

# Life Satisfaction versus Social Support among Aged: An Overview

**Anis Ahmad\***

*Department of Psychology, Millat College (L. N. Mithila University), India*

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**\*Corresponding author:** Anis Ahmad, Department of Psychology, Millat College (L. N. Mithila University), Darbhanga-846 004, Bihar, India, Email: anisdbg@gmail.com

## Abstract

Changing scenario of the world of work has created many things in our daily life. It is a fact that the word change is constant but the term being globalized in the sense that every moment we need change due to fast pace of development. Change is inevitable and no one can deny unless they taste. Change is the spice of life. It makes life worth living. Most of the time it provides us positive benefits but sometimes it causes tension, frustration and stress as well. That's why stress has also become a part of our daily life. Stress occurs when biological, psychological and external demands are greater than the ability of an individual to adapt. Daily life is being adversely affected now-a-days by stress and it deteriorates our life satisfaction and at this juncture every individual especially aged needs social support for maintaining his degree of life satisfaction.

## Introduction

Life satisfaction, morale and happiness are often used interchangeably referring to psychological well being of the individual. Psychological wellbeing includes mental functioning such as happiness, morale, life satisfaction, and the absence of psychopathology (e.g. depression). George [1] defined life satisfaction as a cognitive process by which an individual assesses his/her progress towards desired goals. George also defined happiness as "transitory moods of gaiety reflecting the affect that people feel toward their current state of affairs". Finally she defined morale as fit between the individual and the environment, the acceptance of those aspects of life that cannot be changed and more generally it depends on how positive one's outlook of life is. In addition to these, it is generally observed that motivational spheres of life contribute a lot to getting individual's life satisfaction which provides all round capacity with commitment of work and family.

Old age is the fading period of life cycle. It is a period when people move away from hay day of life, full of power, vitality and happiness. According to Hurlock [2] age sixty is often considered as the dividing line between middle age and old age. The last stage in lifespan is subdivided into early old age, which extends from age sixty to seventy, and advance old age, which begins at seventy and extends to the end of life. Thus old age has been viewed either as a transition that is accompanied by psychological distress or as a time of continued, or even enhanced, subjective

wellbeing. Palmore & Kivett [3] have pointed out that the best predictor of life satisfaction is the person's ratings of life satisfaction in the past and that initial values or changes in other variables appeared to be unrelated to changes in life satisfaction. Moreover, Taves & Hansen [4] point out that health problem appear to detract from enjoying a number of close friendships, satisfaction with work, and satisfaction with family. Whereas various researches have shown that life satisfaction may also affect health when a person is dissatisfied with life, it means that an individual is experiencing negative vive that are coloring his/her view of the world around him/her. There may also be relative lack of positive feelings due to radical change in the state of mind. Such dissatisfaction means important needs and expectations that are not being met as pointed out by Lawton [5].

During reviewing the literature on the life satisfaction it was observed that there are basically two approaches to life satisfactions. The first focuses upon the overt behavior of the individual and uses social criteria of success and competence. The second approach is to be viewed from an individual's internal frame i.e. the individual's own interpretation and evaluation of his present or past life, and his satisfaction or his happiness. Thus the present article is approached to study on the social criteria of life satisfaction to get successful aging. Hence, the present endeavor will fill the void of knowledge in the area

of aging. These days, impact of social support on life satisfaction has attracted the interest of psychologists, behaviorists, public health professionals and NGOs having different perspectives and orientations. Social support refers to helpful social interactions that make people feel better. People who interact closely with friends and relatives are better able to avoid illness and if illness occurs, to recover from it sooner than those who are interpersonally isolated.

