

# Stressors, Social Support, and Quality Of Life in Older Adults

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## Abstract

Stress, grief, social isolation, loneliness, changes in lifestyle, financial status, role change, caring for a sick spouse, deterioration of physical abilities, chronic illness, decline in functioning, inability to live independently, changes in living arrangement, and fear of institutionalization are all common stressors for older adults. Stressors affect quality of life of older adults and also act as a contributing factor for various chronic diseases. Repeated exposure to stressors causes distress, which impacts emotional, mental wellbeing, and leads to poor quality of life in older adults. Social support promote coping in older adults and alleviate quality of life. One of the most effective methods for older adults to improve their quality of life is to have access to resources of social support. This review may aid policy makers, healthcare workers, and social workers to better understand the social support needs of older adults and to provide well-planned social and mental health care to improve the quality of life.

**Key Words:** Stressors, Quality of Life, Psychological factors, Buffering effect of social support.

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## I. Introduction

Older adults face stressors in form of social isolation due to nuclear families, neglect and abuse, violation of rights, financial insecurity, engagement of older adults in informal sector and most importantly physical, social, economic and emotional vulnerability of elderly leads them to isolation, disability, psychological distress, less satisfaction in life which may lead to development of stress, which affect the quality of life mental health issues in elderly. Quality of life of elderly people is influenced by their physical and mental health condition.

Older adults are successful in using cognitive skills (1). Due to lower physiological flexibility in physiological systems such as the cardiovascular and neuro-endocrine, older people are unable to modulate their emotions, resulting in worse emotional well-being and more physical consequences (2). Increased exposure to long-term emotional distress is likely to keep older persons anxious by restricting their ability to move their focus, modify their environment, or rethink situations in order to alleviate the detrimental impacts of negative events (3).

## II. Impact of Psychological factors and Social Support on Quality of Life of Older adults

The link between social support and psychological well-being is complicated, and the sheer presence of social networks does not guarantee that the recipient would sense actual and effective assistance. Physical restrictions and physiological issues in older individuals are often accompanied by a sense of diminished autonomy. The important psychological factors for healthy aging and good quality of life are self-esteem, self-achievement, ego-integrity, elderly engagement in leisure activities, high emotional intelligence, maintenance and improvement of cognitive function, avoiding downward social comparison, high positive optimism and less focus on pessimism, positive life orientation, satisfaction with life, enjoying zest of life, having future plans, feeling supported, having a high internal locus of control on health, and having a higher perceived health status. Elders who have a positive attitude toward their health have a higher sense overall well-being and are less likely to suffer (4).

## III. Buffering Effect of Social Support and Quality of Life in Older Adults

The buffer theory contends that social support lessens the ability of psychosocial hardship to trigger illness episodes and enhances overall quality of life. It has been demonstrated that people with more expansive social networks, higher-quality social connections, and access to social support services have better physical and mental health.

Reduced social support can affect the physical and mental health of the elderly people (5, 6, 7, 8). Mollenkopf & Walker (2007) (9) has shown that social resources, including social activities and social support, are key influences on quality of life particularly in impoverished environments such as low socio economic status neighbourhoods. Social support from family has been identified as one of the most important forms of support for older adults in studies on quality of life (10). Increased social support from family, friends or colleagues is related to decrease psychological distress. At times of extreme stress, social support acts as a buffer against the stressor's negative effects. The stress-buffering theory is demonstrated by the functional elements of social support. When stress levels are high, older adults social networks present in the social environment must provide resources to help older adults to cope with stress. Thus, social support plays significant role among the factors that determine quality of life.

#### **IV. Discussion**

The growing number of older adult population put immense strain on healthcare and social care systems due to their chronic ailment and diseases which needs to be addressed by medical services i.e., hospitals, doctors, nurses, etc., and also need other facilities and resources. Due to their physical and physiological limitations, very old adults have reduced mobility and are reliant on others to do things for them, share their concerns, and provide emotional support. With the rise of nuclear families in society and fewer children in the family, caring for senior members of the family is becoming more difficult. When the elderly need to travel to the hospital for medical reasons, they expect someone from their family to accompany them. Young people are migrating in pursuit of work, leaving the elderly alone, lonely, and with health problems. This scenario makes us to feel care economy in India is the need of the hour as the traditional role of joint family in India is collapsed, which was well recognized as support system for the elderly which enabled them to graceful ageing.

Social changes in the family system have resulted in a drop in social support. With the advancement of technology, the functions of a family have shifted. There is a gradual but evident loss in commitment to performing care functions, which has an influence on the older adult's quality of life. Elderly face a higher risk of exposure to various stressors such as the onset of chronic conditions, loss of function, loss of sources of income, role losses, and loss of a spouse. The families may face the burden of care of the elderly and also the challenge of protecting the rights of the elderly and ensuring their well-being.

Studies have reported a positive association between higher level of social support and higher level of wellbeing and quality of life in older adults (11, 12). When compared to older adults who live alone, those who live with their family have a better sense of health, self-esteem, depression, and life satisfaction (13). Elderly persons may experience loneliness and physical and emotional health difficulties as a result of a lack of family support and as well as diminishing social support networks (14, 13). Garcia et al., (2006) (15) shown that older adults who had poorer social network had poor quality of life. Hence, the most important factors impeding quality of life is presence of chronic physical or psychological illness. The role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in creation and maintenance of social capital has been largely overlooked in social gerontology, as it determines older adult's quality of life (QoL) (16). Many older people relate quality of life to the ability to be independent in their daily activities. Enhancing self-esteem, feeling satisfied with one's abilities, being independent in performing everyday tasks, and engaging in activities are all important components of older adults' overall quality of life standards. As people grow older, they become aware of the unavoidable time constraints imposed by mortality. This realization is said to help them change their values and goals. Hence, gaining a better understanding of the quality of life of older adults who are ageing and going through psychological changes could provide useful insights into long-term health planning, social care services, social support resources, healthcare worker's work policies, and opportunities to engage and collaborate with older adults (17). Quality of life and social support are important indicators of successful ageing, and it is monitored as a way of measuring the effectiveness of social policies, welfare programmes, and health care programme in urban and rural communities.

#### **V. Conclusion**

Social support neutralizes the effect of stressors and improves the quality of life in older adults. Emotional and informational supports provide proper channels and have positive impact on quality of life for older adults. Policymakers must devise measures to encourage older people to participate more actively in the communities to which they belong, such as through volunteer programmes that keep them physically and cognitively active and more deeply involved in the community. Understanding, associations between social support and stressors of older adults may provide valuable insights on quality of life of older adults, essential to informed planning, and to catch up with trends of ageing. Elder population policies and programmes must be developed based on strong evidence base, their links between social support and quality-of-life. The focus must be on efforts to establish personal social support resources that directly contribute to improved Quality of Life.

Government policymakers, non-governmental organizations, community members, caregivers, and family members etc can contribute to improve the quality of life for older adults.

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