

# Stress Management among the Elderly

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### Abstract

Stress is an inevitable part of life. Your heart rate speeds up and intensifies of your senses that you experience with normal stress, it's just that your body is preparing to respond stress. Stress that lasts too long can be dangerous. It would be an understatement to claim that elderly people do not have any stress in their lives. While the pension will keep things moving, retirement from job does not necessarily imply retirement from stress. Job environment is not only cause of worry in an individual's life. Elderly people can encounter stress due to reason such as bad relationship, poor finances, sickening health, boredom, chronic illness, disability, or the loss of a spouse etc. These types of stressors are long term and can be more difficult to deal with. A number of simple yet effective stress management techniques can dramatically control stress. Stress Management works on two levels – prevention and cure of stress. Therefore, this theoretical paper aims to look at the nature of stress among elderly, type of stressors, and strategies that could be applied to stress management in elderly.

**Keywords:** Stress, Stress Management

### Introduction

Though stress is connected to each and every person of the society, but it has somewhat unavoidable and unmanageable to elderly people. The stressful life of this neglected generation and their struggle for existence are the need of hour for research.

### Aim of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the condition of the elderly people and their stressful life. Therefore, this paper aims to look at the nature of stress among elderly, type of stressors, and strategies that could be applied to stress management in elderly.

### Review of Literature

#### Ageing Scenario

The percentage of the elderly in India has been increasing at an increasing rate in recent years and the trend is likely to continue in the coming decades. According to the 2011 population census there are nearly 104 million elderly people (aged 60 and above) in India; 53 million women and 51 millions of men. A report released by the United Nations Population Fund and HelpAge India suggests that the number of elderly is expected to increase to 173 million by 2026. Both the proportion and size of the elderly population increases over time.

From 5.6% in 1961 the proportion has increased to 8.6% in 2011. The share of population over the age of 60 is projected to increase from 8 percent in 2015 to 19 percent in 2050. By the end of the century, the elderly will constitute nearly 34 percent of the total population in the country. 55 million elderly people sleep on an empty stomach every night. 75% of people aged 60 and over live-in rural areas. 1 in 8 elderly thinks that no one cares about their existence. In India, 12 million people are blind, 70-80% of whom are elderly. 62.6% are blind from cataracts. 30 million are alone, 33% are below the poverty line and the majority are illiterate. 90% have to keep working to survive. 6.5 million think no one knows they exist. Only about 11% of the Indian workforce participates in some type of guaranteed retirement income. In the next five years, the number of adults (65 and above) will exceed that of children under 5. India is said to be the World Capital for heart diseases. It is estimated that by 2015 nearly 7 lakhs of elderly people in India aged 60-69 will die from coronary heart disease. More than two thirds of the elderly (80 years and older) are financially dependent on others. Above Ageing Scenario depict the major stressors in the life of Indian Elderly.

#### Elderly Person

"The ageing process is of course a biological reality which has its own dynamic, largely beyond human control. However, it is also subject to

the constructions by which each society makes sense of old age. In the developed world, chronological time plays a paramount role. The age of 60 or 65, roughly equivalent to retirement ages in most developed countries is said to be the beginning of old age. In many parts of the developing world, chronological time has little or no importance in the meaning of old age. Other socially constructed meanings of age are more significant such as the roles assigned to older people; in some cases it is the loss of roles accompanying physical decline which is significant in defining old age. Thus, in contrast to the chronological milestones which mark life stages in the developed world, old age in many developing countries is seen to begin at the point when active contribution is no longer possible." (Gorman, 2000)

### **Stress**

In psychology, stress is a feeling of tension and pressure. Symptoms may be a feeling of being overwhelmed, anxiety, general irritability, insecurity, nervousness, social withdrawal, loss of appetite, depression, panic attacks, exhaustion, high or low blood pressure, rashes, insomnia, lack of sexual desire (sexual dysfunction), migraine, gastrointestinal problems (constipation or diarrhoea) and menstrual symptoms in women. It may also cause more serious conditions such as heart problems. Also, experimental research which has been performed on animals, also displayed results relating to stress and negative effects on the body. It has been shown that stress contributes to the initiation and development of specific tumours within the body.

Small amounts of stress can be desirable, beneficial, and even proved healthy. Positive stress helps improve athletic performance. It also plays a role in motivation, adaptation, and response to the environment. However, an excessive amount of stress can cause many problems in the body which can be proved harmful.

When it comes to measuring the body's response to stress, psychologists tend to use Han Selye's general adaptation syndrome. This model is often described to as the classical stress response and revolves around the concept of homeostasis. According to the concept of homeostasis, in response to stressors the body seeks to return to its equilibrium state, or the normal level of stress resistance. During the alarm phase, the body begins to build up resistance to the stressor beyond normal resistance levels.

