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Mental health of elderly people: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

The aging population can be seen as one of the most significant demographic trends of the 21st century. As we take a glance upon the data, by 2050, the number of people aged 60 and older is projected to exceed 2 billion globally due to increase in Life expectancy rate (UN Report, 2020). This shift is an alarm and rising a need for special and proper health care for elderly people. Mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety and cognitive decline, memory issues etc. are common problems faced by elderly people. The mental health of elderly people is important because it also affects how they think, feel, and act. It is also related with how they cope up with their life challenges, their physical illnesses, retirement or losing loved ones. All these things can greatly affect the quality of their life as all these things are unreported, untreated or underdiagnosed. But all these things enhance their problems. This research paper will focus upon the challenges they are facing in seeking treatment. This research paper will also explore the concept of mental health of elderly people, opportunities of their life and challenges faced by them. This paper will highlight the complexity of their problems and life. The paper also examines the role of society, healthcare professionals, and policy interventions in addressing the mental health needs of the elderly.

Keywords: Mental health, healthcare access, quality of life, ageism, stigma, societal support

Introduction

Elderly people's mental health refers to the emotional, psychological, and social well-being of individuals in their later years of life. In this age, these people often face various challenges and difficulties that can impact their mental health. For instance: mental and physical illness, the loss of their loved ones, and social isolation. Mental health in elderly people encompasses not only the absence of mental disorders but also the ability to cope with the stresses, challenges and changes associated with aging factor. The significance of mental health in elderly people cannot be overstated and described, as it influences their overall quality of life, daily performing activities, and capacity to maintain relationships, financial expenses as well. The number of elderly people is increasing which is due to advancement of healthcare, better living conditions and overall longevity. As life expectancy rate is rising, so these people are facing many challenges too. In fact, they are facing mental health problems and it is becoming a global public health issue and it also requires an urgent attention.

Review of Literature

Rowe and Kahn's (1997) ^[10] have discussed an influential model of successful aging. In their study they proposed a multidimensional framework for understanding aging, which emphasized three key components: low risk of disease and disability, high cognitive and physical functioning, and active engagement with life. Through this model, they highlighted that aging should not be viewed solely as a period of decline but as an opportunity for continued growth and adaptation, with an emphasis on maximizing health and participation in society.

Bae (2023) ^[13] has explored the role of physical activity in reducing stress and fostering a sense of community during the pandemic, while considering the moderating effects of gender and age. He explored that younger individuals were more likely to engage in physical activities that fostered a sense of community, such as team sports or virtual exercise challenges.

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On the other hand, elderly people reported greater stress relief through low-impact individual activities, such as walking or yoga. He explored the nature and benefits of physical activity vary significantly across the life course.

Objectives of the study

- To know opportunities regarding mental health of elderly people.
- To know the challenges in mental health of elderly people.

Research Methodology

A comprehensive review of existing literature is done. Conceptual analysis is made to understand the different dimensions of the topic. This paper is purely based upon descriptive and secondary sources of data. Various research papers, research articles, magazines, books, websites, newspapers and reports are consulted to write this article.

Challenges in mental health of elderly people

Elderly people face many challenges in that specific span of time. In this time, when they are becoming physically weak, they are financially dependent for their medication and other things. They lack proper care. They seek emotional treatment as they face memory loss problems and many more. There are some challenges that are faced by elderly people:

- **Chronic Illness:** it is found that there are many conditions like diabetes, arthritis, heart disease, or chronic pain impact their mood and cognitive function. They face problems fatigue, loss of appetite, or pain etc.
- **Medication:** it is also seen that there are some types of medicines that can have side effects. These things also affect mental health, such as depression, confusion or anxiety.
- **Loss of Independence:** It is also found that elderly people face problems in the sense of physical declining sense, their weaker bodies etc. They also lack independence as they are dependent upon other family members. All this leads to feeling of helpless and sadness as well.
- **Financial Stress:** In their growing age, the elderly people face burden as they have limited financial resources after retirement. They face difficulty in their health care and it can contribute to stress and anxiety among them.
- **Isolation and Loneliness:** Elderly people face isolation and loneliness as due to loss of their partners, friends or family members. They face loneliness as per reduced mobility, limited social interactions etc. they face higher risk of depression, frustration and anxiety due to loneliness. This is also a major challenge for them.
- **Stigma and Reluctance to Seek Help:** In many cultures and societies, mental health is still stigmatized, and older adults may be reluctant to seek help. There is often believed that mental illness is a natural part of aging, or that seeking treatment for emotional or psychological issues is a sign of weakness. Elderly people feel embarrassed while discussing about their mental health with family members and others.

Opportunities in elderly mental health

There are many opportunities found in present times for elderly people, those opportunities are as under:

- **Increased Awareness and Advocacy:** The growing awareness of mental health issues in the elderly is leading towards advocacy for their mental well-being. Many organizations both governmental and NGO's are focusing on improving mental health services for elderly people. Many campaigns and initiatives are being aimed to reduce their mental stigma. Mental fitness programs are being launched to support senior citizens.
- **Telehealth and Digital Interventions:** There are more opportunities like technology is helping in bridging the gaps in elderly people care. Telehealth, virtual therapy, and digital tools are making mental health support more accessible to elderly individuals, particularly those who are homebound or live in rural areas. Telemedicine allows senior citizens to access therapists and counselors from their comfort zones.
- **Community based mental health programs:** Community-based programs are also creating strong social networks and provide mental health support for elderly people. Senior centers and many other local community groups offer activities like therapies and support groups to combat isolation. These also promote mental wellness.
- **Integrating mental health into primary care:** There is also a great opportunity like Integrating mental health screenings into routine medical care for older adults. It offers an active approach to mental health. Primary care physicians and specialists can screen for mental health issues during regular check-ups and refer individuals for appropriate care.
- **Promoting Active Lifestyle:** In present times, there are also many other activities like physical activities programs and cognitive engagement programs. They can encourage elderly people in many activities and social engagement programs. It can improve their mood, reduce anxiety and prevent memory loss. These programs offer yoga classes, art classes and other therapy classes and many more.
- **Person Centered Care Approaches:** A shift towards person-centered can recognize and address the individual's unique mental health needs, preferences and life experiences. This can promote autonomy and dignity.
- **Psychological and Emotional Resilience Programs:** Programs designed to enhance resilience in elderly people can improve their ability to cope with stress, loss, and aging-related challenges. Resilience training can include mindfulness techniques, and social skills development.

Conclusion

The mental health of elderly people presents many significant challenges, but there are also many opportunities for intervention. Elderly people face physical and mental weakness, memory loss and many other difficulties as per their increasing age. They face many types of fears. They face financial problems as they are dependent in this age. But it is also seen that through early diagnosis, many difficulties can reduce. Government should take some measures to help these people out. NGO's should come forward to meet these people problems. Community engagement programs and policies should be there. The use of telemedicine and technology are all key strategies that

can improve the mental health outcomes of elderly people. More research is needed to explore effective interventions and to ensure that mental health care for elderly individuals is widely accessible and tailored to their unique needs.

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