

The Importance of Psychological Care and Social Support in Achieving Mental Health among the Elderly: An Analytical Study

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Abstract:

The current study aims to explore psychological care and social support, which are primarily based on the principles of psychotherapy and counseling, in order to assess their importance and effectiveness in enhancing the quality of life among the elderly. For this purpose, several previous psychological studies that addressed the topic of psychological care and social support and their significance in the lives of older adults will be presented. Additionally, their findings and contributions will be reviewed, along with an analysis and discussion of the results.

We have concluded that psychological care and family support play a vital role in enhancing the mental health of the elderly. They are also effective in fostering a sense of belonging, which in turn increases their acceptance of the new changes that occur at this stage of life, ultimately leading to improved quality of life and psychological well-being.

Keywords: Learned helplessness psychological care; Social support; Elderly.

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1. Introduction

The policies adopted by nations to keep pace with progress are essential in building society. Giving attention to the elderly, as a human resource with abilities and experiences that can be utilized, is crucial. A simple comparison between the attention given to youth and that given to the elderly shows that both categories represent interconnected generations, each with their own experiences and contributions. The elderly, having dedicated their lives and shared their expertise for building a better tomorrow, deserve care and support, especially in addressing their psychological and social problems.

This responsibility is both humanitarian and ethical, and it is also a religious duty, as emphasized in Islam, which urges respect and kindness towards the elderly. Just as society needs the energy, ambition, and ideas of the youth, it equally needs the wisdom and depth of experience of older adults. Societies that work in this way enjoy social stability, growth, and prosperity.

2. Research Problem

Research in the field of aging holds a heightened level of importance, not only because older adults represent a historical reservoir of accumulated experience and wisdom gained over a long lifespan, but also because old age constitutes one of the most psychologically and socially sensitive stages. As individuals grow older, they encounter biopsychosocial transformations: declining physical or cognitive abilities, the disappearance of professional or social roles, and the blurring or loss of certain relationships. These transformations may weaken the older adult's sense of belonging and deprive daily life of part of its previous meaning or value, which can negatively affect emotional balance and psychological well-being (Huda Qenawi, 1987; Al-Zubaidi, 2009).

Global statistics indicate that the proportion of older adults worldwide is increasing at a remarkable rate. Demographic indicators predict that the percentage of older adults will double from approximately 11% to 22% between 2000 and 2050, and that the number of individuals aged 60 and above will reach around one billion after 2050 (Abdelhakim, 2013, as cited in H. A. Zahran, 1999). This demographic expansion urges researchers and social planners to reconsider the needs of this population—not merely from a physical-care perspective, but from a comprehensive approach that includes psychological and social dimensions (Nawar, 2018).

Within this context, mental health among older adults is a fundamental component in ensuring their quality of life and social value. Mental health does not simply imply the absence of disorders such as depression or anxiety, but rather the capacity to adapt to life changes, maintain emotional stability, preserve self-worth, and sustain meaningful relationships despite aging-related challenges (Corey, 2017; Corsini & Wedding, 2013). In environments characterized by isolation, low activity, or declining social roles, mental health becomes increasingly fragile and in greater need of support.

Several studies have shown that problems such as loneliness, isolation, depression, anxiety, or fear of self-loss are common among older adults—especially those living alone or in institutional care. Research conducted in residential facilities for the elderly has consistently demonstrated that perceived social support—an individual's subjective sense of having a supportive network—shows an inverse relationship with depression and loneliness; that is, higher social support is associated with lower levels of depression and loneliness (Gurrapu, Ammapattian, & Antony, 2024).

At the core of this research problem lies a key variable: social support. A functional social network—whether through family, friends, neighbors, or institutions—provides older adults with a sense of security, belonging, recognition, and reduced perceptions of isolation or marginalization (Taylor, 2011; Thoits, 2011). Local studies also affirm this impact: for example, field research conducted in Tipaza (Algeria) found a statistically significant correlation between perceived social support and life satisfaction among older adults. Those who reported higher social support also displayed greater life satisfaction (Amamra & Maamoun, 2015; Zitouni & Abdelsalam, 2024).

