

Impact of Socio Economic Status on Social Support, Social Loneliness, Emotional Loneliness and Social Isolation of older adults

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The present study was planned to find out the impact of socio economic status on social support, social isolation, and social and emotional loneliness among older adults. Three scales were used in present study to measure the constructs i.e. 6-Item (short) De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale (1985), 6-item (short) scale developed by Hawthorne (2006), and Social Support Scale developed in Urdu by Malik (2002). Two scales were translated into Urdu language in order to derive more natural responses from the participants. Standardized translation procedure was used for the translation of the measures. Purposive convenient sampling technique was used to draw the sample of 500 older adults from both urban and rural areas of the various districts of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. The age of the participants ranged from 60 to 90 years ($M = 67.59$, $SD = 7.54$). Alpha coefficients for the all variable were computed, which ranged between .60 for social loneliness to .96 for social support total scale. Significant gender differences were found on social support and its sub constructs, whereas significant difference on all study variables were also observed for socio economic status.

Keywords. Socio-economic-status, social support, social loneliness, emotional loneliness, social isolation.

Old age is the most important issue, usually, in every society. This age is specifically characterized with certain physical as well as psychological, social and mental troubles. Aside from weakening health quality, there are different other specific problems that old age individuals will undoubtedly go over. These problems can vary as per the social and customary standards of a general public however if we deeply consider they would seem similar. There may be variations that exists in the intensity of problems but the emotions related to it nearly remain same.

Older adults might experience feelings of loneliness in presence of individuals, deprived from family support and surrounded with social isolation in most of the cases. This phenomenon even has risen with advanced technology and its infiltration at domestic level.

In Pakistani society the most prominent family structure is still combined family system where the head of family is often a bread winner and enjoys a prime status at home. There are certain economic and social factors, e.g. inflation, proliferation of information technology, and busy life, which have exerted direct impact on family life during last two decades. The prime role of elders is mitigated specially in older age due to suffering from more serious psycho-social issue. This issue has got the attention of researchers in Pakistan and many studies have focused on the problem of

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older adults e.g. poverty, retirement, unemployment, ill health, low morale, death of spouse, absence of children, loss of friends etc.

Isolation and loneliness might be experienced at any phase of life of an individual but it becomes a complex issue in older adult's life. Isolation is not an unavoidable issue associated to old age and also an old age is not the only issue responsible for isolation in old age individuals, but however aging have profound association with isolation.

In order to have more vivid understanding there is still need that ongoing research should explore certain psychological and social matters associated with older adults. Present study is an empirical endeavor to examine the association pattern in social support, social isolation and loneliness among old aged individuals, besides the in-depth exploration of demographic factors pertinent to the topic.

Literature Review

Old age is composed of the ages nearing or surpassing the life expectancy of human beings, and thus the end of the human life cycle. There are different terms used for old age but general definition remains the same. It is defined as the age that is heading towards end of life cycle of humans.

According to Dannefer and Phillipson (2010) the word old age is utilized to signify matured, senior citizens and old age individuals. According to American Psychological Association (2009) a few soft terms used for elder people across the world but common terminology used for old age is old people. In American expression word "seniors" is used for old age. In Britain and also in some parts of America "senior citizens" is used for people in their old age. According to social sciences word used for people in their old age are called "older adults".

According to Erikson (1963) establishes that individuality and characteristics of humans are made and modified in eight stages starting from birth of a person and goes along with ageing process till end of life. Erikson finds out old age as phase of life where there is integrity vs despair. People in old age think back on their past life, people with no achievements have compunction on their past life and this feeling of regret brings disappointment to the person. Such an individual is prone to distress and may feel frustrated. People who are satisfied with their achievements feel good that imparts them feeling of integrity (Carver & Scheir, 2000; Erikson, 1963, 1968).

Social Isolation and Loneliness

Isolation and loneliness may happen at any phase of lifetime of a person but it become a complex problem for older adults. Isolation and old age is not necessarily responsible for each other but still both have close relationship.

Loneliness has been defined in the literature in numerous ways. The term social isolation and loneliness has been frequently use reciprocally or a solitary concept by different studies. According to Weiss (1973), Cacioppo, Fowler and Christakis, (2009), and Golden et al. (2009) social isolation and loneliness have different meanings. Loneliness is classified as a personal sentiment whereas social isolation is related to real/tangible condition indicates the existence or nonexistence of societal networks.

