independent as long as possible, thereby improving the quality of life of both the elderly clients and their significant others. Further, successful ageing is intricately associated with Social Work intervention in elder care. Through intervention strategies such as; holistic assessment, counseling, crisis intervention, dissemination of information, liaison and other systematic as well as evidence based practice; Social Work strives to promote successful ageing. In this 21st century multidisciplinary team approach, including geriatric social workers persevere to ensure safe living environment for older adults and successful aging.

Key words:

Geriatric Social Worker, successful ageing, multidisciplinary team and older adults.

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Introduction

Ageing is an inevitable process associated with physiological and psychological changes. The world population is ageing as stated by the UN, and this demographic transition is evident in every country in the world. The United Nations suggested 60 years as the age when a person should be considered an elderly. Further, classification of the elderly population is as: (i) Young old – between the ages of 60-75 years (ii) Old – old – between the ages of 75 – 85 years (iii) Very old – 85 years and above

Demographic Profile of the World Ageing Population

The number of older persons – those aged 60 or above has in recent years risen considerably in many countries and regions, with estimations of further acceleration in the age structures of the world population in the coming years. Round the globe there were 901 million people aged 60 years or above in 2015 – indicating an increase of 48% over 607 million older adults worldwide in 2000. This demographic change in the world population has been triggered by lower fertility and higher life expectancy. It is estimated to grow by 56% by 2030, to 1.4 billion by 2050. Even through, developed nations have the oldest population profile, the most rapidly ageing population is in less developed regions. A proportion of two – thirds of the total population of older persons are living in developing regions of the world.

Round the globe, women outlived men by an average of 4.5 years between 2010 and 2015. The gender gap in life expectancy is estimated to narrow in developed nations, but will widen in less developed regions. Globally, there were 86 men for every 100 women aged 60 years and above in 2015 and 63 men for every 100 women aged 86 years or over. This estimation is expected to increase to 89 and 73 respectively, in 2050.

Dependency Ratio

There is perception that the increase in population ageing is accompanied by a rise in the total dependency ratio of older adults. However, at the global level, the total dependency ratio has fallen to historical minimum in 2015. From a peak of approximately 112 “dependents” per 100 working age persons in early 1970s, to 74 dependents per 100 working – age persons in 2015. In

this context, the total dependency ratio is defined as the ratio of the number of children and young people under age 20 plus the number of persons aged 65 years or over, to the number of persons aged 20 to 64 years. By 2050, there will be 76 people in the dependent aged per 100 working – age persons.

Physiological and Psychological Changes accompanying Ageing

Old age is an important period in life cycle of any human being the last stage in the development process. Although elderly in many countries enjoy better health, the increased prevalence of chronic diseases and disabilities tend to accompany the ageing process. It is a widely accepted fact the

Ten Leading Causes of Death of those aged 60 Years or more Over Globally, by Sex, 2012

MALES		FEMALES	
Causes of death	Deaths (Thousands)	Causes of death	Deaths (Thousands)
Ischemic heart disease	2985226	Stroke	3102405
Stroke	2614535	Ischemic heart Disease	3087753
COPD	1541208	COPD	1225348
Lung Cancer	858088	Lower Respiratory Infections	780539
Lower respiratory Infections	746789	Diabetes Mellitus	656592
Diabetes Mellitus	500976	Hypertensive Heart Disease	571320
Hypertensive Heart Disease	399580	Alzheimer`s disease	455616
Stomach Cancer	353508	Lung Cancer	389966
Prostate Cancer	309168	Breast Cancer	286593
. Liver Cancer	306859	Kidney Disease	279398

Data Source; World health Organization (2014), Global Health Estimates 2014

'biological age' of a person is not identical with his 'chronological age'. In fact aging merely explains the process of growing old, senescence is a term used for the deterioration of the biological efficiency that accompanies ageing. The health issues that hinder the physical well being in ageing are; senile cataract, glaucoma, bony changes affecting mobility, changes in the mental outlook among others. While impaired memory, emotional disorders, and depression are a few psychological problems of ageing.

