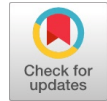


Health Problems and Illnesses: Overwhelming on Living Conditions of Elderly Individuals

Radhika Kapur



Abstract: *The main objective of this research paper is to acquire an efficient understanding of various types of health problems and how they are overwhelming on living conditions of elderly individuals. The senior citizens are overwhelmed by different types of health problems and illnesses. These are experienced in a major or minor form. The senior citizens are required to be well-versed in terms of different types of methodologies and procedures, which would be facilitating in treating various types of health problems and illnesses. Within rural communities, the health care and medical facilities are not in a well-developed state, whereas, in urban communities, these are in a well-developed state. The senior citizens, migrate to urban communities in order to get their health problems and illnesses treated. As a consequence of promoting good health and well-being, the individuals in old age will render an important contribution in bringing about improvements in their overall quality of lives. The senior citizens in some cases are not ambulatory and are required to depend upon other individuals in order to take care of their needs and requirements. Hence, they are required to form cordial and amiable terms and relationships with other individuals, including family and community members. Hence, it is of utmost significance to take care of different types of health problems and illnesses. Therefore, it is understood on a comprehensive basis that health problems and illnesses are overwhelming on living conditions of elderly individuals. The main concepts that are taken into account in this research paper are, health problems and illnesses are overwhelming in old age, health issues in geriatrics, health issues among senior citizens and measures to be implemented in promoting good health and well-being.*

Keywords: *Geriatrics, Health Issues, Illnesses, Living Conditions, Overwhelming, Senior Citizens, Treatment*

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of medical sciences and medical facilities has rendered a significant contribution in leading to an increase in population. In the present existence, when senior citizens are not ambulatory, they receive medical and health care facilities within their homes. They hire caregivers and nurses. Furthermore, they obtain medical facilities, especially when they are not ambulatory and experience severe health problems and illnesses. The senior citizens are vulnerable to various types of health problems and illnesses, i.e. diabetes, heart problems, pain in the joints, high or low blood pressure, and other diseases.

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In old age, individuals may in some cases, experience loss of memory and may not even recognize their own family members. The other health problems, which they experience are, visual impairments, hearing impairments, decline in vocabulary and usage of words and so forth. As a consequence of experiencing various types of health problems, it is apparent that they need support and care from their family members, caregivers and other service providers. Ageing in the Indian society is considered as a disadvantage. It is a norm that elderly members of the households need to be treated with respect and courtesy. When the individuals are to get engaged in the implementation of any tasks or functions, they obtain blessings and good wishes from elderly family members. With changes that are taking place in the social and cultural values, the senior citizens, who are economically unproductive are neglected. It is recognized that the senior citizens are prone to psychological problems through various factors, such as, social isolation, loneliness, malnutrition, and economic and emotional depression (Kamble, Ghodke, Dhumale, Avchat, & Goyal, 2012, [2]). These problems have an effect not only on the psychological health of senior citizens, but also physical health conditions. Before these problems assume a major form and affect the living conditions of senior citizens to a major extent, it is vital for them to implement measures to prevent them from giving rise to impediments.

II. HEALTH PROBLEMS AND ILLNESSES ARE OVERWHELMING IN OLD AGE

The individuals emerge into senior citizens, after they have attained the age of 60 years. In old age, the individuals experience various types of health problems and illnesses. These are experienced in a major or minor form. As a consequence, the elderly individuals experience a decline in capabilities and aptitude. As in their young age, they were active, they are not so active in old age. For example, in young age, the individuals are capable of carrying out manual job duties, which they cannot carry out in old age. Within homes, household chores of cleaning and sweeping may be carried out by elderly individuals, if they are not much tedious, but they obtain help from domestic helpers and service providers as well, in order to carry out job duties more efficiently. Furthermore, as a consequence of experiencing visual and hearing impairments, they experience problems in communicating with others. It is even difficult for them to watch television shows, listen to radios or make use of technologies.



