

Aging Can Be Beautiful: Intervention Strategies for Elderly by their Children

Dr. Bani Narula* & Shefali Midha**

* Assistant Professor, ** Post Graduate Student

Department of Psychology, Post Graduate Govt. College for Girls, Sector -11, Chandigarh India

Abstract

What a parent actually wants and what the children perceives as parent's wants is an age old discussion on aging. Most of the strategies and interventions that are developed for the elderly parents are based on the healthy and younger population and there is a dearth of intervention strategies developed in the Indian context for the general population. Successful aging is extensively defined as leading a healthy physical and mental life in which children plays an indispensable role. There is a very subtle difference between what is known as caring and controlling. When parents grow old, role reversal take place between parents and children which further defines their relation as healthy or unhealthy. Thus the present paper has been undertaken to develop intervention strategies that could be used by children for successful aging of their parents.

Key words: Successful Aging, Children and Intervention.

INTRODUCTION

Aging can be defined as changes that an individual undergoes in various aspects of his life such as biological, psychological and social. Biological aging is related to changes in physical aspects; Psychological aging is referred to as changes in the psychological aspects and social aging is referred to as changes that take place in relationships and social roles of individuals. There are various challenges faced by the individuals' when they cross a mark of 60 years of age; there is role reversal that takes place between children and parents, dependency increases and most importantly the susceptibility to chronic illnesses also increase. In general, the effects of aging are not only challenging for the individual or the individual's family but also have its major effects on the economy of the country.

The government recently stated in Parliament that India will have 34 crore people above 60 years of age by 2050 that would be more than the total population of the US. The numbers are even higher than projected by other international agencies like UN and HelpAge. The agencies had projected the 60-plus population in India to rise to nearly 32 crore by 2050 (The Economic Times, 2018). The projected increase in the aging population poses a great burden on the government as well as the general population. Aging population demands an increase in budget dedicated to the elderly by the government which not only provides facilities for the physical benefits but also for the psychological benefits that will help the people not only age but age successfully.

There is a disparity between the different definitions and explanations of successful aging given by different authors. Meta analysis conducted by Depp and Jesta (2006) regarding the meaning of successful aging found 29 definitions of successful aging. They operationalise the definitions and defined it as survival, lack of disability, life satisfaction, social engagement, productivity, quality of life, and the absence of disease (Bowling, 2007; Depp & Jesta)

Successful aging is a multifaceted concept and is accepted as the paradigm for the quality of life when aging (Rowe and Kahn, 1997). There are many interventions that are developed for successful aging but most of the intervention strategies have focused on only one aspect and overlooked the multi-faceted and cross-disciplinary goal of intervention for successful aging (Estebasari et.al, 2014; Hsu et. al, 2017; Ngadu et. al, 2015). Rowe and Kahn's focused on six aspects that should be prioritized in making strategies for successful aging in their 2.0 idea (Rowe and kahl, 2015). The aspects are- intergenerational relationship, family (evolution, support, and role changes), human capital development (lifelong learning and skill training), and health and healthcare. The aspects given by Rowe and Kahl indicates that aging should not only be seen as growing older but also adopt the approach for promoting successful aging and to increase the ability for lifelong learning, health and social participation.

When people are aging, they often face issues and challenges in everyday life which they are not capable of managing (Lawton & Nahemow, 1973). The reasons could be decrease in cognitive and functional abilities (Baltes, 1997). In order to respond to the changes, older people depend or turn up to their children for support required in daily life (Pescosolido, 1992). There has been a great zeal of research on the adolescents' and young adults' perspective of their parents but there is a dearth of research studies conducted on the perspectives of young and middle aged adults. According to the Gerontologists, emotions such as closeness towards parents and also increase in the feelings of liberty are encountered more by adults (Fingerman 2001b).

The intervention studies that have been conducted on successful aging focus merely on the perspective of the elderly for whom the intervention strategies are designed but overlook the perspectives of the younger population who actually contributes in the practical functioning of the designed interventions. For example- children of elderly are responsible for the successful functioning of their elderly parents in various sectors of life such as physical exercise (drop them to park or gym), psychological well-being (communicating with parents) etc. Sometimes when the elderly parents are unhappy with their lives or are not aging successfully, their children are most likely to be blamed for the dysfunctioning. It is very important to understand that the traits of individuals' also play an important role. The intervention strategies developed for successful aging are most likely to be practiced by the elderly who are high on happiness index than those who are low on it. There has been adequate amount of research done on the factors positively correlating with successful aging which also gives ample evidence to support the intervention techniques developed by the authors of the present paper. Thus, the present paper aims to develop intervention strategies based on the biopsychosocial model i.e. the intervention strategies will cover the biological, psychological and social aspects that will help in successful aging.