Stress, especially work-related stress, is the second most common health problem, according to the World Health Organization. There is a large body of research linking the stress of cardiovascular disease to the future manifestation of hypertension related to a person's response to stress metabolic syndrome, obesity, emotional overeating, and elevated blood pressure levels. It should be noted that stress management techniques are applicable not only to people who manifest a disease or disorder, but also to healthy people, when added to daily routine practice as an effective tool for health enhancement

and protection over the life span, serving thus as a valuable intervention for the healthy population as well.

### **Effects of stress**

There are physiological, behavioural or even psychological effects of stress:

#### **Physiological**

The release of hormones triggers the fight or flight response. These hormones help you fight harder or run faster. Heart rate, blood pressure, and sweating increase. Stress has been linked to heart disease. Long-term stress increases the load on the arteries due to increased heart rate and blood pressure. It also affects immune system, that's why colds and flu are common during exams.

#### **Behavioural**

It can make you nervous, irritable, or even cranky. The effects of stress can cause some people to drink or smoke heavily, neglect exercise or proper nutrition, or abuse television or computers.

#### **Psychological**

The stress response can affect your ability to work or interact effectively with other people, and you may be less able to make good decisions. Stress is also known to affect anxiety and depression level.

#### **Stress among the Elderly**

Prolonged stress in the elderly can be the result of chronic illness, disability, or death of spouse. Other sources of stress can be money, a change in life, or family relationships problems. These types of stressors are long-lasting and can be more difficult to handle. Stress causes your body to release stress hormones that stimulate your brain and body. Over time this type of stimulation can adversely affect an older person.

The elderly face stress from various situations, which are different from those that are faced by adults. They are at a stage in life where they may face extended and critical health problems. They may lose a spouse and feel lonely and alone. They may have retired and therefore be forced to make a change in their living conditions and financial management.

Stress is augmented further by the fact that the ability of the elderly people to face stressful situations weakens over time. In spite of all the challenges that they may have faced during old age some of their systems that react and help in stress management are no longer as efficient as they were. The process of aging wears of the brain in some way and the response to stressful situations is far from adequate at times.

The various situations that can cause stress in older people can be related to:

1. Caring for a sick spouse
2. Losing a spouse
3. Death of other relatives and friends that one may have been close to
4. Reducing physical strength and a realization that one is not as fit and strong as one used to be
5. Worries about finances after retirement and the fear of institutionalization
6. No one to talk to and a feeling of dejection at being dependent on someone

All these can cause a lot of harm to self-esteem and send confidence levels spiralling down to abysmal levels. For those who have been independent and led a respectable life, it can be extremely stressful. Even though the events and situations that cause stress may be different for the elderly, the techniques that one can use are similar.

#### **How stress affects Elderly**

Studies show that long-term stress can damage brain cells, leading to depression. Depression is one of the most dangerous effects of stress in older people:

1. Fatigue
2. Loss of memory and concentration
3. Inability to fight off or recover from illness
4. Increased risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer
5. Irritability or moodiness
6. Consuming too much alcohol

#### **Common signs and symptoms of stress**

Symptoms of stress may include anxiety, sadness, trouble eating and sleeping, aches and pains, and weight loss.

#### **Physiological**

1. insomnia, nightmare
2. loss of appetite, palpitation
3. frequent urination
4. muscle pain and tiredness

#### **Emotional and psychological:**

1. anxiety, fear, frustration, depression
2. restlessness, poor concentration, forgetfulness

#### **Stress Management**

Stress management refers to the wide range of techniques and psychotherapies that aim to control a person's stress level, especially chronic stress, usually with the aim of improving daily functioning.

3. The term "stress" refers only to stress with significant negative consequences or distress in the terminology defended by Hans Selye, rather than to what he calls eustress, a stress whose effects are beneficial.
4. Stress causes many symptoms that vary from person to person, situation and severity. These can include decreased physical health and depression. Dealing with stress is considered one of the keys to a happy and successful life. While there are many demands in life that can be difficult to control, stress management offers several ways to manage anxiety and maintain overall well-being.
5. Although stress is often considered a subjective experience, stress levels can be easily measured using various physiological tests, similar to those used in polygraphs.
6. There are many practical stress management techniques available that can help a person reduce stress, give a positive sense of control over life, and promote well-being.
7. The effectiveness of various stress management techniques can be difficult to assess, as few of them have received significant attention from researchers. Therefore, the number and quality of evidence for different management techniques vary widely. Some are accepted as effective

treatments for use in psychotherapy, while others, with less evidence, are considered alternative therapies. There are many professional organizations that promote and provide training in conventional or alternative therapies.

8. There are several models of stress management, each with separate explanations of stress management mechanisms. More research is needed to better understand which mechanisms actually work and are effective in stress management.