Ageing: The Indian Scenario – Twenty first Century

The number of older adults – those over 60 years of age has risen significantly in the country over the recent years, accounting for 8.6 percent of the country's total population. The state with the highest proportion of elderly is Kerala and that with the least percentage of elderly is Arunachal Pradesh. While the global dependency ratio is declining, India's age dependency ratio is increasing, standing at 14.2 against 10.9 in 2001. However, the trend in the gender gap of the aging population in India, is similar to what can be seen at the global level, with 5.11 crore men over 60 years and 5.28 crore women. (Indian express .com)

The “Domains” of Quality of Life of Older Adults

Material well-being – This includes a reasonable standard of accommodation, adequate possessions and sufficiently enough money to maintain a reasonable standard of comfort.

Emotional well-being – Depression is quite common among older people and has a crucial bearing upon function as well as quality of life.

Social inclusion – This domain includes being involved in the community and also being able to contribute to that community.

Physical well-being – This area often poses problem to older people because as people age, the physiology functions of their body gradually change.

Interpersonal Relationships – Socialization of older people is quintessential for a good quality of life. Frequent contact with family and friends play crucial role here.

Self determination – The idea of being dependent on others affects self determination of older adults.

Social Work among Elderly Population

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), defines Social Work as, “The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well being. Utilizing theories of human behavior and social systems, social work intervenes at points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work,” (IFSW 2000 and IASW codes of ethics 2006). The care of the aged is called clinical gerontology or geriatrics and geriatric social workers expertise in providing support and services to elderly clients and their families.

Surprisingly, Geriatric Social Work is not a very recognized field of practice in India, but in developed nations it is a crucial area of Social Work Intervention with specific guidelines and principles.

Theoretical Perspectives for Social Work with Older Persons:-

Social work with elderly clients is structured by a range of theoretical and methodological, perspectives, which guide social work practice.

System Theory- Social work with elderly clients, takes into account the persons Informal or natural system; Formal system such as community support, Societal system, (eg: health professional, hospitals), etc.

Problems can be caused not only by internal issues of the person but also by a disruption in the interactions between the older person and any of these systems. Here the role of social workers is to assess the cause of the problem and to act as a mediator between the client and the specific resource system.

Strength perspective – This approach identifies and encourages the worth, dignity and individual uniqueness of elder clients amidst social attitude that can at times even sideline them from mainstream. The strength perspective is based on the resilience that clients develop from coping with past life even and tries to place self determination as the core value.

Crisis Intervention – Elder clients go through a series of life experience and transitions during the course of which they may even struggle to cope sufficiently with the stressors. This intervention impinges on enhancing the client’s emotional capacity to manage the problem.

Task Centered – As the term suggests, it is a systematic and target oriented

framework where social work intervention is time bound the impetus is on the “here and now” and also on the eight problem areas which are psychosocial in nature such as; Interpersonal conflict, Dissatisfaction with social relations, Problems with formal organization, Difficulties in role performance, Problems of social transitions, Reactive emotional distress, Inadequate recourses, Behavioral problems.

Here, the problem solving approach is collaborative in nature, whereby the social worker and the client together assess the practical ways of dealing with the problems.

Emancipator Practice – Emancipator practice seeks to target discrimination, inequality and exclusion. This practice tries to downsize ageism and any other kind of prejudice or stereotypes around aging.

Counseling – Theories of counseling in healthcare setting emphasis on the interaction between various elements – the disease, the individual, the family, healthcare providers and other systems. This comes from a bio-Psycho social perspective and is an indispensable intervention strategy in Social Work.

The Role of the Social Worker with Older Persons

1) Geriatric Assessment – This involves a holistic approach, whereby social workers assess the functional aspects, potential risks, likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, practical and emotional needs as well as appropriate support of the primary clients. It is in short a social study of older clients and their significant others.

2) Counseling and solution focused brief therapy – This intervention helps clients to cope with transitions in life. Social workers adopt an individualistic approach – focusing on the individual strength and circumstances and promoting resilience in clients. As opposed to the widely held view of elderly as rigid and unchanging, many older adults benefit considerably from individual counseling.

