

SOCIO- ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING OF OLDER PERSONS

K.Maheswari* and R.Maheswari**

*Head, Department of Social Work, Government Arts and Science College, Perambalur.

**Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Government Arts and Science
College, Perambalur.

Affiliated to Bharathidasan University – Tiruchirappalli

Abstract

Ageing imposes lot of challenges to the modern society because ageing is multifaceted. The older persons cope and adopt the physical and psychological changes by using coping mechanisms which includes the main component spiritual well-being. Spirituality can be depicted as a continuum of spiritual need from spiritual well-being and its association psycho social factors. As age increases, the belief in superior power, quality of life, religiosity and well-being of self and others, relationship with others, becomes priority for older adults. This study was planned to measure the socio-economic conditions and spiritual well-being among the elderly residing in Perambalur district. Spiritual well-being was assessed through interview schedule of 105 older persons from both rural and urban settings using random sampling procedure. The study is descriptive in nature. The findings highlight the socio-economic conditions and spiritual well-being of older adults. It was found that majority of the respondents (63.8%) had high level of spiritual well-being. Along with psychosocial dimensions spiritual well-being and the religiosity were interconnected and religious belief were understood better and accepted than spiritual beliefs among the older persons.

Key words: Older Persons, spiritual well-being, religiosity, superior power.

Introduction

Ageing, which is an inescapable reality of the human existence on the planet earth, plays a crucial role in the global demographic transition. More recently, there has been an expansion of interest to explore how older adults continue to create meaning and live resiliently in a time of increasing frailty, loss, and loneliness along with deaths of contemporaries (Mukherjee, 2016). Spiritual expression may include experiences of a transpersonal nature and behaviors such as prayer or meditation in which one finds support and meaning (James, 1902). Socio economic factors such as age, gender, marital status, number of surviving children, level of education decides the well-being of older persons.

Ageing accompanied with various challenging problem occupation and economic dependency are determined the living conditions of elders of older persons. Elderly people suffer from many physical, social, emotional and psychological problems which decrease the spirituality of older persons. For developing countries, ageing is not a challenge, but the increased number of older persons is important in several spheres of life such as health, social security, living arrangement, relationship building and maintenance, coping with stress and ideas and issues in relation to death and dying. Within the framework of ageing population spirituality and religiosity are crucial. Spirituality and religion are important constructs in the lives of many elderly (Mukherjee, 2016). Spirituality can be viewed as essential or core nature, one domain among the psychological, biological, emotional and social aspects of a person, and the overarching content of self-surrounding one's being (Furman, 2010; Carroll, 2001).

Spirituality and Ageing

Paley (2006) has said that spirituality has become separate from religion only recently and Nolan (2011) suggested that spirituality has become uncoupled from religion. Spirituality includes attributes, outlooks and practices which emphasis the exploration for meaning in human lives, particularly in terms of relationships, values and meanings by which people seek to live (Sheldrake, 2007) and enhance quality of life (Ferguson, 2011). Spirituality is thought to

include a system of beliefs than encompasses life, compassion and respect for life. Despite the inevitable change of old age contemporary society provides new opportunities for growth and a sense of relative mental and emotional well-being for the elderly. Religion, spirituality and belief in god found to play vital roles in the everyday lives of the senior citizens and spiritual well-being is a source of support and helps in positive ageing. Older persons face lot of problems but spirituality and religiosity helps to cope with them. Not necessarily as the traditional refuge in times of need, but also as a source of inspiration for living the later stages of life more fully and contentedly (George, et al., 2000; Levin & Chatters 1998; MacKinlay, 2001; Moberg, 2001).

Malone and Dadswell (2018) stated that the role of religion, spirituality and/or belief in positive ageing for older adults. Qualitative focus groups with 14 older adults living in West London explored the role and importance of religion, spirituality and/or belief held in their everyday lives and its impact on positive ageing. Major findings of the study revealed that Religion, spirituality and/or belief were found to play a number of roles in the everyday lives of the older adults, including being a source of strength, comfort and hope in difficult times and bringing about a sense of community and belonging. Lima et al (2020) had conducted a study on spirituality and quality of life in older adults; a path analysis model. A cross-sectional study, including 604 older adults from general community and 63.6% of the sample was composed by female gender with a mean age of 71.6 (SD=4.81). The major findings revealed that A path analysis model was performed where the presence of a chronic disease, age and functionality has a direct effect on physical quality of life and spirituality had a direct effect on mental quality of life. Social support mediated the relationship between functionality and mental quality of life, and in turn, functionality mediated the relationship between age and physical quality of life.

Roy et al (2022) had examined the influence of spiritual practices on quality of life among older urbanites in an Indian town. The researcher used to WHOQOL-BREF questionnaire and Daily Spiritual Experience Scale to the need of the respondents. The relationship between Spiritual practices and

Quality of Life has been observed through Pearson correlation and the influence of spiritual practices on quality of life has been assessed by regression analysis. Major findings of the study revealed that practising spirituality insists older people to remain hopeful about their life with good mental health.

Materials and methods

Aim and Objectives of the study

The aim of the study is to assess the socio-economic conditions and spiritual well-being among the older persons in Perambalur district.

