

The influence of living arrangement on the level of loneliness among the elderly

Astha Vora^{1*}, Dr. Chetna Lakhotia², Ms Sandhya S³

ABSTRACT

According to the state of world population 2019 report by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), India's population in 2019 stood at 1.36 billion and 6% of the population was of the age 65 and above. Lack of evidence on the impact of living arrangement on loneliness necessitates this study. The current study focuses on the influence of living arrangement on the level of loneliness among the elderly. The UCLA Loneliness Version 3 scale was administered on 2 different groups of the elderly i.e the elderly living with their family which includes their children, grandchildren or other extended members and those residing at old age homes which are either private or government owned. 64 individuals participated in the current study; 34 of them who live with their family and 30 of them living at old age homes. Results indicate that the level of loneliness is higher among the group living at old age homes compared to those living at home. Family acceptance, health care provisions and societal acceptance can bring about a positive change. However, there is no significant difference in the level of loneliness among gender i.e. male and females.

Keywords: *Elderly, Family, Old Age Homes, Loneliness*

Loneliness usually occurred and felt in a large segment of elderly people in different types of situations. According to Forbes (1996) "the elderly persons who experience loneliness comprise of elderly married women, older people who live with married children, those living in residential care or in sheltered housing, older people who are caregivers, and older immigrants, particularly those who do not speak the language of their host country". Holmén et al (2000) found that "women reported both social and emotional loneliness significantly more than men and older subjects in the older age group reported more frequent loneliness than their younger counterparts as females survive to a greater age and live without a partner for longer than men".

Loneliness is a frequent and universal feeling among elderly persons. It may be triggered by different reasons. The elderly persons experience loneliness when their relations with adult children or family members are not cordial. The old people who hold very less social

¹Student, Indian Institute of Psychology and Research, Bangalore, Karnataka, India

²Assistant Professor, Indian Institute of Psychology and Research, Bangalore, Karnataka, India

³Assistant Professor, Indian Institute of Psychology and Research, Bangalore, Karnataka, India

*Responding Author

Received: September 03, 2020; Revision Received: September 23, 2020; Accepted: September 27, 2020

The influence of living arrangement on the level of loneliness among the elderly

interactions and those who are not in favour of keeping social relations with relatives and friends experience strong feelings of loneliness. Those persons who keep themselves idle, who do not indulge in any kind of recreational or pleasurable activities, who do not utilize their leisure time properly and who do not use religious coping are being forced to have the feeling of loneliness. This loneliness is always accompanied by negative and suicidal thoughts and depression as compared to the elderly persons who claim to be active in their recreational and leisure time. They always indulge in some or the other activity and participate in social gatherings frequently. They indulge themselves in household chores, visit parks and religious places or a club for retired people. The elderly people usually feel lonely when their children leave them for good with the result they experience 'empty nest syndrome'. They anticipate their children to support them when they fall sick or in other types of assistance. Next most important reason could be retirement. After retirement, old people may have more free time which they are not able to reschedule and they do not know how to spend it. Moreover, the pension impedes the potential of enjoying the time. People in some jobs used to cultivate social interactions among colleagues and other professionals but after retirement they have to give them up.

Background/Premise

Loneliness is a growing public health concern for all ages from young adults to seniors. Studies have long connected loneliness to a range of health issues that could threaten longevity and well-being, including higher risks of heart attacks, strokes, depression, anxiety and early death. The latest National Poll on Healthy ageing find that about a one third seniors are lonely.

Research shows that chronic loneliness can impact older adults memory, physical well-being, mental health, and life expectancy. Some research also suggest that chronic loneliness may shorten life expectancy even more than being overweight or sedentary, and just as much as smoking.”

India's ageing population is struggling with loneliness and becoming increasingly disconnected from its environment. In India, a country of over a billion people, one in every two elderly individuals suffers from loneliness, says a study by Age well foundation. India's ageing population is struggling with loneliness. In addition, according to the study every fifth senior citizen in the country is in need of some kind of psychological counselling. A non-profit non-government organization based in Delhi, surveyed a sample size of 15,000 elderly individuals. The researchers found that 47.49 percent of them suffered from loneliness. The numbers from urban areas were worse: 3,205 of the aged out of 5000 felt lonely.

Living alone was most often cited as the reason for loneliness. According to the Census 2011 data, about 15 million elderly Indians live all alone and close to three-fourths of them are women. One in every seven elderly persons in India live in household where there is nobody below the age of 60. Other reasons cited for loneliness according to the Age well study was 'less interaction with family members', 'poor health', and 'isolation and non-availability of social interaction'.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Barakat M, Elattar N.F et al., (2019) conducted a study to assess depression, anxiety, and loneliness among elderly living in old age homes. Results shows that three quarters of the studied elderly have depression and more than two thirds have anxiety, while the majority of

The influence of living arrangement on the level of loneliness among the elderly

them suffer from loneliness. Their study concluded that the studied elderly living in geriatrics homes had higher levels of depression, anxiety and loneliness.