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Therefore, it is well-understood, health problems and illnesses are overwhelming in old age. The elderly individuals are in some cases not ambulatory. They make use of wheel chairs and walkers to move around. As a consequence, they are overwhelmed by problems and are dependent on others even to carry out the activities of daily living, i.e. eating, bathing, dressing, toileting and transferring. They obtain help from family members or caregivers. In such cases, they are overwhelmed by the psychological problems of anger, stress, anxiety, frustration and depression. The elderly individuals in such cases want help to be available to them 24 hours in a day. The family members in such cases make sure, they do not leave elderly individuals alone in the house. Furthermore, they need to pay adequate attention towards meals and medicines of elderly family members. Hence, elderly individuals form the viewpoint that they are proving to be burdens on their family members due to health problems and illnesses. Furthermore, they feel they are interfering in the daily life routine of their family members. Therefore, it can be stated, health problems and illnesses are overwhelming in old age. The individuals are different from each other in terms of their financial positions. The elderly individuals, belonging to deprived, marginalized and economically weaker sections of the society are overwhelmed by the conditions of poverty. As a consequence, they are experiencing problems in obtaining medical treatment, hence, they make use of traditional methods, which are affordable. These include, obtaining herbs and medicinal plants from the forests. Furthermore, there have been cases, when adult children of these individuals are engaged in jobs, hence, they are financially strong. They provide financial help to their elderly parents in cases of their health problems and illnesses. Hence, it is understood on a comprehensive basis that health problems and illnesses cost medical expenses. In addition, there are number of factors, which need to be paid attention to, i.e. diet and nutrition; exercise and physical activities; cleanliness; cordiality in terms and relationships; obtaining medical check-ups on regular basis and coping with psychological problems in an effective manner. Elderly individuals need to take help from others, if they are unable to implement these on their own. Therefore, health problems and illnesses are overwhelming in old age.

III. HEALTH ISSUES IN GERIATRICS

World Health Organization defines health as the state of complete physical, mental, social, uniform and spiritual well-being. Health is not merely considered as the absence of a disease or illness. Geriatrics is the branch of medicine that deals with physiologic characteristics of ageing and the diagnosis and treatment of diseases that affect senior citizens. In most of the countries of the world and in India, the geriatric age is 60 years. There have been improvements taking place in geriatrics, as developments are taking place in the living standards and life expectancy of individuals. The senior citizens depict a great deal of variation in the physiological decline related to their age and other health problems. Most of the chronic diseases increase with the growing age of the individuals. The experiencing of various chronic diseases and disabilities lead to an increase in

utilization of health care resources and health care expenditure (Salagre, n.d.). In India, the elderly individuals experience dual health problems, which include, both communicable and non-communicable diseases. This is further augmented by the impairment of special sensory functions, such as, hearing and visual. A decline in immunity as well as age-related physiologic changes leads to an increased burden of communicable diseases within senior citizens. The prevalence of tuberculosis is higher among senior citizens as compared to younger generation. The number of health issues that senior citizens experience include, type 2 diabetes, coronary heart diseases, hypertension, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, Alzheimer's disease, osteoarthritis, osteoporosis, cataracts and so forth. According to the Government of India, one third of the mortality among senior citizens takes place due to cardiovascular disorders. Respiratory disorders account for 10 percent of mortality. Neoplasm accounts for six percent and mortality rate accounts for four percent takes place due to accidents, poisoning and violence (Salagre, n.d.).

A. Health Issues among Senior Citizens

It is apparently understood that in old age, the individuals are overwhelmed by various types of health problems and illnesses. These are experienced in a major or minor form. They are required to ensure, these do not have detrimental effects. The health care facilities are obtained from health care centres or within homes. In rural communities, the elderly individuals are making use of herbs and medicinal plants in order to treat health problems and illnesses. In cases, these are severe, they migrate to urban communities in order to obtain medical treatment. The health issues among senior citizens have been stated as follows:

B. Frailty

Frailty is referred to the loss of the capacity of the individuals to withstand the pressures and stresses that take place within the environment as well as in maintaining terms and relationships with other individuals within as well as outside the homes. Due to frailty, individuals experience a reduction in the physiological function of several organ systems. The senior citizens, who become frail are at an increasing risk of disability and death. The reason being, they lack the reserves to respond and maintain homeostasis. Frailty impedes the capability of the individuals to carry out the activities of daily living of eating, bathing, dressing, toileting and transferring. Therefore, the senior citizens are more likely to depend upon other individuals. Both frailty and disability exist simultaneously, particularly among senior citizens (Salagre, n.d., [4]).