Objectives

- To study the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample population.
- To assess the spiritual well-being among the elderly living in community settings.
- To find out the association between the socio economic conditions and spiritual well-being among the older persons.

Methodology

The present study was a descriptive study of community dwelling older persons aged 60 years and above and residing in both rural and urban areas of Perambalur district.

Sample

105 elderly people living in household settings of both sexes were selected randomly from a village and town panchayat of Perambalur district. Elderly were interviewed using pre-tested interview schedule which included questions on socio demographic details, health, leisure time activities and religious dimensions.

Tools of Data collection

Self-prepared interview schedule was used to collect the personal data of the respondents. The researcher has also applied a standardized tool on spiritual well-being developed by Poloutzian and Ellison (1982) which measures both religious and existential well-being. Data was collected by the researcher in person by visiting the households. Data was managed by MS excel and analysis of data was done using SPSS package.

Findings and Discussion

Socio-economic conditions of the respondents

Socio economic survey helps a researcher to understand the social standing of an individual in the society. It also measures the levels of income, educational qualification, occupation, family type and size, dependency ratio, health conditions and living arrangement of the respondents and the characteristics of the neighbourhood. Health ratio, nutrition factors, disability percentage are also understood by the socio economic survey and it differs based on the economic conditions of the people. Various studies have proved that socio-economic conditions affect the lives of older people. Spiritual well-being is also affected by these socio economic factors and has significant association on the respondents.

It is evident from the study that 46 per cent were in young-old category. Different age groups help us to understand the characteristics and ways of thinking of the older persons of a particular time. Regarding gender of the respondents, more than half of the respondents (53.3%) were female and 46.7 per cent were male older persons, older women outnumber the male persons and it may be due to life expectancy and chances of survival probability.

It is seen from the study that nearly majority of the respondents (59%) are illiterates and as Perambalur district is a small district, with poor facilities, the opportunities to get education were lacking in those days. Vast majority of them (96%) are Hindus and 3.8 per cent follow Christianity.

Regarding the living arrangement and family status of the respondents, majority of the respondents (72%) are living arrangement with their son's family and the family size comprises of above six members and are living in with joint families (55.1%) and 42.9 per cent are living along with the spouse. When it comes to occupation, the older persons continue to work after 60 years of age and earn their living. 44.8 per cent of the respondents are doing agricultures and 26.7 per cent are home makers, 14.3 per cent are pensioners and only 6.7 per cent are unemployed. The older adults are self-reliant and they support their children with their income. The monthly income of the respondents ranges from Rs.6001- 10,000 (21.9%) and 28.6 per cent have said that their monthly income is above Rs.10,000 per

month.

It is understood from the study, that nearly half of the respondents (48.6%) are married and living with spouse whereas 40.7 per cent are in widowhood and equal number of them are separated and unmarried(5.7%).

Regarding assets of the respondents, 41 per cent have said that they have both movable and immovable property. Especially rural older persons have immovable property and it is patriarchal in nature. Majority of the respondents (65.7%) are residing in their own houses and 45.1 per cent of them have 2 to 4 children.

When it comes to health status, 52.4 per cent have said that their health status is poor and it is worse compared to their adulthood. It is noted from the study that majority of them sleep (76.2%) during the leisure time, 67.6 per cent participate in community or religious activities, 43.7 per cent do agriculture.

Regarding spiritual well-being of the respondents, majority of them (63.8%) have high level of spiritual well-being. When compared with spirituality, religiosity is given utmost importance and understood better by the older adults. Majority of the respondents (78.1%) have said that religion is important in their life and majority of them (66.7%) confirmed that spiritual beliefs is needed in life and 48.6 per cent accepted that they are more spiritual in this age i.e., above 60 years and great majority of (88.6%) have faith in superior power.

Findings related to socio-economic status and spiritual well-being

- It is evident from the study that there is a significant difference between the gender and spiritual well-being and more or less there is no much difference between both male and female respondents.
- A significant difference was found between religion, domicile, age and spiritual well-being of the respondents. There is a significant association between number of years living together with spouse, number of children, family size, monthly income and expenditure and spiritual well-being.
- It is also noted that health conditions and spiritual well-being have significant

association between the respondents spirituality well-being and it is more among the married and living with spouse older persons as well as property plays a significant role in deciding the spiritual well-being of the senior citizens.

- From the study it is understood that socio economic conditions influences the spiritual well-being of older persons.

Conclusion

Old age is a period of cumulative stress, deprivation and loss and therefore, old people must be among the unhappy of all age groups. So this stage of people need to spiritual belief. The older person's spiritual well-being is very important and its contribution for well being must be understood in a pragmatic way. This is an most important study area with an increasing positive attitude in the older population. All interdisciplinary programmes need to include the training of Social Work professionals and health care professionals. Assessment of the older person's socio-economic status and spiritual well-being should be examined to have better understanding of older adults at their old age. There is also need for discussion surrounding appropriate service provision ensuring that all of the needs of older persons are fulfilled to enhance their socio economic conditions and age gracefully. From the study it is clear that majority have high level of spiritual well being as well as religious beliefs and the respondents believed that their ageing process is successful only because of their faith in the direction of God or superior power especially by the elderly of our country.

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