

Nutritional Status and Adjustment Problems of Old Age Persons

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Abstract: Aging is a universal process. Indian society has traditionally expected the family to care for of its older people but urbanization, modernization and globalization have led to change in the economic structure the erosion of social and moral values. There are number of physiological changes in old age persons and is considered as the closing period of life span. These changes depend on many factors like biological, socio-economic status and cultural values. The percent of old age persons is increasing in our population day by day due to improvement in medical facilities and the problems associated with old age are also increasing in their magnitude. Many physiological and psychological problems are associated with old age. Nutrition is an important determinant of health of old age persons. There is prevalence of overweight and obese people in the community. Being overweight and obese increases the risk of a number of age related disorders such as physiological problems like cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes mellitus, arthritis etc and psychological problems like impaired memory, bereavement, loneliness, dementia etc.

Ensuring good food habits and hygiene practice will contribute towards maintaining health and nutritional status. There are some measures of social security for the old persons in India but only these are not sufficient to redress the problems of the old age in the country. It remains a challenge to be addressed in order to develop targeted support for old age persons and its implementation. The need of hour is to create a society which is sensitive to unique and special needs and care of old age persons. The elderly should be encouraged to undergo periodic medical checks at a clinic for routine appraisal of their health status.

Index terms: Nutritional status, physiological problem, psychological problems and bereavement.

Introduction

Aging population is the most challenging demographic phenomenon worldwide and elderly is the final stage of the normal life span. United Nations recommended 60 years as the transition to the elderly segment of the population. Many physiological and psychological problems are associated with old age. It is really interesting to note that everybody wants to live a long life but nobody wants to be old. Thinking of old age visions of loneliness and neglect emerge in mind. The picture becomes all the more awesome with the failing health and illness. A sense of despair glooms over all his pleasant feelings.

Nutrition is an important determinant of health of old age persons. There is prevalence of overweight and obese people in the community and psychological problems such as impaired memory, bereavement, dementia, loneliness etc are prevalent among the old age persons.

This paper outlines the nutritional status and adjustment problems of old age persons. It reviews some issues regarding nutritional needs and food habits of old age persons and their adjustment. The major objective of this paper is to review studies conducted on various problems of old age persons in India and suggest measures to address them.

Methods Many journals, books, magazines, newspapers etc related to old age have been read and analyzed.

Discussion

1. Nutritional status and old age

Changes in digestive system

There are alterations in taste, smell and teeth with age and it affects the oral intake and as a result there is decline in nutritional status. Old age persons are at risk of developing conditions such as constipation, dehydration etc. The increased risk of dehydration is due to number of reasons including increased losses through skin, reduced ability of kidneys to concentrate and a less sensitive thirst mechanism. It adversely affects the dietary intake and nutritional status.

Weight

There is prevalence of overweight and obesity among old age people. Being overweight and obese increases the risk of a number of physiological problems like cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes mellitus, arthritis etc. These all have implication on person's level of dependence. A person suffering from physical or mental impairment and dependent on caregivers is likely to be victim of elder abuse.

Dietary intake

Older people belonging to low socio-economic status have poorer diets that lead to nutrient deficiency. Dietary intake is also affected by chronic illness and disability, as a person's ability to buy, prepare and eat food is degraded in such conditions. That is why nutrient deficiency is common among old persons mainly micronutrients that leads to several health problems.

2. Adjustment problems

Social adjustment

Today, the urbanization, modernization and globalization have led to change in social values and family structure, the elderly are not given adequate care and attention and this leads to loneliness. In opinion of majority of young generation, old age persons are socio-economic burden. In many families they are not allowed to involve in family affairs.

Health

Old age persons are more susceptible to chronic diseases, physical diseases and mental problems. This is due to low immunity power, no proper dietary intake and some physical changes. Another important reason is their perception towards old age that they are prone to illness mainly due to their advanced age and it is natural to suffer from such problems. In some cases, the health problems become aggravated and sometimes lead to death due to not having medication at time. The wrong lifestyle adversely affects the health and increases morbidity conditions among the elderly.

Emotional adjustment

The attitude of family members towards the old age person and his attitude towards his family members also changes. This happens because of attitude towards old age, degradation of status in the society, problems of isolation, loneliness and the generation gap. It is reported that anxiety is at higher levels among the older people. Old persons who are living in old age homes feel more emotional problems than those who are living with their families (Zulfekar 2014). This is due to negative self concept and self perception.

Elder abuse

Elder abuse includes verbal assaults, threats, fear of isolation, physical violence and financial exploitation. Mainly less educated old people and having no income of their own are likely to be victims of elder abuse but highly educated old persons and having sufficient income are also subjected to abuse.

Gender discrimination

It was found that common morbidity pattern of the old age persons was higher among the males than females except the respiratory and skin diseases.(Asadullah et al 2013). Elderly women face the same health, economic and social issues that all old people face, but often encounter more challenges compared with men and are prone to abuse. As compared to men, the loss of decision making is felt more by women. The main reason behind this is their economical dependency.

Conclusion

Based on the review, it can be concluded that there is need to improve nutritional intake that has potential to reduce health care, social problem, elder abuse and dependency. Ensuring good food habits and hygiene practice will contribute towards maintaining health and nutritional status.

Following points should be considered, older people should-

- Eat different colours and types of fresh vegetables and fruits.
- Eat whole grains breads and cereals.
- Have plenty of water and a glass of milk before sleeping in the night.
- Avoid “empty calories” foods and drinks like chips, soda, alcohol etc.
- Proper diet with supplements would be effective in managing nutrition and health problems.

Older people should be encouraged to do yoga. As yoga gives relief from stress and boost will power. With regular yoga, they will feel more energetic and can help in managing the aches and pains that come with aging. This leads to a more independent life.

Improvement in health care services is required but alongwith this, it is also important to make the older people aware about health care services available, accessibility of services and willingness to utilize the services.

A holistic approach is needed to effectively solve the emerging problems of old age. The need of hour is to recognize old age as a resource group and give them a special care.

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