IV. MALNUTRITION

Malnutrition is the condition, when the individuals are unable to obtain the essential nutrients that are required for their effective growth and development.



When the individuals are unable to obtain their necessary nutrition, they are stated to be experiencing malnutrition. The senior citizens need to take care of their nutritional requirements and ensure to consume their meals regularly. They may consume less, i.e. instead of two pieces of bread, they may take just one piece of bread, but they need to ensure they do not skip meals. Malnutrition is a consequence of anorexia. Among senior citizens, malnutrition takes place due to skipping meals, not eating regularly, lack of essential nutrients and other health issues. As a result of malnutrition, they lose the capabilities to get engaged in various tasks and activities (Salagre, n.d.).

A. Falls

In old age, it is recommended that senior citizens need to go out of their homes for walks in the mornings or in the evenings. In India, the cities are mostly crowded with heavy traffic. The lanes are narrow and individuals need to walk carefully. The senior citizens are subject to falls, particularly when they go out of their homes alone and do not take precautions. When they are unable to walk and come across a barrier, they may lose their balance. Therefore, it is recommended that they should be accompanied by a family member or caregiver. Furthermore, they need to make use of assistive devices, such as, walking stick, wheel chair, hearing aids, spectacles and so forth. Risk factors for the repeated falls among senior citizens are, poor muscle strength, cerebellum ganglia involvement, hypoglycemia in diabetes, postural hypotension in hypertension and peripheral neuropathies. The preventive strategies for falls require environmental, medical and rehabilitative interventions (Salagre, n.d.).

B. Osteoporosis

Ageing is associated with osteoporosis and progressive bone loss. Due to this, there is an increasing risk of hip and other fractures. It is more common in the case of women as compared to men. The risk factors for osteoporosis are increasing age, small build, calcium and vitamin D deficiency, sedentary lifestyle, smoking, alcoholism and excess of caffeine. Bone mineral density measurement by dual energy is the modality that is available for the diagnosis of osteoporosis. Hence, it is essential for the individuals to obtain calcium and vitamin D in their diet. It is of utmost significance for senior citizens to obtain healthy nutrition. Apart from a nutritious diet, they need to restrain the intake of alcohol and caffeine. Exposure to sunlight for about 15 to 20 minutes at least thrice a week is recommended to senior citizens, as sunlight is regarded as the good source of vitamin D (Salagre, n.d.).

C. Delirium

Delirium is referred to the severe disorder of disturbed attention that fluctuates with time. It is associated with an increase in the in-hospital mortality and sometimes with permanent damage of the brain. The clinical features of delirium include, rapid decline in the level of consciousness with difficulty in focusing, shifting or sustaining attention and cognitive change in communication abilities and behavioral traits, such as, mumbling, coherent speech, memory gaps, disorientation and hallucinations. The diagnosis of delirium in the hospital and health care set up can be done by a simple validated tool, i.e. the Confusion

Assessment Method (CAM). Prompt and early identification and treatment of precipitating factors, and supportive care are essential factors that are required in the treatment of delirium (Salagre, n.d.).

D. Cognition Impairment (Dementia)

Dementia is a decline in the memory, intellectual and cognitive function, due to the affection of the central nervous system without the loss of consciousness. Dementia occurs in the Alzheimer's disease, multi-infarct state, subdural hematoma, normal pressure hydrocephalus, hypothyroidism, head injury, alcoholism, brain space occupying lesions and vitamin B deficiency. When dementia assumes a major form, the senior citizens need to take medical treatment. They may experience loss of interest in activities that they used to take pleasure in. Disorientation in time and space is followed by language impairment. Aphasia and paralysis are common features. Vegetative state of the person and ultimately death are the outcomes of severe cognitive impairment (Salagre, n.d.).

