

Spirituality as a Factor in Positive Ageing

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ABSTRACT

Positivity in ageing is a new field that has emerged and is gaining high popularity among adults. The concept talks about how a person should maintain positive attitude towards his/her ageing despite of any physical or mental illness that is associated to ageing. Positive ageing depends on many factors. Factors like financial stability, physical fitness, positive mental status, sociability, and many more have been regarded as contributing factors to gain positive attitude towards ageing. But the main factor that is pre-dominantly seen in India for positivity in ageing is level of Spirituality. This factor contributes to answering vital questions, like what is happening in one's life, faith upon higher authority, how to be hopeful for future, etc. Spirituality in a broader sense is connecting with someone bigger than the human being itself. Each person has its own perception of spirituality. People associate ageing as a scary process with uncertainty regarding their physical & mental deterioration and financial instability. Spirituality helps in gaining hope and finding a silver lining even in such conditions. Current research aims at establishing spirituality as a critical factor in developing positive outlook in ageing.

Keywords: *Spirituality, Positive Ageing*

Spirituality contributes to a healthy and positive outlook towards one's own life. There are many questions that cannot be solved through facts and figures present in science. Thus when a person resides to a superior being, hope arises. This hope helps in creating a positive attitude in a person. A negative attitude has been clearly seen from the point of view of people who are about to age and who have already aged. Attitude is directly proportional to the way to living life (Peppard R Nancy). Thus a positive attitude that is created by spirituality helps in positively thinking about Ageing. This paper thus helps in providing evidences that Spirituality is a strong factor to create positivity in one's outlook towards ageing.

Positive aging has been a less researched field which emerged as an important issue in this age. It has been termed as an 'issue' due to deteriorating physical and mental health of the Grey

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Population (term used to denote people who have already aged, probably 65+). Despite of all the facilities provided by the government, there has been seen a decline in the life expectancy of a human. Over the years, gradually as the standard of living increases there is a decrease in happiness index of the people. So, clearly we can see that materialistic things do not define a person's happiness. There must definitely be another factor that governs the happiness or satisfaction index of a person. Many researchers have seen that Attitude of a person towards his/her own life style helps in determining the decisions taken by them.

Ageing has always been paired with the negative stereotypes of physical deterioration, mental illness, financial crunch and dependency. Adding to all this negativity, are the negative thoughts of emptiness or loss of purpose in living that a person experiences. For a long time every individual lives with a goal in their life. Initially it is the purpose to achieve something theoretically, making one's own parents or guardians proud. Then it's the purpose of financial stability that the person works towards. Slowly working towards it, the purpose of social security arises which is achieved by marriage. Then the process of procreation starts to fulfil the societal responsibilities. Finally when a time arises when person fulfils all his/her responsibilities, they feel emptiness. The purpose vanishes from their life. It is when they should realize the importance of self-worth. This is the only time that the person can focus all his/her attention towards self. The purpose of living can be re-focused towards self. This is where Spirituality comes into picture.

Spirituality as defined by Webster Dictionary is the sensitivity or attachment to spiritual values, also quality or state of being spiritual. Now if we look at the word "Spiritual", it is defined as relating to a person's spirit or having similar values and ideas. A person's spirit comprises of its 'being' in the world, purpose of its existence and of course its biological composition. When a person gains perspective about one's own spirit, the person is said to be known as being spiritual. This phenomenon is known as spirituality. This paper discusses the link between Spirituality and Positive attitude which ultimately leads to Positive Ageing.

Positive Ageing is an emerging and important field. There are researches made in the direction of its causes as well as plausible ways how to positively age. But there is a dearth of literature on objective measures of positive ageing.

Positive ageing is defined as the positive attitude of a person towards his/her ageing. There are certain factors that can be derived by the review from the present literature regarding positive ageing. These factors can be categorized into broader categories of Relational Resource, Physical Well- Being, Positive Mental States, Engaging activity, Financial Security & Spirituality.

Following are the explanations of the factors:

1. Relational Resource- Supportive Family and Friends

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2. Physical Well- Being - Optimal functioning of mind and body
3. Positive Mental States - Wellbeing, happiness and satisfaction with life
4. Engaging activity - Active participation in mental and physical activity.
5. Spirituality & Financial Stability – Spirituality is harmony with oneself and with natural and social environment. Financial Stability is the equilibrium of one’s future need with the finances.