However, social support alone is not always sufficient—especially when older adults encounter psychological complications, life shocks, or losses. This highlights the importance of professional psychological care (psychological intervention). Such care may involve counseling, structured social support, support groups, psychological rehabilitation, or interventions that aim to strengthen resilience and coping abilities (Norcross & Wampold, 2011; Al-Sharif, 2021). Fortunately, research indicates that combining social support with psychological care yields highly positive effects on mental health among older adults. For example, a recent study involving 964 older adults found that both social support and psychological resilience had a direct effect on mental health, while social support also exerted an indirect effect by reinforcing resilience. Another study reported that approximately 30% of older migrants

experienced high levels of depression, but enhancing social support, reducing loneliness, and strengthening resilience significantly lowered depressive symptoms (Biam Waraei, Momeni, & Moradi, 2018).

The interplay between mental health, social support, and psychological care suggests that these variables do not operate independently; rather, they form an interconnected system. Social support alone may be insufficient in cases requiring professional intervention, while psychological care may have limited effectiveness in the absence of a supportive social environment.

Despite these findings, significant knowledge gaps remain. With the global increase in the older population and the transformation of social structures—smaller family sizes, the rise of solitary living, and changing housing or migration patterns—there is still limited clarity on how social support, psychological care, and mental health interact across different cultural and social contexts. For example: Is family support sufficient in traditional societies? Or does professional psychological care become more essential as traditional bonds weaken? And how can intervention programs be designed to integrate social support with psychological care in an effective and sustainable manner? Accordingly, the central research question can be formulated as follows:

- To what extent do psychological care and social support contribute to achieving mental health among older adults?

3. Theoretical Framework of the Study

3.1. Concept of Psychological Care

It is the process of understanding an individual's abilities and using them to solve problems and plan their life, through awareness of their reality and present situation, and helping them to achieve the greatest degree of happiness, adequacy, and self-fulfillment, ultimately reaching psychological adjustment (Nawar, 2018, p. 627). Psychological Care May Include:

- Individual or group psychotherapy.
- Psychological and social support.
- Psychological counseling.
- Self-motivation and personal skills development.
- Long-term psychological accompaniment.

3.1.1. Theoretical Background of Psychological Care

3.1.1.1. From the Behavioral School Perspective

It focuses on modifying maladaptive behaviors through reinforcement, punishment, and behavioral training, which fall under psychological rehabilitation programs (Norcross., & Wampold, 2011).

3.1.1.2. From the Cognitive School Perspective

It views psychological care as a process that helps the individual restructure distorted thoughts and negative beliefs, and develop more adaptive coping strategies.

3.1.1.3. From the Psychoanalytic Perspective

This approach assumes that psychological care should explore unconscious conflicts and repressed childhood experiences that influence current behavior.

3.1.1.4. From the Humanistic School Perspective

It emphasizes self-actualization, active listening, and supporting the individual's psychological growth, particularly through person-centered therapy (Carl Rogers). (Corey 2013)

3.1.2. Objectives of Psychological Care

- Helping the individual understand themselves and their issues.
- Enhancing the ability to cope with psychological and social pressures.
- Preventing relapses and future disorders.
- Supporting social and professional integration.
- Alleviating psychological distress (Nawar, 2018).

3.1.3. Characteristics of Effective Psychological Care

- **Individualization:** Each person receives care based on their specific case
- **Gradual Process:** Begins with diagnosis, followed by intervention, accompaniment, and then evaluation
- **Confidentiality:** Respecting the privacy of the care recipient
- **Integration:** Combines psychological, medical, and social interventions
- **Continuity:** Sustainable psychological follow-up (Corey 2017).

