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Correlations of Social Support, Religiosity, Spirituality and Life Satisfaction in Indian Geriatrics

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ABSTRACT

Ageing is a nerve-racking phenomenon in a developing country like India with approximately 7% elderly population. Thus, stress management is a very important aspect of caring in the old age. Various studies have shown that practice of spirituality and religiosity as well as supportive social resources reduces stress. In India, most persons are brought up with divine ideology and religious practices. With this background, we thought, it would be interesting to study the effect of spirituality and religiosity on Life Satisfaction (L.S.) 120 subjects of either sex, above 60 years from middle class families were included in the present study. A standardized questionnaire was prepared and translated into the vernacular language; Marathi. Field work was done by trained interviewers and collected data were analyzed using SPSS. Initially internal consistency of spiritual scale of BMMRS (Brief Multidimensional Measurement of Religiosity and Spirituality) and RFQ (Royal Free Questionnaire) were checked. It was observed that no significant inconsistency was seen with the reported data. A moderate correlation was found between RFQ and BMMRS. There appears to be little effect of age and sex on L.S. Using multiple regression analyses with L.S. and well-being as separate dependent variables, the predictive value of different domains was evaluated. Besides, the influence of social support resources on L.S. was also analyzed. This study underscores that the religious values, daily spiritual experiences and social support resources were found to positively intervene with life satisfaction of elderly.

Keywords: Social Support Resources; Spirituality; Life Satisfaction; Religiosity.

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INTRODUCTION

India is a geographically vast democratic country with multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-cultural population (121.02 crores) the number of which is increasing by leaps and bounds. Over the years, this proportion is showing increasing trend supposedly due to increasing awareness of the problems faced by elderly people and improvement in the health care system. Due to significant advancements in technology and economic up-liftment, the life expectancy is increasing rapidly with concomitant rise in elderly population. World over, there is concern of "stress" associated with increasing age. In this respect, social support, practice of spirituality and religiosity are believed to offer some relief [1].

The definition and perception of "health" is undergoing a rapid change with the current focus on "mental" and "spiritual" health. Hence, the spirituality and religiosity are important social and psychological factors in the lives of elderly people. Therefore, there has been continued interest in examining the effect of spirituality and religiosity on the life-satisfaction of these citizens.

While investigating these aspects, the conceptual difference between spirituality and religiosity, and operationalization of these constructs are critical. Religiosity is still being viewed as the organized, individual and attitudinal manifestations of different faith traditions, while, spirituality often denotes a deep sense of connotation or power either from within or from any other inspirational source. Despite the availability of myriad tools to assess the multiple dimensions of both spirituality and religiosity, the worth of any of these tools in studying individual life satisfaction is still a matter of debate.

The working group of Fetzer Institute along with National Institute on Aging (NIA) and National Institute of Health (NIH) has identified some research areas in this field of gerontology [1,2]. However, to our knowledge, there are no systematic studies reported from India in relation to religiosity, spirituality, social support resources and life satisfaction in senior citizens.

Pune, located in Maharashtra is geographically in the centre of India, can be construed as a representative city of India in these respects. In addition, it is considered as "Pensioners' paradise". Hence, the population of elderly is supposed to be more than the national average of 7%. Therefore, this study was embarked upon in an endeavour to devise a valid questionnaire and guidelines for assessing the effects of religiosity, spirituality and social support resources on life satisfaction of senior citizens in India.

METHODOLOGY

A 56 item questionnaire was prepared covering demographic details (like name, age, sex, occupation, hobby, education) and including 9 items pertaining to social support resources (SSR) from "Global Aging Well Project" [3-7]; 6 items were taken from Royal Free Questionnaire

- (RFQ; UK) [8] – pertaining to beliefs and views about life; and 39 items covering 11 domains from Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness & Spirituality (BMMRS; USA) [17] .

The "Life Satisfaction" was measured by two means: The current or present life satisfaction (LS-ladder) was measured by an 8 point ladder method[2]; while life satisfaction of entire life was measured by LIFE Satisfaction Index (LSI) [8-10] i.e. Life Satisfaction derived from responses to 13 statements.

Data collection

The data was collected from Pune city and surrounding area. Those senior citizens who were willing to participate filled the consent form. The subjects were of either sex, above the age of 60 years. All of them were literate enough to read and follow the questionnaire prepared in their own mother-tongue i.e. Marathi. Wherever required; assistance was provided by trained field worker collecting the data. Totally, 120 subjects were included in the present study.