#### **Stress Management among the Elderly**

It would be an understatement to claim that elderly people do not have any stress in their lives. While the pension will keep things moving, retirement from job does not necessarily imply retirement from the stress. After all, job environment is not the only cause of stress in an individual's life. Elderly people can encounter stress due to reason such as bad relationship, poor financing, sickening health, boredom etc.

Stress management works on two levels. The first is about maintaining a harmonious lifestyle so that stress does not get out of control. This involves having outlets that allow you to release the stress. The second strategy involves learning how to relax yourself or change your mood if stress is having a negative impact on your life. The first strategy is about prevention. The second is more to do with the cure for stress. This Paper will look at these two strategies and how they can be applied to stress management for the elderly.

There are no great secrets about preventing stress from being a serious issue in your life. If you want to prevent stress then you have to engage in life.

#### **Stay Active**

Many older people go to the gym these days and there is a variety of low impact activities like water aerobics or classes aimed at older people. If the gym is not your thing then any kind of sport or physical activity is good. Walking, bowls or golf provide exercise without putting too much physical stress on the body.

#### **Stay Involved in the Community**

As people get older they may feel out of touch with the mainstream. They may not see their friends so often and it is easy to suddenly find yourself isolated.

It is important to have an outlet to express your feelings and thoughts about the world and your life. Many people see their children and grandchildren as a focal point and outlet for their thoughts and feelings but it is also important to have a life outside of the family. Look for community activities that you can become engaged in. Many charitable organisations like Rotary run events for seniors. Make friends with people you meet at these events as this will lead to more opportunities to socialise.

#### **Establish a New Purpose in Life**

Retirement should open up a new freedom in your life to try things you never had time to do before because you were working. This doesn't mean a cruise round the world (but it could do) rather taking a

hobby or pursuing something that you have always been interested in. This could involve gardening, photography, hang gliding or whatever you can think of. It is important to have something to focus your mind and body on.

The cure of stress is effectively about changing the state of your body. The body responds in a certain way if it believes that it is experiencing stress. This can lead to ill-health over time and a feeling of anxiety or depression. If you find that you are becoming stressed out or suffering from anxiety or depression it is advisable to see your doctor but other techniques can be combined with your doctor's advice. These techniques are ways of telling the body to calm down. Three common techniques are meditation, yoga and deep breathing. Meditation and yoga can be learned through classes or by reading books/watching videos. Deep breathing is fairly straightforward and serves to slow the body down and take more oxygen into the body.

#### **Meditation**

Recent studies have unveiled the fact that meditation is a great stress buster tool which will help you deal not only with the prevailing stress, but also act like a shield towards future stress. Regular meditation will ensure that you will respond less often during stressful moments. Meditation turns out to be an excellent stress reliever resource for elderly people as it does not require any equipment. All you need is a willing mind to get started.

#### **Yoga**

It's a documented fact that yoga offers numerous health benefits to individual of all age and sex. Senior citizens can drastically improve their quality of life by performing yoga. One can also stay immune to lots of diseases and common health issues like cold, flue etc.

#### **Cognitive Puzzles**

Solving puzzles or spending time on similar thinking games are a good exercise for the brain. Most of these games require considerable focus and attention, which is why cialis (cialis canadian pharmacy) price they act as a great distracting source to diverge your mind from all your worries. You can also win some prizes if you solve the daily crossword puzzles published on the local newspaper. It's not a bad idea to get addicted to these games. They will also take care of your boredom in life.

#### **Prevention is Often Better than Cure**

Stay active and engaged in life and you will find that you have ways to deal with potential stressful events. This does not mean you are running a marathon every month but having an outlet for your energies, thoughts and feelings.

#### **Some other Stress Management tips for Elderly**

The elderly can form a group where they can share their feelings about their life and the problems that they face with other elderly people. They should involve themselves in some activity that brings them in contact with other people like them who can share similar experiences. Opening out about emotions can help relieve stress to a large extent.

Leading an Active Social Life Where you draw out activities for the day for yourself can ensure

that you are busy all the time. They could join a volunteer group and help the needy. They could join a club and play golf or go to the gym for regular exercise. Trying to create a passion for them after you retire can surely help you to keep them busy. The thing that they may decide to take on may not need a lot of money but should definitely be interesting enough o keep you involved.

Ensure that they entertain only positive thoughts and shun any kind of self-pity. Avoid resorting to smoking and drinking since they are not solutions in themselves but only avoidance techniques that are harmful in the long run. Nutrition plays a crucial role in managing stress. Hence make sure you follow a balanced and wholesome diet.

Understand that they also need adequate rest and relaxation and do not try and do more than whatbody allows. Don't push to achieve what they could during their youth and they shouldaccept the fact that they are older now and age gracefully.

#### **Conclusion**

This research paper makes it clear that how many difficulties elderly people face in their life. In the present paper an attempt was made to state that how many stressors in the life of the elderly and how elderly can effectively manage with these stressors.

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