Aung K.T., Nurumal M et al. (2018) conducted a study on loneliness among elderly in nursing homes. The aim of this study was to explore the level of loneliness among elderly in nursing homes using UCLA loneliness scale. A quantitative cross-sectional design conducted in nine nursing homes chosen by a stratified random sampling method in Kuantan, Pahang, Malaysia. Eighty elderly was involved and self-modified questionnaire for sociodemographic data and UCLA loneliness scale that was used to measure the level of loneliness with internal consistency (coefficient α ranging from 0.89 to 0.94) and test-retest reliability ($r = 0.73$). The descriptive analysis, such as frequency and percentage and Chi-Square test was analyzed using the (SPSS) version 20. 75% of elderly felt very high loneliness while 25% felt moderately lonely. These participants mostly came from age-group 71-80s, female, Chinese, not schooling, already lost spouses and don't have any jobs currently.

Rationale

The rationale behind the study is to understand how the living arrangement affect the feeling of loneliness among the elderly. This study helps us in the identification of living conditions of the elderly which will lead to better physical, psychological and social health, thereby improving the overall well-being of the family and its members, furthermore it would also provide an insight to those running old aged homes to devise suitable programs such as strengthening social networks and providing individual attention and care to those residing away from their family.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

- To assess the influence of living arrangement on the level of loneliness among the elderly.

Hypotheses

- H₁: There will be a significant influence of living arrangement on loneliness among the elderly.
- H₂: There will be a significant influence of gender on loneliness among the elderly.
- H₃: There will be a significant interaction effect of the living arrangements and gender on loneliness among the elderly.

Variables

Independent Variables –Living arrangement (family and old age homes), Gender (Male and Female)

Dependent Variable– Loneliness

Operational Definitions

1. **Loneliness:** loneliness can be defined as a feeling of unpleasant experience that is felt when a person feels emotionally disturbed which is caused due to the perceived feeling of lack of social support around them. This may include feeling helpless and the feeling of not having a social network.
2. **Old Age:** Old age can be defined as a complicated age with deteriorating mental and physical age. It is the age of helplessness and dependence for financial, social and physical support.

The influence of living arrangement on the level of loneliness among the elderly

- 3. Elderly Living with Family:** The old aged living with family can be defined as those individuals that live or reside with their immediate family which consists of their spouse, children, grand -children and/or their siblings.
- 4. Elderly Living at Old Aged Homes:** The old aged living at old aged homes can be defined as those individuals that live away from home in care centers, NGO or any other shelter which is either voluntary or involuntary.

Sample

- 1. Sample Description:** The population for the present study comprised of the elderly aged 64 and above which included both male and female participants either living with their family or at old age homes. In order to obtain the sample for the study, individuals meeting the inclusion and exclusion criteria were chosen.
- 2. Sampling Size:** A sample size of 64 elderly, participated which included 34 participants living with family and 30 participants living at old age home.
- 3. Sampling Method:** For the present study non-random purposive sampling and snowball sampling was used.

Inclusion Criteria

Individuals with a minimum age of 60 and above, either living with their family which would include their children, grandchildren or spouse, and those living at old age homes either private or government owned participated in the study. Individuals fluent in reading and writing English were chosen. Both males and females in good health participated in the study.

Exclusion Criteria

Individuals below the age of 60, and those living alone were not included in the study because the study focused on the influence of living arrangement of the elderly population. Those with serious illness were not included.

Tools for Data Collection

- 1. Informed Consent form:** An informed consent form was given to the participants that included the researcher's affiliation and purpose for the data collection. The participant will be had to sign before the participation.
- 2. Socio Demographic Data Sheet:** It was used to collect personal information such as their name, Contact Detail (phone number), Age, Gender, Place of Living, Number of members living in their family or old age home, number of months or years at old age home, City, and their current location (urban, semi-urban or rural).
- 3. UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3:** A simple measure developed by Russell, Peplau and Cutrona in 1980 which measures loneliness was used. It comprises of 20 statements, having 4 point scale ranging from 'often' (4) to 'never' (1) for statements depicting loneliness and 'never' (1) to 'often' (4) for statements not depicting loneliness. The scores of the scale could range from 20- 80. The overall score represents total level of loneliness and higher scores indicate greater loneliness. The internal consistency reliability was found to be in the range of 0.89 to 0.94

Procedure for Data Collection

The elderly population either living at home or at old age home were approached. The data was collected through a survey method. The hard copies of the Questionnaire by Russell along with the socio demographic form were circulated to the participants after explaining

The influence of living arrangement on the level of loneliness among the elderly

the purpose of the study and obtaining the informed consent and the response would be marked. Permission to withdraw from the study was allowed.