Positive ageing is a term used to describe the process of maintaining a positive attitude, feeling good about yourself, keeping fit and healthy, and engaging fully in life as you age (Australian psychological society).

Among all the above factors, Spirituality has been found to gain a little more advantage in India. As we have defined the terms Positive Ageing, Positive Attitude and Spirituality, we can easily find a link between all the three. Many researchers all over the globe are trying to figure out a practical approach to have a positive attitude towards one’s own ageing. Recent researches have proved that Spirituality is a practical approach for attaining positive attitude towards life.

Grey population, as they liked to be called for the people who have already aged, lean a little too much towards spirituality as they go about their life. It has been an age old practice as they feel that they receive meaning to their life while doing so. Being spiritual doesn’t always mean being religious. Religion is a path towards spirituality. Spirituality can be different according to different people. It is just defined as believing into the existence of a super power. Thus the dependency over something so powerful and enlightening, helps people fight their battles in life. Spirituality provides with answers and confidence to come over a situation or a problem in one’s life. Thus as the issues related to ageing arises, people tend to move towards this process of being spiritual.

As we proceed further, let’s look at some evidences supporting the fact that to attain positive aging, it requires positive attitude towards ageing and spirituality is a governing factor in attaining it.

Studies on Ageing

A recent research by Anna Kornadt and Klaus Rothermund (2011) have studied that stereotypes prevails in three main domains: friends and acquaintances, financial and monetary issues, and physical and psychological fitness. Stereotypes were the most positive in the religion and spirituality domain. These findings show again the ambivalence of old age stereotypes: Thus people hold very negative and positive attitudes toward older adults depending on the life domain being considered.

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It has been researched that stereotype of women ageing has been seen negatively more than of any age or race. (Frieden, 1993). Loss of productivity is also associated with loss of intellectual and bodily strength. Older women are presumed to think less rationally or have physical stamina to carry simple everyday task.

Ageing is a complex phenomenon dealing with change across the lifespan and that this change has a broad inter individual variability in level, rate and direction. This broad heterogeneity is expressed by several commonly accepted ways of ageing: normal, optimal, and pathological (Rowe & Khan, 1987).

Studies on attitude towards ageing

A recent Health Service Executive (HSE) (2009) report, 'Open Your Eyes', highlighted how people's attitudes and perceptions can have a significant negative impact on the lives of the older people. The report states: Ageism and ageist attitudes are not the sole factors contributing to elder abuse but can give rise to a culture which creates a fertile environment in which elder maltreatment can develop, leading to age prejudice, and diminish and disempowering older people (HSE 2009, p. 21).

According to the new study conducted by Steven E. Mock of the department of Health Studies and Gerontology at the University of Waterloo, People's attitude towards ageing directly influences their psychological well-being. His study examined 1,170 adults over the age of 40, and evaluated their attitude towards ageing at baseline and compared it to their overall life satisfaction and affect 10 years later. The results supported his previous supported evidence, when ageing attitudes are less favourable, older subjective age predicts lower life satisfaction and increased negative effect. However, when ageing attitudes are more favourable, older subjective age is no longer associated with these measures of psychological well-being.

Palmore (2003) worked towards this area and published a book, Attitude towards old age: A study of the Self Image of aged. He took a sample of 25 elderly (age ranging from 60 to 75 years) was selected randomly and a set of questionnaire was administered to elicit information on transition to old age. response to aging (change in personality, change in life style, religiosity in old age, gender differential response to aging, aging), best and worst aspects of aging, aging well and poorly, changes in family and society, ageist attitudes, aged abuse, social image of the elderly-myths and misconceptions regarding the elderly, the need to change public perception and ways to do it.

Found four common responses to these prescriptions: Acceptance, Denial, Avoidance, or Reform. The aged who accept the negative image "acts old" even if it's contrary to his/her personality. Denial includes lying about one's own age, plastic surgery, cosmetic surgery etc. Avoidance may take the form of self-imposed isolation. Reform involves an effort by the aged to eliminate the ageist attitude individually.

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Pearlin and Schooler 1998 stated all the negative behaviours have a negative effect on ageing and a harmful effect on the aged.