Data analysis

The data so collected was analyzed by using SPSS-10 software. Reliability analysis was done to check the reliability of the items in the questionnaire. The internal consistency of the related items was also checked. The correlation between the two measures of Life Satisfaction i.e. LSI and LS-ladder was calculated. Then, the correlation of life satisfaction with various items pertaining to demographic data, SSR, RFQ and BMMRS was also studied. Two types of correlations between related two variables were analyzed. One-way relation by linear regression (LR) and two-way relation were analyzed by Pearson's correlation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Geriatric psychology is the scientific study to understand, control and predict health related behavior of human beings in their elderly life. To the best of our knowledge, there has been no study done with respect to life satisfaction in elderly Indian population.

Demographics and work pattern

The present study has been done in 120 elderly subjects in age group of 60 to 82 years which includes 65% males and 35% females. These subjects are from the urban areas i.e. Pune city located in Maharashtra (India). Majority of them (50%) were in service and continue to do service (28%) (Table 1). Understandably, their main hobby is reading (70.8%); some of them (31.7%) are involved in social work (Table 2). If we look at the education profile of the study group, it shows that all of them were literate. Nearly 58% of them had studied up to their matriculation while 42% were graduates (Table 3).

Social Support Resources

Results pertaining to social support resources (Table 4) suggest that most of these were married (78.3%), had spouse (82.5%) and trust or confide someone (94.2%) who also care during illness (96.7%). These findings reveal the typical Indian traditions which are being followed over the years. Though the percentage is less (58.3%), most of them don't feel lonely; because of the prevailing social support. In this population, the status of current life was assessed by rating scale of well-being on a ladder (LS-ladder) and the perception of satisfaction with entire life (LSI) was measured by responses to 13 statements. It was observed that the status of current life and the satisfaction perceived over a period of life were significantly correlated with each other (r=0.439). The 9 items pertaining to Social Support Resources (SSR) have a reliability value of 0.60, which is quite acceptable. Further, there was significant correlation between items from SSR and related items from BMMRS (Brief Multidimensional Measurement of Religiosity/ Spirituality). The reliability of items from RFQ (Royal Free Questionnaire) was more than those from SSR. The reliability of items from different domains of BMMRS was also good and comparable to that reported in GSS survey [14] (General Social Survey, National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, 1998). The most significant difference is in items related to negative coping. The reliability is only 0.03; though it was also less in GSS survey as compared to other domains (Table 5). When the questionnaire was analyzed, it was seen that there is good correlation between two measures of Life-Satisfaction.

RFQ items - Significant Correlation with Life Satisfaction

While analyzing correlation between items from RFQ and Life-Satisfaction; it was seen that entire Life Satisfaction is directly dependent on how strongly one hold - the view of spiritual way of life. The private religious practices like meditation and entire life satisfaction (LSI) are mutually dependent on each other; especially in females. The entire life satisfaction is also dependent on whether one believes in spiritual power or force, which is more prevalent in higher age groups and that it influences world affairs. E.g. wars (Table 6).

BMMRS items: Significant Correlation with life satisfaction

Table 7 shows various items which have significant correlation either with present or entire life satisfaction; mutually dependent or one-way dependence. E.g. Help in problematic situation is mutually dependent on both. The feeling that God punishes is more common in males than females. While the belief that God forgives is more prevalent in females than in males and also in low-education group. Only present life satisfaction dependent on belief of God's presence. The belief that God watches is mutually dependent on both, present as well as entire LS.

Spiritual/ Religious practice

People from higher age group believe in spiritual power influencing day-to-day life. However, less people from higher age group think that life is a part of a larger spiritual force. Females spend less time with others and also trust less than males. Spiritual/Religious practice e.g. meditation appear to be more important for females. Females found more comfort in

religion; felt more of God's love, more touched by beauty of creation. They also believed more that God forgives them and the events in their life are as per divine plan. However, more of males felt that God punishes them. These findings are consistent with findings of Levin *et al*, 1993 who concluded that black women significantly exceeded black men in levels of religiosity at all ages [11]. The findings from four national surveys regarding religiosity among older adults also show significant gender differences which consistently withstood controlling for sociodemographic effects, including age, education, marital status, family income, region, urbanicity, and subjective health. Higher scores on religiosity could be found in women compared to men, in German population too [12]. Those who are less educated talk less to others, feel strongly closer to God, and believe that God forgives them. They also watch more of religious programmes on TV or listen to Radio and spend more time in religious activities. However, the people with higher education are more able to make sense of the situation and make decisions without relying on God. The items from SSR (Social Support Resources) or RFQ fail to discriminate present life satisfaction as measured by ladder (LS-ladder). However, there are many items showing significant differences. The feeling of deep inner peace, god's love, strong desire to reduce pain or suffering, forgiving other is associated with higher satisfaction of present life. This is also more, if other people offer more support in difficult situations. The present life satisfaction is more if one does not feel that God has abandoned him. The observations from present study show that items from BMMRS questionnaire are better than those from SSR or RFQ to discriminate people with low and high life satisfaction. However, the only items from BMMRS that have poor reliability are pertaining to negative religious coping. In the study on religious effects on health status and life satisfaction among black Americans, evidences propose that the link between religion and well-being is steady over the life course and not just an artefact of the mystifying of measures of organizational religiosity and health status [13]. Besides sample evidences underscored that particularly organizational religiosity had notably positive net effects on well-being in elderly [14-20].