It has been found that there is a close relationship between the possibility to engage actively in life and the other two characteristics. An older person in good shape is more likely to be able to be active in life. As is supported by abundant scientific evidence, Physical activity lowers the risk of disease and contributes significantly to mental and physical functioning (McAuley, Kramer & Colcombe, 2004).

Sabia and colleagues (2012) attempted to quantify odds of successful aging based on four healthy behaviors: regular physical activity, consuming fruits and vegetables daily, drinking alcohol moderately and never smoking. *Together, these behaviors accounted for almost half the potential for successful aging.*

A higher correlation has been found between optimism and successful aging. Scheier argues that the benefits of optimism are the result of the way in which optimists cope with problems. Because they expect positive outcomes and tend to see the best in a bad situation, they are likely to demonstrate more proactive coping behaviors. Pessimists tend to avoid, withdraw or deny in the face of challenge (Scheier, Carver & Bridges, 2001).

Social engagement is a key indicator of successful aging and is associated with mortality (Berkman, 1995), morbidity (Berkman, 2000) and quality of life (Levasseur, 2007). Older adults value the ability to participate in their communities and feel fulfilled by enhanced participation (Marshall & Mackenzie, 2008; Leuven, 2010).

Meta analysis have found that a higher self-rating of successful aging was more likely among those with higher education, better cognitive function, better perceived physical and mental health, less depression and greater optimism and resilience (Gannon,2012).

Research has found that feeling that one has a purpose in life is an indicator for healthy aging for several reasons, including its potential for reducing mortality risk (Hill & Turiano, 2014; Pietrzakm, et.al., 2014). It has also been found that those with a greater social support and more social contacts are more likely to age well (Depp & Jeste, 2006).

An empirical study on Thai successful aging by Wattagakosol et al. (2013) revealed that successful aging included multiple components involving psychological factors such as mindfulness, family functioning, and social engagement. They defined successful aging as five interrelated dimensions (i.e. body, mind and emotion, brain and cognition, social, and life wisdom).

Nowadays a 60-year-old person shows more readiness to exercise than some decades before. Furthermore, older people, especially female, are in fact more active today than older women 20 years before (Breuer, 2004). Breuer (2002) explained this alteration with higher motivation of older people to keep healthy. A second reason may be a modified view of what is prototypic for an older person today and what older persons are expected to do. Those normative beliefs and culturally learned ideas form special *stereotypes of aging* influencing behavior of older people (Brandtstädter, 1990).

On an average physical and psychological health of people in the old age deteriorates and there is a requirement of extensive care in this phase of their lives by their children and other support systems. The present paper aims to develop biopsychosocial intervention techniques for the successful aging of older adults with the assistance of their children. An acronym 'HOPE' has been posed by the authors which describes the activities that can be exercised by the elderly population to age successfully and gracefully. The endeavor is based on the survey conducted by the author and the final framework of the 'HOPE' program will be developed after conducting the pilot trial. The activities that are developed are not complex or unusual but what should be embellished by the elderly in their day-to-day life.

H.O.P.E

- ❖ **H-Health and nutrition (Biological facet)**
- ❖ **O-Optimism (Psychological facet)**
- ❖ **P-Physical activity (Biological facet)**
- ❖ **E-Emotional support and Engagement in social activities (Social facet)**
- ❖ **Health and Nutrition**

Adequate amount of nutrition intake by older adults plays a crucial role as it circumscribes the other roles played by the individuals in their daily lives. A healthy individual is open to many possibilities and is better in exploring the environment than the unhealthy individual.

When an individual crosses a mark of 60 years of age, the nutritional and health needs are somehow different than other age groups. Thus aging successfully demands supplementary care by their children. Activities which can aid in health and nutrition are:

- **Nutrition-rich meal with the whole family:** Determine to have at least one healthy meal with the older adult along with all the family members at a scheduled time. It will not only help the older adult to get all the required nutrients but also increases the interpersonal contacts with the other members.
- **Regular contact with the Nutritionist:** As a child of an aging parent, one needs to be in regular touch with the nutritionist. The nutritionist will help in maintaining the good health by providing diet charts rich in nutrients required by the older adult.
- **Health Check-up:** Older adults are more vulnerable to diseases as the immune system declines in the old age; so it is necessary for the children to take their parent/s to the regular/routine check-up.

❖ Optimism

Optimism and Hope are the two aspects of positive psychology which have been flourishing like never before. There is ample of research done on the aspects of positive psychology and successful aging which often shows a positive relationship.