Levy, Ashman, & Dror, 1999–2000 in their book *Mind Matters: Cognitive and Physical Effects of Aging Self-Stereotypes*, found that the older individuals exposed to the positive aging stereotypes tended to accept the life-prolonging medical interventions, regardless of financial or familial cost, whereas those exposed to the negative aging stereotypes tended to reject the life-prolonging interventions. After subliminally exposing a group of young and old individuals to either the positive or negative age-stereotype-prime intervention, presented them with a series of hypothetical medical situations, each of which involved a fatal condition and an intervention that could prolong their life. (The scenarios were modelled after those presented in some versions of the living will.) The hypothetical interventions entailed disadvantages by way of either the financial cost or the time that family members would need to spend administering and monitoring the intervention.

It was also found that those participants who were subliminally exposed to the negative aging-stereotype primes demonstrated significantly greater cardiovascular stress after the challenges than those exposed to the positive aging stereotype primes. Also, the negative aging stereotypes affected the cardiovascular measures even before the cardiovascular challenge. This suggests that negative aging stereotypes directly cause stress to older individuals, as well as exacerbate how older individuals respond to stressors in their environment. This research very nicely presents that attitude have a great impact on how a person takes his/her ageing.

Slade, Kunkel, et al., 2002 examined whether self-perceptions of aging influence survival. To conduct this study, the OLSAR data were matched with the survival data that we obtained from the National Death Index. It was found that older individuals with more positive self-perceptions of aging, measured up to 23 years earlier, lived 7.5 years longer than those with less positive self-perceptions of aging. This advantage remained after controlling for age, functional health, gender, loneliness, race, self-rated health, and socioeconomic status. The survival advantage for those with more positive self-perceptions of aging seems noteworthy, especially because physiological measures (such as low cholesterol level) and behavioural measures (such as exercising) predicted a longer life span of 4 years or less in other studies.

Studies on Spirituality and Positive Ageing

Rowe and Kahn's three-factor model of successful aging consisted of (a) minimizing risk and disability, (b) engaging in active life, and (c) maximizing physical and mental activities. The three components of the model have the following characteristics: (a) each is a part of an overall system and each is therefore temporally related to the others, (b) the variables are activating characteristics that describe both weaknesses and strengths, and (c) each must consider both individual characteristics as well as contextual factors. They then argued that positive spirituality

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is the missing component in the model; it addresses the interrelatedness between the older adults' beliefs and values, the community, and the efficacy of interventions focused on successful aging. Evidence presented suggests that the addition of spirituality to interventions focused on health promotion was received positively by older adults. Leaders in gerontology often fail to incorporate the growing body of scientific evidence regarding health, aging, and spirituality into their conceptual models to promote successful aging. This enhancement of Rowe and Kahn's model helped health professionals, religious organizations, and governmental agencies work collaboratively to promote wellness among older adults.

Michael W. Parker found a community and faith-based intervention with elderly persons and their adult children involving religious, medical, and academic communities. In his paper 'A Multidisciplinary Model of Health Promotion Incorporating Spirituality into a Successful Aging Intervention with African American and White Elderly Groups' designed an intervention program for the elderly using the extended version of Rowe and Kahn's Model. There were many participatory institutions from academic, medical, state, and religious faculties that presented a variety of workshops and seminars at a multichurch-sponsored conference that hosted over 500 seniors. Great results were seen in the post conference surveys that suggested extremely favourable satisfaction rates across all groups those who represented. The African American religious community was seen at achieving an excellent African American participation rate. This paper implies that the model described has the capacity to generate collaborations across denominational, racial, and class barriers, and has the potential of helping to unify the religious community around the important task of promoting successful aging.