3.1.4. Methods and Tools of Psychological Care

- ❖ Clinical psychological interviews
- ❖ Psychological assessments for diagnosis
- ❖ Therapeutic sessions (individual/group)
- ❖ Family and social support
- ❖ Life skills training programs. (Norcross., Wampold, 2011)

3.2. Concept of Psychosocial Support

Social support refers to the availability of people one can trust, those who leave an impression of reliability, care, and affection.

3.2.1. Social Support and Its Role in Psychological Well-being

Social support is considered one of the most important psychological factors that contribute to enhancing mental health and the ability to cope with stress. It refers to all forms of assistance that an individual receives from their social environment, whether emotional, material, informational, or through social recognition and appreciation (Thoits, 2011).

3.2.2. Types of Social Support

Social support encompasses several main forms. First, **emotional support**, which includes listening, empathy, and encouragement — a crucial element during difficult times. Second, **instrumental or tangible support**, such as providing concrete help or financial resources. Third, **informational support**, which involves offering advice and guidance to assist in decision-making processes (Taylor, 2011).

3.2.3. The Role of Social Support in Coping

Social support plays a protective role in facing psychological crises, acting as a "buffer" against the negative effects of life stressors. Numerous studies have shown that individuals with effective social support networks enjoy better psychological well-being and lower stress levels compared to those who lack such support (Thoits, 2011).

3.2.4. Social Support and Mental Health

Social support is closely associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety, especially among vulnerable groups such as patients, the elderly, or disaster survivors. The presence of a supportive network also enhances the effectiveness of psychological care and treatment programs (Taylor, 2011).

3.3. Concept of the Elderly

Defining the elderly is subject to significant variations, with terms such as elderly, old age, senior, fourth age, and advanced age being used interchangeably. International documents, however, generally adopt the term elderly. **A distinction is made between:**

- **Chronological age:** measured in years, dividing elderly individuals into four groups starting from 55 and ending at 70.
- **Biological age:** a descriptive measure of the organic aspects of each stage (Zubaidi, 2009, p. 90).
- **Psychological age:** measures mental and psychological disturbances and the problems appearing at this stage, affecting the individual's ability for psychological and social adjustment, thereby reducing their capacity to use their potential (Qenawi, 1987, p. 51).

Despite differing opinions among researchers regarding aging, it is ultimately the outcome of biological, psychological, and social accumulations experienced by the individual.

4. Review of Some Psychological Studies and Research on Psychological Care and Social Support among the Elderly

Several studies have addressed the elderly population. Within the scope of our research, we reviewed the following four studies:

4.1. Study by Al-Sharif (2021)

The study aimed to examine the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) in reducing symptoms of depression among the elderly. The sample consisted of 20 elderly individuals with depression, with a mean age and standard deviation of (66.20, 4.48). They were randomly divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group underwent ACT, and results showed significant differences between pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental and control groups in depression levels, indicating the effectiveness of ACT in reducing depressive symptoms.

4.2. Zitouni, Abdelsalam (2024)

This study aimed to explore the impact of cultural activities on the quality of life among the elderly by analyzing psychological, social, and physical aspects. Cultural activities were found to play a fundamental role in enhancing psychological and social well-being.

The study targeted a sample of 89 individuals aged 60 and above. Results showed that the largest group was aged 60–65 (55.06%), enjoying good physical fitness and the ability to engage in cultural and physical activities, compared to older groups who faced more health challenges.

The second group (66–70, 21.35%) represented middle-aged elderly, still able to participate despite possible health issues.

The third group (71–75, 19.10%) started facing more health difficulties, reducing participation in cultural activities.

The fourth group (76–81) represented the least active, with health restrictions making their participation nearly absent.

The study concluded that participation in cultural activities improves psychological states, reduces feelings of depression and anxiety, and increases happiness. Elderly individuals who regularly participate in cultural activities enjoy greater social integration, less isolation, and stronger belonging. Conversely, non-participants reported higher levels of anxiety and depression, indicating that cultural disengagement leads to isolation and unhappiness.