Optimism is basically defined as thinking positively about the future. In the context of aging, optimism is directly linked with successful aging. The individual will be able to age successfully only if he is able to think about the future positively and be hopeful about it. The activities encompassing the present dimension are:

- **Learn something new:** Always encourage the older parent/s to learn or do something new or which was left behind. Communicate with them about the things they wanted to learn but somehow were not able to do. For example, Opening a boutique or a salon, learn musical instruments' etc. Activities like these will build optimism as well as hope in them as they will make goals for the future (short-term or long-term goals) and be hopeful about them.
- **Best possible self (BPS):** Activities of the best possible selves includes writing about oneself in a best possible manner imagining an ideal position in the future. In this activity an individual visualizes and jot down the things as if everything has worked out in a manner they wanted it to be. It is the most vigorous form of optimistic activity that could be performed by the elderly population. The children can simply give their parents a pen and a paper and encourage them to write about their BPS. Regularly performing this activity will lead to a positive affect and an optimistic outlook towards life.

❖ Physical Activity

The domain of physical fitness holds equal importance as any other domain required in successful aging. Physical activity that is appropriate for young adults may be physically challenging for the older adults so it is important for the child to find the best possible physical activity for their older parent/s to complement their health.

- **Intergenerational activities:** Arrangement of those physical activities that can be performed by all the members of the family together. As in old age, people are fond of spending their time with their family, exercising together will not only improve the physical health but will have positive effects on the psychological health.

The exercises can be:

- Yoga
- Light aerobics
- Pilate
- Stretching
- Light weight training

- **Facilitation of Open Gym:** Today, many society parks provide the facility of open gyms. There are many types of equipment available in the park-gym which can be used by all the age groups. They are simple and convenient to use and also are free of cost. Most of the people in the older age group do not prefer exercising in the closed area as they prefer exercising more in the open areas like gardens which are amidst greenery so open gym are very good and feasible place to exercise. As a child of an aged parent, one can encourage and sometimes accompany their parent/s to go to the nearby park.

❖ Emotional support and Engagement in social activities

People in their later adulthood often face many challenges in their lives. The challenges can be in the form of physical or psychological. For example, at the time of retirement, a feeling of unproductiveness may disturb the psychological well being or deterioration in health may affect the individual psychologically. The need for emotional support substantially rises and engagement in various other social work or events also become necessary for successful growth of an individual. Family members play a huge role in providing emotional support to the older adult member.

- **Communicate with them:** Regular communication between parent and child often resolves all the problems or issues. In old age, family holds great importance for an individual more than anything but this may not be realized by their children. But it is necessary to have meaningful conversation with the older parent/s often which will give them the required emotional support.
- **Invite old friends for supper:** Meeting old friends often cheers the person by relishing old memories. As a child one can help their parent/s remain in regular touch with their friends by taking them to their friends place or inviting them over to a light supper. It will also enhance the relationship between a parent and the child.

There is a substantial need for older adults to engage in variety of social events and communities to keep a proximal contact with the society members who enhance the autonomy levels of individuals which successively contributes in successful aging.

- **Help them Explore:** Today, there is a pool of options available for the aged population to invest their time doing different activities. It depends upon the individual that where he/she wants to spend their time, it could be a community club or a non-profitable organization. For the aged-parent one can find different places according to what their parent/s wants. At the beginning phase of joining any club or society, encouragement is necessary by the family members as it is a novel phase and takes time for adjustment.

CONCLUSION

The present paper is developed for the population above 60 years of age. The interventions are designed for helping people to age successfully and all the aforementioned activities can be performed by the elderly in every society irrespective of culture, race or gender. Children play a vital role in all the activities so the assistance of children can help parents not only age but age successfully. The 'HOPE' program for successful aging does not require any special setting or training but it can be imbibed or cultivated by all the elderly people who wish to age successfully.