Procedure for Data Analysis

Data was analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) tool by IBM. Two-way ANOVA was used to find the mean differences between groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 Results of Two-Way ANOVA for levels of loneliness.

Loneliness	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Living Arrangement	804.654	1	804.654	8.138	.006
Gender	186.844	1	186.844	1.890	.174
Living Arrangement*Gender	197.468	1	197.486	1.997	.163
Total	97844.000	64			

Dependent Variable: Level of Loneliness

Table 1 shows the obtained F value is 8.138 and the influence of living arrangement on loneliness is significant at 0.05 level of significance >0.06 . Hence the result obtained supports the first hypothesis that there is a significant effect of living arrangement on the level of loneliness among the elderly. Living with family can lead to better well-being, contentment and affection but living away from family i.e. living at old age home can lead to detachment, isolation and ignored medical attention. However, considering the second hypothesis the influence of gender is insignificant at 0.05 level of significance with a F value of 1.890, hence rejecting the second hypothesis which states that there will be a significant effect of gender on loneliness. The possible reasons could be, male and females experience loneliness in different ways. Males tend to feel lonely due to retirement and inability to go to work and involve themselves in various other activities, while females tend to feel lonely emotionally when their children move out, settle abroad, loss of spouse or physical in capabilities. In addition to this the third objective of the study which is the interaction effect of living arrangement and gender with a corresponding hypothesis stating there will be a significant interaction effect of the living arrangements and gender on loneliness among the elderly is also rejected since the F value is 1.997 and the significant value is .163 which is insignificant at 0.05 level of significance. The results demonstrate that loneliness is influenced differently by males and females Males experience loneliness because of physical inability to go out and work, diminishing physical health and dependency however females on the other hand experience loneliness due to lack of social and emotional support, diminishing physical health, loss of their partners.

Recreational activities, group therapies, social gatherings, involvement in religious activities and involvement in house hold chores can help reduce the feeling of loneliness as this keeps them occupied and entertained. Moreover, attention to their needs as well as empathy can also help ease feelings of loneliness.

CONCLUSION

In the present study it is found that there is a significant influence of living arrangement on loneliness among the elderly. On a deeper analysis it was found that individuals living at old age home experience higher levels of loneliness compared to those that live with their family. The sample recruited for the study was limited in terms of the pandemic caused due

The influence of living arrangement on the level of loneliness among the elderly

to corona virus, sample size, and the geographical area from where it was sourced. The sampling technique was purposive non-random and snowball sampling, hence the sample cannot be considered a full representation of the population. Also, all the individuals above the age of 60 were not included in the study due to language barriers. For further research a larger sample size could be recruited with equal representations from each group of gender and living arrangement and other parts of the city as well as the country can be included. These findings can be useful in formulation of various intervention strategies to improve the mental health of the elderly. Appropriate data can be presented to various old age homes for the betterment of mental health of the elderly.

REFERENCES

- Arslantas, H., Adana, F., Abacigilergin, F., Kayar, D. & Acar, G. (2015). Loneliness in elderly people, associated factors and its correlation with quality of life: A field study from western Turkey. *Iran Journal of Public Health*, 44(1), 43-50
- Aruna Dubey, Seema Bhasin, Neelima Gupta & Neeraj Sharma (2011) A Study of Elderly Living in Old Age Home and Within Family Set-up in Jammu, *Studies on Home and Community Science*, 5:2, 93-98, DOI 1080/09737189.2011.11885333
- Aung, K., Nurumal, M. S., & Bukhari, W. N. S. W. LONELINESS AMONG ELDERLY IN Nursing homes.
- Barakat, M. M., Elattar, N. F., & Zaki, H. N. (2019). Depression, Anxiety and Loneliness among Elderly Living in Geriatric Homes. *American Journal of Nursing Research*, 7(4), 400-411.
- Naseem, S. (2010). Influence of loneliness and leisure time activities on general health among elderly people.
- Pietromonaco, P. R., & Barrett, L. F. (2000). The internal working model concept: What do we really know about the self in relation to others? [Electronic version]. *Review of General Psychology*, 4, 155-175.
- Victor, C. R. (2012). Loneliness in care homes: A neglected area of research *Aging Health*, 637-646

Acknowledgements

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Vora A., Lakhotia C. & Sandhya S. (2020). The influence of living arrangement on the level of loneliness among the elderly. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 8(3), 1851-1856. DIP:18.01.191/20200803, DOI:10.25215/0803.191