3) Stress Management – Stress management is considered to be crucial in maintaining increased senior health and well being. Stress in the elderly population can result from relationships, finances, role transitions and many other spheres of life

4) Advocacy work – Advocating on behalf of clients to defend and safeguard

their rights. Today's social workers adopt a wide range of advocacy techniques to make the voices of their clients be heard. Resource mobilization, interaction with agencies and active participation in decision making at bureaucratic level form a part of advocacy.

5) Developing Care Management services – Care management is the specific assessment of client needs within the context of the available social support, and the designing of individual care plan that meets those needs while maximizing independence and dignity. The principles of communication, flexibility, and goal setting are extensively used in this role.

6) Group Work – Group work and group therapies are designed on the basis that people are social and benefit from the contributed experiences of others to achieve growth or change. Groups offer several advantages which otherwise would be inaccessible in individual effort. There are various groups formed on the needs of clients such as, emotional support groups, health – related support groups, and psychotherapy groups.

Social work with elderly client is a multidimensional approach, involving families, spouses, adult children siblings, grandchildren and other caretakers (also known as significant others), to assist families to deal effectively with the special needs of primary clients. This would include:- Information and giving pieces of relevant information – providing specific information to clients and their families on a range of topics including benefits, entitlements and support available, Crisis Intervention, Brief Therapy, Conflict management and meditation, Bereavement counseling, Advocacy

Help with navigating the bureaucracies (eg: social welfare schemes), Training courses and career support groups. Geriatric Care also involves; environmental modification, education to clients on wills, power of attorney and other legal procedures, and financial planning.

Settings that geriatric social workers work: Generally geriatric care social workers engage themselves in the following settings: Community hospitals, Daycare centers for older people, Non Government organizations, Care homes, Rehabilitation centers, Local Authorities, Palliative care units etc.

Berkman et al. (1997), define the purpose of Geriatric Social Work Practice as Social work practice to enhance developmental, problem solving and coping mechanisms of older persons and their families, Facilitate effective and hu-

man functioning of delivery systems that offer resources and services to older adults and their families, Link older clients with systems that offer relevant resources, services and opportunities and contribute to the development and improvement of policies aimed at maximizing individual functions throughout the life span

Elder Abuse and Social Work

A definition of Elder Abuse: "A single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person or violates their human and civil rights" (report of the working Group on Elder Abuse, 2002)

Forms of Abuse are Physical abuse, Sexual or Psychological abuse, Financial or material abuse, Neglect or commission, Discrimination and Institutional abuse.

Social workers carry out a multidisciplinary assessment where elder abuse is reported, followed by liaison with relevant services and agencies and crisis intervention to foster ultimate resolution of the solution.

Successful Ageing

Apart from medical problems, social, psychological and financial issues play a crucial part in geriatric care. Therefore, the goal of successful ageing demands a multidisciplinary approach, with Social Work as an important discipline. Successful ageing has three basic components; low probability of disease and disease related disability, high physical and mental functional capacity, and active engagement with life.

Conclusion

The ageing society is a global phenomenon. 1999 which was the United Nations international year of older persons proclaimed that with proper planning an ageing society could turn into a society "for all ages" that would wholeheartedly welcome multi generational equity and meaningful participation at all stages of life. A society for all ages would embrace the idea of interdependence of the individual and society. Sir James Sterling Ross, aptly commented 'You do not heal old age; You protect it; You promote it; You extend it.' Here

the role of Geriatric Social Workers is that of a catalyst of change in the lives of older people cannot be ignored.

Owing to the rapid changes in human society as an impact of: Industrialization, Urbanization, Technological changes, Education and globalization, Weakening of intergenerational ties, Disintegration of joint family system to mention few has drastically affected the elderly population. These changes compounded by issues such as; Lack of social support, Economic problems, Health problems, Psychological issues and Abuse, the role of Geriatric Social Work becomes indispensable in promoting successful ageing as it is a multi-dimensional approach encompassing a holistic view of the situation. Social Work profession is purely committed to individual and community level evidence based practice incorporating the skills and values essential in promoting individual well being.

Successful ageing denotes modification of behavioural process to gain the best possible outcome to ageing.

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