Social Support

Social support is an essential element to manage problems of Isolation and loneliness that old age individuals are facing. Provision of social support is important for older adults as it aids in reducing the impacts of social isolation and loneliness. Longitudinal investigations by Bassuk, Glass, and Berkman (1999) displayed that those old age individuals who don't have connections of societal group have greater chances of being socially isolated than those older adults who have proper societal group connections. Having relationships in societal group is a sign of social support.

Causes of Social Isolation and Loneliness among Old Aged People

The causes of loneliness and social isolation can be numerous, for example, living alone, marital status/widowhood/ divorce, absence of children, low education, poverty, illness, retirement; and so forth.

The studies of Victor Scambler, Bowling, and Bond (2005) and Cann and Jopling, (2011) explain that loneliness starts slowly in old age. At times loneliness occurs through a particular life incident, particularly one related with some shortfall, like retirement, or grief etc. the threats of loneliness rises when individuals have more responsibilities in their lives. These life moves have greater probability of occurrence at old age because the risk of loneliness and isolation are greater for older adults. Schnittger et al. (2012) further highlights that because of the death or disease of earlier relations societal linkages may possibly reduce in extent, or due to their own poor health old age individuals may be incapable to take part in formerly delight in events .

Further causes e.g. low income and old age such as 80 or above are related with isolation and loneliness in older adults (Age UK, 2010). Ill health, mental and physical deficiency are also the reasons for loneliness and isolation denoted by Victor et al, (2005).

Social Economic Status

Socio economic status also has association with isolation and loneliness. According to Age UK (2010) an absolute relationship exists among older adults' isolation and loneliness and low socio economic status. Further causes related with isolation and loneliness among old age individuals are low socio economic status, and being very old age such as 80 years and above, (Age UK, 2010), ill health and mental and sensual deficiency (Victor et al, 2005).

The study of Havens, Hall, Sylvestre, and Jivan (2004) specifies some causes of loneliness among rural communities in Canada e.g. being lonely, an insight of upcoming earnings are insufficient, ill health, and expectation of life fulfillment. Study done by Berkman and Gurland, (1998) found that among old age issues, lower income comes as prominent one. These findings were supported through recent research carried out by Weyers, Dragano, Mobus, Beck, and Stang (2008) who found that old age peoples who belong to financially and socially weak backgrounds are more susceptible to loss of social contacts and support.

The insight of individuals about their inadequate earnings may stop them from contributing in events and operate as an obstacle to the utilization of marketable societal chances and rewarded facilities, as well as lessen the person's capability to yield care delivered by other individuals (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2001).

Furthermore, research carried out by Ryser and Halseth (2011) found that lack of social support to old age women, who belong to financially weak backgrounds and live alone in their old age, may impart severe effects to their health and standard of life and can lead them to before time admittance in hospitals or health care centers.

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between social support, social isolation, and loneliness of elderly people.
2. To analyse the impact of socio-economic status on social support and social isolation and loneliness in elderly people.

Hypotheses

In order to achieve the above mentioned objectives, following hypotheses have been formulated:

1. Social support will negatively predict social isolation and loneliness among older adults.
2. People living with high socio economic status will exhibit high social support and less social isolation and loneliness as compare to low socio economic status in old age.

Method

Sample

The sample of the current study consisted of older people ($N = 500$) which were further divided into male ($n = 250$) and female ($n = 250$). The base line for age according to Erickson "Psycho Social theory" is around 60 years. The sample was also categorized on the bases of socio economic status. The sample was collected both from Urban and Rural areas of Peshawar. Purposive convenient sampling technique was used in this research study.

Instruments

Following instruments were used to measure constructs pertinent to the study:

Social Support Scale (SSS). The SSS is developed by Malik (2002) which contains 51 items anchored on 4-point Likert type rating i.e., always = 3, often = 2, sometimes = 1, never = 0. It is consisted of five subscales: Informational Support (6 items), Tangible Aid (5 items), Emotional Support (16 items), Esteem Support (11 items), Social Network Support (13 items). The SSS has highly significant internal consistency i.e., an alpha coefficient of .94. Pearson r-value for test-retest reliability is highly significant which is .85.

6-Item (short) De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale (1985). Loneliness scale was utilized as a unidimensional loneliness scale. Reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of the 6-Item Loneliness Scale ($\alpha = .71$) and the 3-Item Emotional scale ($\alpha = .68$) and 3-item Social Loneliness Subscale ($\alpha = .69$) were reported by the authors.

Friendship Scale (2006). The Friendship Scale is a short, 6-item scale assessing social isolation developed by Hawthorne (2006). Concurrent validity with correlates of social isolation found to be satisfactory. Cronbach alpha on sample of 829 older adults was demonstrated excellent ($\alpha = .83$). Total is sum of all 6 items, possible range for total is 0-24 with response format anchored on 5 point Likert type rating where each item is scored 0-4, i.e. almost always = 4 to never = 0.