E. High Blood Pressure

Hypertension, stress, and anxiety are the major causes of high blood pressure. High blood pressure among senior citizens is diagnosed, when they have high readings. High blood pressure can cause symptoms, such as, headaches, vision problems, nose bleeds, trouble in breathing, fits and black-outs. Blood pressure control is important among individuals, whether, they have diabetes or not. However, high blood pressure is the major cause of heart diseases, strokes and other health problems. High blood pressure and diabetes are associated. In most cases, the senior citizens with diabetes are required to take medication to control their blood pressure (High and Low Blood Pressure Symptoms, 2019, [1]).

F. Low Blood Pressure

Low blood pressure can take place not only among senior citizens, but other individuals as well. Dehydration, lack of proper diet and fatigue are the major causes of low blood pressure. It can also be influenced by genetic make-up, ageing, medication, infection and allergy. As a consequence of low blood pressure, the individuals can experience other health issues, such as, central nervous system disorders, nerve problems, such as, peripheral neuropathy or autonomic neuropathy, cardiovascular disorders, alcoholism and nutritional diseases. Chronic low blood pressure with symptoms is not serious. But health problems can take place, when the blood pressure lowers and brain is deprived of adequate supply of blood (Understanding Low Blood Pressure, 2019, [5] [6][7]).

G. Sleep Disorders

Research has indicated that sleep disorders is common among senior citizens, particularly when they are above 70 years of age. When they reach the age of 70 and above, they usually sleep just about four to six hours per day.

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In most cases, they prefer to take rest during the day time and during the night do not feel sleepy. Lack of sufficient sleep also has an effect upon the health conditions of the individuals. Hence, it is essential for senior citizens to obtain at least seven to eight hours of sleep. The senior citizens need to consult their physicians and health care specialists to obtain solutions to the problems of sleep disorders. In patients with sleep disorders, it is recommended that they should get engaged in activities, which may require them to work diligently and obtain good sleep. It has been researched upon that intake of medicines also enables the individuals to feel sleepy. In such cases, individuals obtain sufficient amount of sleep during the day and night time.

H. Pain in the Joints

Pain in the joints is common in old age. They may take place on temporary basis or may be long-term. Research has indicated that senior citizens experience pain in their body, due to various reasons. These are, contact with sharp objects, getting touched by others in a hard manner, walking, going up and down the staircase or simply when they are getting engaged in some work, such as, household chores, such as, cleaning or sweeping or physical activities. In most cases, they make use of ointments or oil to relieve themselves of pain. But it is recommended that they should not get engaged in activities, which may augment their pain in the joints. When they feel relieved, only then they should resume their activities.

I. Measures to be implemented in Promoting Good Health and Well-being

The individuals, belonging to all communities, categories and socio-economic backgrounds are required to promote good health and well-being. This needs to be promoted from physical as well as psychological perspectives. As a consequence, the individuals will be able to implement all the factors that are facilitating in leading to progression. Maintaining good physical health conditions enable the individuals to remain free from various types of health problems and illnesses (Maintaining a Healthy Lifestyle, 2016, [3] [8] [9] [10]). On the other hand, maintaining psychological health conditions are facilitating in coping with psychological problems of anger, stress, anxiety, frustration and depression. As a consequence, individuals will be able to prepare themselves adequately in doing well in one's job duties and generating desired outcomes. Therefore, throughout the lives of the individuals, they are required to be well-versed in terms of measures to be implemented in promoting good health and well-being. These are stated as follows:

J. Diet and Nutrition

It is indispensable for the senior citizens to pay attention towards their diet and nutrition. Adequate diet and nutrition helps the individuals to take care of their health and prevent various health problems that may take place from lack of essential nutrients. Nutritious diet makes provision of essential nutrients, which are needed to live a healthy life. In addition, the individuals obtain the energy that is required to carry out one's tasks and activities in a well-organized manner. It needs to be ensured that senior citizens obtain their nutrition, four times in a day, breakfast, lunch, evening

tea and dinner. Food items, such as, cereals, bread, vegetables, fruits, eggs, and milk are usually recommended. Fried foods and sweets are not completely given up, but consumed in moderation. Normally sweets are recommended to be consumed once or twice a week. Skipping of meals should be avoided. The senior citizens may consume less amount of food, but they should not skip meals. The physicians and health care specialists need to provide information to the senior citizens in terms of diet and nutrition.

V. PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

The senior citizens need to get involved in physical activities, especially when they are obese and in other cases as well. Walks are usually recommended for senior citizens at least thrice a week for about 20 to 30 minutes. When they make use of walking sticks or wheel chairs, they usually are accompanied by family members or caregivers. In some cases, senior citizens are actively involved in various types of sports as well, such as, tennis and badminton. They take pleasure in playing these outdoor sports mainly to keep themselves healthy. In most cases, when they feel they need to reduce weight, they not only keep a control on their diet, but also get engaged in physical activities. The physical activities not only help in controlling body weight and staying healthy, but individuals also are able to stay active.

A. Regular Medical Check-ups

Senior citizens need to obtain medical check-ups on regular basis. When they have experienced any health problem or illness, which have imposed detrimental effects upon their lives, they need to consult physicians and medical practitioners. They advise them not only in terms of diet and nutrition, but also prescribe medicines and suggest ways that need to be implemented to live a healthy life. Medical check-ups are normally acquired by senior citizens once a month or once in two months. On the other hand, in the case of severe medical and health care problems, they usually obtain medical check-ups on regular basis, which may be once a week. In medical check-ups on regular basis, the senior citizens obtain assistance from their medical doctors regarding providing solutions to health care problems and living a healthy life. Research has indicated, when senior citizens do not feel comfortable in the home environmental conditions, they obtain suggestions from medical doctors. The main reason being, it is indispensable for the individuals to maintain pleasant and amiable home environmental conditions.

B. Pleasant and Amiable Home Environmental Conditions

It is indispensable for the home environmental conditions to be pleasant and amiable. Pleasantness and amiability within the home environment can be created by number of factors.



These include, maintaining good terms and relationships with family members, providing peaceful solutions to the occurrence of conflicting situations, making provision of all the infrastructure, facilities and amenities, so individuals can satisfactorily fulfill their needs and requirements and hiring helpers and caregivers, as there are certain tasks within the house, which cannot be implemented by individuals. Hence, when all these aspects are implemented, the individuals are able to form pleasant and amiable environmental conditions within homes. These conditions would be favorable to not only senior citizens, but also other members of the households. The individuals are able to maintain good health as well as carry out various tasks and activities satisfactorily, when pleasant and amiable home environmental conditions are formed.

C. Peaceful Conflict Resolution Methods

In some cases, within as well as outside the homes, there are occurrence of conflicts and disagreements. There may be instances, when individuals may not agree with what the elderly members of the household are trying to convey to them or they may not agree to their advice and suggestions. In such cases, it is vital that individuals need to implement peaceful conflict resolution methods and maintain control on the feelings of anger and frustration. The elderly members of the households need to be treated with respect and courtesy. When they are communicating in terms of their viewpoints and suggestions, which may not be applicable, it is vital to provide them the necessary information in a polite manner. In the case of occurrence of a conflict or disagreement, the individuals need to listen to each other calmly and then come to an agreement in a peaceful manner. Implementation of peaceful conflict resolution methods helps in maintaining good terms and relationships as well as good health and well-being.

D. Maintenance of Good Terms and Relationships with Family and Community Members

It is comprehensively believed that senior citizens are dependent upon family members to maintain good health and well-being. When they experience health problems and illnesses, they need assistance from family members to take care of their needs and requirements, take them to the health care centre and care for them. In the absence of the family members, they need to obtain assistance from community members. These include, their helpers, caregivers, friends and neighbors. It is vital for the senior citizens to maintain good terms and relationships with family and community members. One of the important aspects to maintain good terms and relationships is to communicate in an effective manner. The senior citizens should listen to the suggestions that are given to them by their family members and implement them, if they are beneficial. On the other hand, elderly members of the family should not be considered as liabilities and treated with respect and courtesy. This would render an effective contribution in the maintenance of good terms and relationships and promote good health and well-being.