Social support may be in several forms such as family, community, and other social institutions like religious and state. The rising number of literature documents the importance of social support network in maintaining good morale, happiness, psychological well-being and life satisfaction. Hence, adequate social support system helps individuals avoid internalizing diminished views of themselves. The greater integration in a social network is associated with fewer mental and physical health problems [6]. Social support as information that leads the individual to believe that he is cared and loved, esteemed and valued, and that he belongs to a network of communication and mutual obligations [7]. On the basis of past researches and self observations the present article was aimed to assess the life satisfaction of elderly and to find out its relationship with social support availed by them. It is a fact that we are now shifting from industrial society to information society, forced technology to high tech, national economy to global economy and representative democracy to participatory democracy. These are some important features of 21<sup>st</sup> century. India is one of the most developing countries and an emerging powerful country in the comity of nations in general and in South Pacific Rim in particular.

India is having democratic set-up where provisions have been incorporated for protection of elderly but most of the time senile group of people are reported to be dissatisfied. How and why it happens. This is the question and needs viable attention with regard to the successful aging to make healthy India. Most of the researches have shown that social support is a significant side of human life that influences life satisfaction directly or indirectly. A large number of studies have been published in the last two decades regarding the social network and social support. Social relationship and affiliation are now known to have powerful effects on physical and mental health for a number of reasons [8]. Social supports have a well-documented association with both depressive symptoms [9] and life satisfaction [10-11]. Certain Studies demonstrated that old adults receiving considerable amount of support were determined to have higher morale and life satisfaction [12,13]. For example, some time emotional support is an important factor for recipients and provides as it creates attachment sense, e.g., comforting and intimacy, alliance, guidance and appreciation of one's worth [14,15] as well as objective and social contribution [16].

The findings of some important studies conducted by Rook & Weiss [17,18] emphasizes that inadequate emotional

support may result in loneliness, anxiety, uncertainty. A sense of purposelessness and vulnerability to stress cropped up [19]. Although, it is often seen that receipt of the social support does not necessarily bring about benefits [20]. Social support hypothesis suggests that receiving support improves health and well being was tested and accordingly, some inconsistent results were obtained [21], demonstrating that receiving support could be harmful in some instances [22,23]. It is witnessed from the Indian cultures that dependency on other people for support can cause guilt and anxiety; on the other hand, feeling like a burden to others who presumably provide support is associated with increased suicidal tendencies even after controlling for depression [24,25]. The correlation between social support and dependency could also explain the failure of previous studies which consistently supported the social support hypothesis. Furthermore, the benefits of social contact may extend beyond the received support to include other aspects of the interpersonal relationship that may protect health and increase longevity, e.g., giving support to others [26].

It is very interesting to note the hypothesis which offers an explanation for the negative effects of receiving aid. It involves providing support for someone in need and under-benefiting enhances self-esteem, and thus increasing the well-being. According to exchange theory of relationships, intimacy increases in parallel with the equality of exchange [17,27-29]. The studies seem to be logical that equitable relationships provide positive emotion; therefore, the intimacy is expected to increase in this kind of relationship. On the other hand, it is to be mentioned that one can get less support than one provide in the imbalanced exchanges, which may creates negative emotions. According to the equity theory [29], perceived inequity generates negative effect. It is because of the fact that one feels guilty if he/she receives more than he/she gives in a relation i.e., over benefited. However, if one receives less than he/she punt into a relation, he/she can become distresses or even angry, i.e., under befitted. It is observed from the literature that equitable exchange creates positive emotion and intimate social contacts, while the imbalanced exchange causes negative emotion or diminishes positive feelings. Assistance is not provided in one direction within an informal net work. Theorists and researchers generally agree that informal social support, as a construct and a process, is multidimensional. Conceptual definitions of informal support often fall short of adequately capturing the nature, quality, or range of behaviors and activities that have been associated with this construct. Researchers identify several dimensions that should be considered when assessing or measuring informal support. These dimensions include the structural characteristics of the informal social networks from which social support emanates the types of supportive activities or behaviors exchanged by network members, and the informal social network members' subjective evaluations of the supportive behaviors and relations that occur between network members [30-34].