4.3. Waraei et al. (2018)

This study aimed to predict the level of psychological well-being, given its important role in achieving adjustment among the elderly, focusing on religiosity and death anxiety in elderly men in Kermanshah Care Center.

The sample included 200 elderly men. Tools included a psychological well-being questionnaire, a religiosity scale for Muslims, and a death anxiety inventory.

Results revealed a significant positive relationship between religiosity and psychological well-being, and a negative relationship between well-being and death anxiety. The study concluded that increasing

religious involvement and applying strategies to reduce death anxiety can improve psychological well-being among the elderly.

4.4. Amamra, Maamoun (2015)

The study aimed to examine the relationship between quality of life and social support among the elderly in Ouargla city, focusing on the role of social support in enhancing life quality.

The study sample consisted of 60 elderly individuals. Findings revealed a positive correlation between social support and quality of life. Social support contributed to positive adjustment, as explained in the theoretical framework. It also played a significant role in mitigating the negative effects of life stressors associated with aging and declining social participation.

5. Commentary on Previous Studies

The reviewed studies, both local and international, confirm the importance of caring for the elderly in various societies. Given that Arab societies share similar social characteristics and orientations toward elderly care, all studies emphasized the significance of providing support and accompaniment to the elderly in achieving psychological and social adjustment, ultimately leading to their integration into social life.

5.1. First Study

This study used Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) to highlight its effectiveness in reducing depression levels among the elderly. This was proven, since this therapeutic approach is strongly linked to psychological flexibility and adaptation. It focuses on:

- . Acceptance: of illness, failures, loss of socially status, or decline in social activity.
- . Commitment: to positive change and following a sequence of constructive steps.

In its simplest form, ACT helps individuals accept their difficulties, move forward, and leave behind negativity. The study confirmed its success in reducing depression levels among the elderly sample, as they overcame daily challenges, improved self-perception, and committed to behavioral changes that enhanced their psychological lives.

5.2. Second Study

This study confirmed the importance of cultural activities in raising happiness levels among the elderly. Through such activities, the elderly can reintegrate socially, break isolation, reopen themselves to life, and discover new meaning for their existence.

5.3. Third Study

This showed that religious orientation and practice are fundamental for achieving psychological well-being among the elderly. By adopting authentic religious principles and behaviors such as patience, faith in divine decree, doing good deeds, and engaging in charitable activities, individuals maintain psychological balance. Religious practices like remembrance and worship also reduce death anxiety, thereby enhancing well-being.

5.4. Fourth Study

The fourth study highlighted the importance of social support in self-satisfaction and coping with psychological stress and its health effects on the elderly.

Individual differences in quality of life and social support levels among the elderly are tied to socioeconomic status. Higher-income individuals tend to enjoy life more and report higher satisfaction compared to those with moderate economic conditions.

Overall, the reviewed studies agreed on the importance of the psychological dimension in elderly life and their ability to maintain roles in others' lives. They also shed light on the effectiveness of using therapeutic techniques and strategies tailored for this group. For example: The first study adopted ACT. The second study relied on cultural activities and their psychological impacts. The third emphasized religious guidance to prevent pathological symptoms and achieve psychological well-being.

6. Conclusion

The present study addressed one of the crucial topics: the importance of psychological care and social support for the elderly. This population group, based on our review of various studies, has not received sufficient focus, particularly in the psychological field, where most attention is often directed toward physical and sports-related aspects.

This study thus sought to shed light on the importance of providing psychological care to the elderly in order to achieve mental health.

7. Recommendations and Suggestions

- Assist individuals in overcoming difficulties and adapting to their current conditions according to their life stage.
- Provide psychological counseling and therapeutic services for the elderly.
- Focus on religious guidance by encouraging elderly participation in Qur'anic schools and charitable associations.
- Develop specialized programs for elderly social and cultural activities.

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