Procedure

Permission from original authors was sought for the scales used in present study. The present study was carried out into two steps. In first step original scales for social isolation and loneliness were translated in to Urdu. Translation was carried out through standard translation procedure recommended by Brislin (1980).

The second step was carried out to meet the objectives of the study and hypotheses testing. For this purpose, sample of the study i.e. older adults were selected both from urban and rural areas of different districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through purposive convenient sampling technique. First, the participants were brief about the objectives of the study then informed consent were taken and confidentiality of the participants was ensured. After giving required instructions (written as well as oral) the scales of the study were given to the participants.

Results

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Alpha Reliabilities for all study variables (N = 500)

Scales	Subscales	N	M	SD	α	Range		Skewness
						Potential	Actual	
SS	Instrumental Support	500	8.57	2.59	.70	0-3	.56-.85	1.56
	Tangible Aid	500	9.07	2.64	.70	0-3	.56-.70	1.25
	Emotional Support	500	6.37	1.91	.86	0-3	.54-1.13	1.45
	Esteem Support	500	19.94	5.58	.83	0-3	.62-.77	1.87
	Social Network	500	24.73	6.64	.86	0-3	.48-79	1.34
	Total SS	500	92.08	23.95	.96	0-3	.48-1.13	1.76
Loneliness	Emotional Loneliness	500	6.37	1.91	.65	0-4	.64-.72	.87
	Social Loneliness	500	5.29	1.84	.60	0-4	.63-.70	.67
	Total Loneliness	500	11.66	2.95	.64	0-4	.62-.72	1.25
	Social Isolation	500	13.76	4.36	.62	0-4	1.30-2.22	1.19

Note. SS = social support.

The result in Table 1 displays the descriptive data of 500 participants and also demonstrates that alpha reliability coefficients for the scales used in present study ranged between .60-.64 for social loneliness and from .70-.96 for social support total scales. This indicates that reliabilities are found to be quite high for various scales of the study.

Table 2

Mean, Standard Deviation and F-Values for Source of Socio Economic Status on Variables of the Study (n = 500)

Variables	Rich (Rs 60000 and above) (n = 56)		Middle Class (Rs 20000 to 60000) (n = 197)		Lower Class (Below 20000) (n = 147)		F	p	η^2	Post Hoc
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD				
IS	11.47	2.88	8.99	2.92	7.83	2.07	37.84	.000	.132	1 > 2 > 3
TA	11.67	3.24	9.57	2.70	8.30	2.13	36.76	.000	.129	1 > 2 > 3
EmoS	32.31	8.02	26.17	7.22	21.30	4.94	68.82	.000	.217	1 > 2 > 3
EstS	25.61	7.22	21.40	5.94	17.97	3.87	49.80	.000	.167	1 > 2 > 3
SNW	31.00	8.38	26.66	6.78	22.29	4.98	50.49	.000	.169	1 > 2 > 3
TSS	119.17	28.97	98.91	24.99	82.79	16.54	63.47	.000	.203	1 > 2 > 3
SL	4.11	1.37	4.90	1.79	5.77	1.80	22.46	.000	.083	3 < 2 < 1
Loneliness	8.81	2.16	10.73	2.53	12.80	2.83	56.37	.000	.185	3 < 2 < 1
EL	4.69	1.35	5.84	1.82	7.03	1.76	43.97	.000	.150	3 < 2 < 1
SI	13.92	4.64	12.93	4.05	14.42	4.50	6.81	.001	.027	3 < 1 < 2

Note. IS = informational social support; TA = tangible aid social support; EmoS = emotional support; EstS = esteem social support; SNW = social network support; TSS = tangible social support; SL = social loneliness; EL = emotional loneliness; SI = social isolation.

Table 2 illustrates the alpha values, means, standard deviation and F values for all the study variables. The above findings indicated the significant mean differences on informational social support { $F(2, 497) = 37.84, p < .001$ }, tangible aid social support { $F(2, 497) = 36.76, p < .001$ }, emotional social support { $F(2, 497) = 68.82, p < .001$ }, esteem social support { $F(2, 497) = 49.80, p < .01$ }, social network support { $F(2, 497) = 50.49, p < .001$ }, total social support { $F(2, 497) = 63.47, p < .001$ }, emotional loneliness { $F(2, 497) = 43.97, p < .001$ }, loneliness { $F(2, 497) = 56.37, p < .001$ }, on social loneliness { $F(2, 497) = 22.46, p < .001$ }, and on social isolation { $F(2, 497) = 6.81, p < .01$ }. Results depict that individuals with rich status scored higher on social support and its constructs as compared to other groups, whereas individuals with lower class scored higher on loneliness, emotional loneliness, and social isolation.