REFERENCES

- Baltes P. B. (1997). On the incomplete architecture of human ontogeny. Selection, optimization, and compensation as foundation of developmental theory. *American Psychologist*, 52, 366–380.
- Berkman, L.F., Glass, T., Brissette, I., Seeman, T.E. (2000). From social integration to health: Durkheim in the new millennium. *Soc Sci Med*; 51: 843–57.
- Berkman, L.F. (1995). The role of social relations in health promotion. *Psychosom Med*; 57: 245–54.
- Bowling, A. (2007). Aspirations for older age in the 21st century: What is successful aging? *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, vol. 64, 263-297.
- Brandtstädter, J. (1990). Entwicklung im lebenslauf. Ansätze und probleme der lebensspannen-entwicklungspsychologie. In: Mayer KU (ed) *Lebensverläufe und sozialer Wandel. Kölner zeitschrift für soziologie und sozialpsychologie, sonderheft*, 31. Westdeutscher, Opladen, pp S322–S350
- Breuer, C. (2002). Sozialer wandel und sportengagement im lebenslauf. In: Allmer H (ed) *Sportengagement im lebenslauf* (Bd. 23). Academica, Sankt Augustin, S61–S82
- Breuer, C. (2004). Zur dynamik der sportnachfrage im lebenslauf—dynamics of life-span demand for sport. *Sport und Gesellschaft—Sport and Society* 1, 50–72
- Depp, C.A., Jeste, D.V. (2006). Definitions and predictors of successful aging: A comprehensive review of larger quantitative studies, *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 2006, vol. 14, 6-20.
- Depp, CA & Jeste, DV. (2006). Definitions and predictors of successful aging: A comprehensive review of larger quantitative studies. *American Journal of Geriatr Psychiatry*, 6-20.
- Estebasari, F.; Taghdisi, M.H.; Foroushani, A.R.; Ardebili, H.E.; Shojaeizadeh, D. (2014). An educational program based on the successful aging approach on helaht-promoting behaviors in the elderly: A clinical trial study. *Iran. Red. Crescent Med. Journal*, 16, e16314.
- ET online (Aug 13, 2018) Demographic time bomb: Young India ageing much faster than expected . The economic times
- Fingerman, K. L. (2001b). The paradox of a distant closeness: Intimacy in parent/child ties. *Generations* (Special Edition: Perspectives on Intimacy), 25, 26–33.
- Gannon, M. (2012). Optimism is Key to Successful Aging. <https://www.livescience.com/25327-optimism-successful-aging.html>
- Hill, P.L. & Turiano, N.A. (2014). Purpose in life as a predictor of mortality across adulthood. *Psychological Science Online*, 1-5.
- Hsu, H.C.; Chuang, S.H.; Hsu, S.W.; Tung, H.J.; Chang, S.C.; Lee, M.M.; Wang, J.Y.; Kuo, L.T.; Tseng, F.Y.; Po, A.T. (2017). Evaluation of a successful aging promotion intervention program for middle-aged adults in Taiwan. *Glob. Health Promotion*.
- Lawton, M. P., & Nahemow, L. (1973). Ecology and the aging process. In Lawton M., Eisdorfer C., editors. (Eds.), *The psychology of adult development and aging* (619–674). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, Task Force on Aging, 619–674.
- Levasseur, M. & Desrosiers, J. St-Cyr TD. (2007). Comparing the disability creation process and international classification of functioning, disability and health models. *Can J Occup Ther*, 74, 233–42.
- Marshall, E., & Mackenzie, L. (2008). Adjustment to residential care: the experience of newly admitted residents to hostel accommodation in Australia. *Aust Occup Ther*; 55, 123–132.

Mc Auley E, Kramer AK, Colcombe SJ (2004) Cardiovascular fitness and neurocognitive function in older adults: a brief review. *Brain Behav Immun*, 18, 214-220.

Ngandu, T.; Lehtisalo, J.; Solomon, A.; Levälähti, E.; Ahtiluoto, S.; Antikainen, R.; Bäckman, L.; Hänninen, T.; Jula, A.; Laatikainen, T.; et al. (2015). A 2 year multimodmain intervention of diet, exercise, cognitive training, and vascular risk monitoring versus control to prevent cognitive decline in at-risk elderly people (FINGER):A randomized controlled trial. *Lancet*, 385, 2255–2263.

Pescosolido B. A. (1992). Beyond rational choice: The social dynamics of how people seek help. *American Journal of Sociology*, 97, 1096–1138.

Pietrzakm RH, Tsai, J, Kirwin, PD, & Southwick, SM. (2014). Successful aging among older veterans in the United States. *Am J Geriatr Psychiatry*, 22:6,

Rowe, J.W.; Kahn, R.L. (2015). Successful aging 2.0: Conceptual expansions for the 21st century. *J. Gerontol. B Psychol.Sci. Soc. Sci.* 70, 593–596.

Rowe, J.W.; Kahn, R.L. (1997). The structure of successful aging. In *Successful Aging*; Rowe, J.W., Kahn, R.L., Eds.; Dell Publishing: New York, NY, USA, pp. 36–52,

Sabia, S. Singh-Manoux, A. Hagger-Johnson, G. et al. (2012). Influence of individual and combined healthy behaviours on successful aging. *CMAJ*, 184, 1985–92

Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S., & Bridges, M. W. (2001). Optimism, pessimism, and psychological well-being. In E. C. Chang (Ed.), *Optimism and pessimism: Implications for theory, research, and practice* (pp. 189–216). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Van Leuven, K.A. (2010). Health practices of older adults in good health: engagement is the key. *J Gerontol Nurs*, 36: 38–46.

Watakakosol, R., Ngamake, S., Suttiwan, P., Tuicomepee, A., Lawpoonpat, C., Iamsupasit, S. (2013). Factors related to successful aging in Thai elderly: a preliminary study. *J Health Res*; 27(1): 51-6.