David O. Moberg, Ph.D., researched upon the importance of spirituality, religion and Ageing. He suggested that spirituality and religion are overlapping. People generally use the term interchangeable. Sometimes people confuse the term Spirituality with religion. Many researches in the past have shown negative effect of Religion over people's perception. Thus when talked about spirituality people misunderstand the concept and do not follow the basic component of life that helps them give hope. David argues that there are many investigations which suggest that the likelihood of leaning towards spirituality increases as the age progresses. It has important positive relationships with various measures of life satisfaction, psychosocial well-being, and both physical and mental health. There are many benefits seen in this therapy for recovery from illness and it serves as source of meaning and purpose in life. Spiritual intervention has been seen to minimize death anxiety, psychological distress and stresses of caregiving. There are many instruments that are developed to check the spirituality index in a person, one of them being Spirituality Well-Being Scale. The applications of the research findings which person, which overwhelmingly demonstrate the importance of spirituality to human well-being, already are improving the effectiveness of clinical work and social services in all of the health and human service professions. As scientific knowledge of spirituality expands, so does awareness of the need for further research, including the refinement of methodological

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procedures, expansion to new topics, and extension to international cultures and diverse religions. The outlook for research on spirituality and the consequent practical applications to benefit humanity is very promising.

Studies on how Ageing and Spirituality are viewed in India

Shrinivas Tilak, in his book 'Religion and Ageing in the Indian Tradition' mentioned that how we age or the perception of ageing depends on the culture a person follows. He studied the different ways how a person views ageing and found that there is a specific way of ageing in India. He analysed some key concepts derived from the different religious practices followed in India. The key concepts were- Ageing (*jara*), stages of life (*asrama*), time (*kala*), determinate deeds (*karma*), desire (*kama*), change (*parinama*) and rejuvenative force (*vaja*). The author offers important transcultural insights into the realities of ageing. He suggests that through Indian religious traditions, one can shape the ageing experience into a meaningful system including some social values, ethical principles and life goals.

Dr. Ranjan Banerjee is a retired psychiatrist living in Kolkata suburbs. Sarah E Lambs, in her book *Ageing and the Indian Diaspora: Cosmopolitan Families in India and Abroad*, interviewed Mr. Ranjan and talked about his perception towards ageing. He clearly stated that Old Age Homes are not meant for the Indian Society. They never were a part of Indian Culture. But due to growing limitation of time with everyone, even the parents think that it's better to live with someone of our own pace. The children do not understand the pace of an aged. Thus people prefer to live together with the same interest and perception towards ageing. But he also suggests the absence of spirituality or a faith or belief towards the higher authority. He thinks that due to fast moving world, everyone has become thankless and thus lost the meaning of life.

CONCLUSION

With more wisdom and experience of life, people have more thoughts which needs to be channelized. It needs to be given some direction. There are many researches and studies done on how to provide a meaning to life. Either it be a life of an aged or an ageing person, it has been seen that spirituality is a key to positive outlook. India is known to be a land of various religious practices. Thus the followers are ought to be plenty. They describe various experiences in the light of a superior being but the basic content remains the same, i.e. faith and hope to overcome various difficulties of life. The reason that Spirituality is linked with ageing process is due to the side effects of ageing that a person experiences. Side effects like physical deteriorations, financial dependency, memory loss etc. create negative stereotypes in a person. These stereotypes lead to negative outlook towards living. As it is already seen that attitude towards life is directly proportional to the way of ageing in a person, it is quite necessary that a person maintains a positive attitude towards life to attain positive ageing. As discussed in this paper, Positive Ageing can be described as a positive attitude of a person towards his/her ageing. This field has come into talking due to the constant deterioration of life expectancy and standard of

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living of the 'Grey Population'. Many factors are seen in creating a positive attitude towards ageing like family support, financial stability, physical fitness, positive mental state, engaging activities etc. Among them, Spirituality has been seen as new and promising factor in creating faith and hope towards overcoming the hurdles of life. Among all the factors, Spirituality is one of the practical ways to attain positive ageing.

Future Implications

This research talks about the importance of Spirituality as the key factor in attaining Positive Ageing. There is an ample amount of researches on this new field called Positive Ageing but a dearth of literature on how to attain it. Spirituality has been in practice since ages. Due to its components of faith and hope to overcome hurdles of life, people are leaning towards spirituality. It was lost somehow in the fast pace of the world, where people were becoming thankless day by day. This might have been due to the world running by just facts and figures. Spirituality is more of a person's energy in the form of Faith, diverted to an unseen authority power in a hope that hurdles can be taken care with a little bit of personal effort and optimism. Thus creating a positive attitude towards life and one's own ageing. Spirituality is preached and seen in different forms in different parts of the world. Many consider it in form of religion, some see in the form of karma, some in terms of cosmic power thus making it easier for a wider population to follow.

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