Table 1: Nature of Occupation

Occupation	Current	Previous
Service	34 (28.3%)	60 (50.0%)
Business	3(2.5%	5(4.2%)
Agriculture	0	0
Any other	16(13.3%)	17(14.2%)
Nothing	67(55.8%)	38(31.7%)

Table 2: Time utilization

Hobby	Number	%
Reading	85	70.8
Gardening	19	15.8
Social work	38	31.7
Games /Sports	7	5.8
Tuitions	6	5

Any other	31	25.8
Nothing.	7	5.8

Table 3: Demographic features: Education

Education	Number	%
School – Std.	7	5.8
Matric – 10th Std. / 12th Std.	63	52.5
Degree	32	26.7
Post Graduate/Doctorate	18	15
Total	120	100

Table 4: Social Support Resources

Parameter	Number	%
Marriage	94	78.3
Spouse	99	82.5
Visit of people	99	82.5
Trust/confide	113	94.2
Care in illness	116	96.7
Never Lonely	70	58.3

Table 5: Reliability Analysis

Domain	GSS study	Present Study
SSR	NA	0.60
RFQ	NA	0.85
Public activity	0.82	0.67
Private activity	0.72	0.7-0.74
Support-Benefit	0.86	0.86
Support-Problem	0.64	0.55
Coping -positive	0.81	0.7-0.72
Coping-negative	0.54	0.03
Intensity	0.77	0.78
Forgiveness	0.66	0.41
Experience	0.91	0.86
Beliefs	0.64	0.43
Meaning	NA	0.47

(NA-Figure not available)

Table 6: RFQ items: Significant Correlation with Life Satisfaction

Item	Demographic factor	Entire (LSI) LR (r)	Entire LS (LSI) Pearson(R)
View of life	-	0.284*	-
Private practice	F>M	0.45**	0.186**
Believe-Force	A2>A1	0.32*	-
World affairs	-	0.231*	-

A1 = Age ≤ 65, A2 = Age > 65

Table 7: BMMRS items: Significant Correlation with life satisfaction

Item	Demo graphic factor	Current LS (LS-ladder) LR(r)	Entire LS (LSI) LR (r)	Current LS (LS-ladder) Pearson(R)	Entire LS (LSI) Pearson(R)
Service attendance	-	-	-	-	0.191*
Help in illness	-	-	-	-	0.204*
Help in problem	-	-	-	0.196*	0.282**
Criticism	-	0.241*	-	0.236**	-
Feel punished	M>F	0.316**	0.446**	0.261**	-
Abandoned	-	0.364**	-	0.406**	0.479**
Without God	-	-	0.182**	-	-
Forgiven self	-	-	0.176*	-	0.226*
Forgiven others	-	-	-	0.226*	-
God forgives	F>M; UG>G	-	-	0.232*	0.254**
God's presence	-	0.287*	-	-	-
Comfort religion	-	-	-	0.185*	-
Inner peace	-	-	-	0.275**	0.219*
God's love	-	-	-	0.321**	0.313**
Touched by creation	-	-	-	0.206*	0.216*
God watches	-	0.222*	0.245*	0.278**	0.31**
Desire-reduce pain	-	-	-	0.239**	0.224*
Experience	-	-	-	0.182*	-

UG: Under-graduates; G: Graduates.

CONCLUSION

The study was designed in an endeavour to devise a questionnaire for assessing the impact of social, religious and spiritual factors on the life satisfaction in the Indian geriatric population. Though the sample size is very small viz. 120 subjects, the typical Indian traditions and their importance were revealed and the questionnaire appears to be quite reliable. Particularly the items from BMMRS (Brief Multidimensional Measurement of Religiosity and

Spirituality) are more reliable than those from RFQ (Royal Free Questionnaire) except for those related to negative coping.

Our study results throw snapshots on one's wish for high life satisfaction, which disclose the facts that one, must believe that God is watching him; one must forgive others even if they hurt him and believe that other people are always prepared to help him. Most of females and people with lower education believe that God forgives them. If one wishes to have high satisfaction in entire life including the present, then one must feel deep inner peace, have desire to reduce pain and sufferings in the world and do not feel that God has abandoned him/ her. If one forgives himself for doing something wrong, then there is high satisfaction for entire life, but not necessarily the present life. However, future prospective studies with large pool of data are highly warranted.

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