Discussion

Before moving towards main analysis alpha reliabilities were computed to ensure soundness of scales used in current study. Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) have suggested .70 alpha level for social science and all the scales of present study obtained satisfactory reliability level except loneliness its sub-scales and social isolation which ranged between .60 to .65 (see Table 1). Having an understanding that increase in alpha value is partially subjected to number of items a scale held. Because of the lower number of items the slight decrease of alpha reliabilities of these scales were also considered to be acceptable as recommended by George and Mallery (2003).

One of the key findings of the study was regarding to the impact of socio economic status on social support loneliness, and social isolation. Results revealed that individuals with rich status scored high on social support and its sub scales, whereas individuals belonging to lower class scored higher on loneliness and social isolation. So it can be concluded that socio economic status had a positive relationship with social support and inverse relationship with loneliness and social isolation. The

study of Havens, Hall, Sylvestre, and Jivan (2004) described some causes of loneliness among rural communities e.g. being lonely, an insight of upcoming earnings are insufficient, ill health, and expectation of life fulfillment is not high.

As explained by Age UK (2010) different variables connected with isolation and loneliness in older adults are low salary, and older age i.e.80 years or above, weakness and psychological and tactile impedance (Victor, Scambler, Bowling, & Bond, 2005).

Study done by Berkman and Gurl (1998) revealed that among old age issues, lower income comes as prominent one. These findings was supported through recent research carried out by Weyers, et al. (2008), that old age people who belong to financially and socially weak backgrounds are more susceptible to loss of social contacts and support.

Furthermore, research carried out by Ryser and Halseth (2011) found that lack of social support to old age women, who belong to financially weak backgrounds and live alone in their old age, may impart severe effects to their health and standard of life and can lead to their before timely admittance in hospitals or health care centers.

Finding of Acierno, et al. (2010) provide empirical that social isolation could exert negative effects on older adults as they low social support from society. A prior study by Jylha and Jokela (1990) also found that the prevalence of loneliness is more common in regions where living alone is uncommon and where there is solid understanding among the members of society. So it is evident that social isolation and loneliness are inversely correlated with social support.

The results of the current study found significant impact of the socio economic status on the social isolation. Furthermore these findings revealed that older people belong to lower class status they had high score on social isolation and interestingly some upper class older adults also significantly high score on social isolation as well as older adults from middle class had lower score on social isolation. These finding shows that for older adults good social relationship has much importance than high income, an individuals who have intimate relationships they can easily cope with loneliness and social isolation without enough income resources. We see in our surroundings that older individuals who belongs to financially strong background, mostly many people (friends, family and other people) want to meet them, spend time with them for the sake of materials gain. In my opinion income is very important for every individual, but it is not the sole factor of minimizing the pain of social isolation, an old person who belong to a high socio economic status but he is paralyse or have physical disabilities or dementia, then they cannot kill isolation only on the basis of their high income, they need intimate relationships to cope with social isolation. It's not the matter of income but it's the quality of the intimate relationships ones have. In line with the current study, an investigation of Californians conducted by West, Reed, and Gildengorin (1998) that whose age were 55 and above also discovered that if physical wellbeing, societal care and social isolation are in control then the signs of unhappiness have insignificant relationship with money, and the authors further elaborated that we are not able to purchase happy life with cash.

According to Centre for research and education on violence against women and children, their findings suggested that older adults even belongs to high socio economic status facing sometime financial exploitation like someone traps, pressurizes or influence old age individuals upon

their cash, assists. In some cases the offender may compel the older adults to do amendment in their will, take signatures on their property papers or on cheque book without let them know.

Limitations of Study and Suggestions for Future Research

Like most of the studies of social science there may be certain issues that contribute to the limitations of the present study. Most important is that the data was exclusively gathered through self-report inventories, which lacks the inclusion of multiple sources. Consequently, the relationships between our variables of study may have been inflated due to response bias. Collection of data through multiple resources, for future researches, is suggested to enhance the validity and generalization of findings. Moreover some valuable demographic variables were not exclusively controlled i.e., age, family system and cultural context. The recent research focused only on socio-economic-status, it can also be considered as a limitation of the study.

Additional research needs to be carried out to study the further demographic information related to sample concerned. Longitudinal research is recommended to investigate this issue.

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