E. Reducing Consumption of Alcohol

Alcohol is publicly accepted. In India as well as in other countries of the world, alcohol is used in marriages and

parties. The senior citizens too consume alcohol in such occasions. But it is vital for them to reduce the consumption of alcohol. In some cases, senior citizens consume alcohol on daily basis, which is excessive consumption. Whereas, in some cases, they may consume occasionally or seldom, particularly when they make visits to parties. Excessive consumption of alcohol is unfavorable to the health conditions of individuals. Therefore, it is essential for the senior citizens to reduce the consumption of alcohol. This applies, particularly to the individuals, who consume alcohol on a daily basis. When the individuals consume alcohol to a major extent, they become addicted to it. In such cases, it becomes difficult for them to quit or reduce the consumption of alcohol. In the case of such problems, they are required to consult health care specialists and physicians. It is indispensable to reduce the consumption of alcohol to promote good health and well-being.

F. Staying Active

It is vital for the senior citizens to stay active and participate in various tasks and activities. Even when they are confined within their homes, it is vital for them to get engaged in various tasks and activities. They usually keep themselves active by getting engaged in various household chores, such as, cleaning, sweeping, gardening, fetching water, preparation of meals and so forth. In rural areas, there are additional household responsibilities, as the senior citizens as well as the other members of the households need to get engaged in the rearing of livestock. The senior citizens normally stay active by communicating with their grandchildren, telling them stories, playing with them indoor as well as outdoor games and so forth. When they are active and busy in various tasks, they feel pleasurable, contented and are able to maintain physical as well as psychological health. Therefore, even when the senior citizens are not ambulatory, they are required to stay active to stimulate their mind-sets.

G. Developing an Optimistic Outlook

The senior citizens usually develop a pessimistic outlook, particularly when they experience health problems, physically and psychologically. When they possess the viewpoint that due to the declining health conditions, they are unable to carry out certain tasks and activities and are dependent upon their family members and caregivers, they usually develop a pessimistic outlook. But it is vital for the senior citizens to develop positive thinking and an optimistic outlook towards life. They should develop interest and enthusiasm towards various tasks and activities that would be pleasurable for them. When the senior citizens are experiencing health problems and illnesses, which are imposing detrimental effects upon their lives, they need to develop positive viewpoints and ensure, they do not let their health problems to impose barriers upon their lives. The senior citizens, who form an optimistic outlook live their lives effectually and render a significant contribution towards the achievement of personal and professional goals.

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H. Using Medicines and Assistive Devices

The senior citizens normally experience visual and hearing impairments. In such cases, they need to make use of spectacles and hearing aids. With the utilization of these assistive devices, they are able to provide solutions to these challenges. Furthermore, the senior citizens need to make use of medicines to maintain good health. The various medicines, which they need to make use of are, vitamins, calcium, blood pressure, heart problems, thyroid, to relieve pain in the joints, cold, cough and so forth. When they experience visual problems, they need to put in eye drops. Putting in eye drops help them to watch television and make use of other technologies. Using medicines help them to remain healthy and promote well-being. They need to ensure, they consume a snack before taking medicines. Apart from making use of medicines and assistive devices, the senior citizens need to refrain themselves from taking any tension or getting angry. It is vital for them to have a peaceful mind-set and keep a control on the psychological problems of depression, stress and anxiety.

VI. CONCLUSION

In old age, individuals are overwhelmed by different types of health problems and illnesses. Health problems and illnesses are overwhelming in old age. Geriatrics is the branch of medicine that deals with physiologic characteristics of ageing and diagnosis and treatment of diseases that affect senior citizens. Health issues among senior citizens are, frailty, malnutrition, falls, osteoporosis, delirium, cognition impairment (dementia), high blood pressure, low blood pressure, sleep disorders and pain in the joints. Measures to be implemented in promoting good health and well-being are, diet and nutrition, physical activities, regular medical check-ups, pleasant and amiable home environmental conditions, peaceful conflict resolution methods, maintenance of good terms and relationships with family and community members, reducing consumption of alcohol, staying active, developing an optimistic outlook and using medicines and assistive devices. Finally, it can be stated, coping with health problems and illnesses are enriching to elderly individuals to a major extent.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

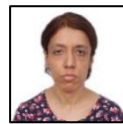
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