It is further important to explain a distinction between formally and informally provided social supports. Formal social support may be defined here as assistance provided by paid helpers or volunteers who are affiliated with social or health service agencies. Informal support, in general, could be defined as assistance provided by family members or friends based upon feelings of affection or personal obligation toward the recipients of the assistance. Informal social support activities may take many forms such as concrete assistance with personal or household task, the provision of monetary assistance or other resources, advice or guidance, companionship, and the provision of emotional encouragement. Hence, in this article, the term used social support referring to the types of social support exchanged by members of informal social networks. Remarkably, social support has been found to influence a variety of complex human behaviors and the way people perform their social roles. Many studies have found links between some individuals' health conditions and emotional states, and the nature or degree of their received social support [35]. Much research interest has focused on the potential beneficial effect that social support may have for persons who experience stress.

In this connection two theoretical hypotheses have been proposed to explain the relations between stress and social support by Cohen & Wills [9]. The direct effect hypothesis states that social support has a beneficial effect on peoples' health and well-being, regardless of how much stress they may be experiencing. Another hypothesis states that social support acts to protect people from the potentially harmful effects of stressful situations or stressful life events. In addition to above observations experienced by the present investigator, it is also important to point out here that social support is a recurrent issue to most gerontological social work practitioners and researchers, it is because of the fact that an increasing level of gerontological research is being focused on gaining a better understanding of social support as a dynamic process that has important potential outcomes for older persons and members of their informal social networks. There is growing research evidence that the health, well-being and life satisfaction of older persons may be positively impacted by the structure of their informal social networks, as well as the nature of the supportive activities of those networks [36-40].

The rapid growth of the aging population not only in India but throughout the globe indicated sign that most of the parents spend as much as they can for their children. However, it becomes quite difficult for older adults either men or women to give response in their relations as they need more support with decreasing health status and functional capacity. Since psychological and instrumental factors are involved in the costs and rewards of exchanges between generations, it is rather difficult to determine the degree of imbalance. Relatives may continue to provide assistance because of familial expectations and/or obligations not depending on one's ability to response.

Moreover, younger adults could also regard helping their parents as an opportunity to reciprocate for the support of their parents in past. Observations also reveals the fact that essential aid might only be given by a group of people who benefited from the older person in his productive years or who would like to benefit from their contributions in the future. Friendship is a voluntary attachment because of the fact that relationship involves emotional ties, while the relation with friends is reciprocal. Thus it is suggested here that positive concern i.e., the interest of the individual in the well-being and activities of another is an important indicator of affinity in relations, on the other hand, consensus i.e., sharing common values, interests, and attitudes is the foundation of friendship as Wood & Robertson [41] regarded 'obligation vs. choice' as a key element to distinguish between kinship and friendship.

### Conclusion

The important conclusions are summed up on the basis of observations and past researches. The studies and discussions mentioned above seem to be the reasons like disengagement, harassment in getting pensions/monetary, and for old age health problems-lack of proper care and cooperation from the concerned authorities e.g., social and religious institutions and moreover, other perks and benefits from the government as well as the non-government agencies may be the important factors which affect the life satisfaction of aged. Social support especially informal social networking from the side of members of home either they live in joint family or nuclear family are always needed for successful ageing. This is only the way by which life satisfaction with positive sense of commitment and work ethics can be maintained without having any feeling of shyness, inferiority and sense of loosing esteem needs, etc. In spite of the demerits of the joint family, there are certain merits associated with joint family, particularly from the point of view of social security and emotional support that one gets from the members of the joint family. It is widely recognized that joint family provides social supports to the weak, aged, sick and disabled person.

It gives the emotional support to the orphans, widows, deserted and neglected persons. Hence, social security, emotional support, and sympathy become more important for the old age. It is often seen that being the elder member of the joint family the elders of old age members are obeyed, their inner feelings are recognized, and thus their status is not undermined. So, the old age members of the joint family experience less depression, anxiety, stress and harassment in comparison to those old age members who are living in nuclear family set-up. Further empirical and theoretical researches on different aspects relating to aging is needed to understand the behavior of aged because of the fact that they have contributed a lot to the betterment of society in general and their services for the promotion of nation at large cannot be overlooked.

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