

Enhancing quality of life of elderly; Social Work Interventions

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to enumerate the social work intervention for elderly which enable them to adapt to changes arising from old age. The crucial problems of a sense of powerlessness, helplessness, low self-esteem and low self-efficacy possessed by elderly people can be addressed by social work approaches. In response to the social and political changes in contemporary society, it is necessary to change old people from passive clients into active and empowered individuals with a positive self-image. Social work inventions are effective in strengthening elderly people's contact with the community, eliminating elderly people's negative self-image, protecting elderly rights, and increasing their capacity to contribute towards society in terms of their life experiences and knowledge. Finding of the study can serve as input to enhance the quality of life of elderly.

Key words: Social Work Intervention, case work, group work

I. INTRODUCTION

India's elderly population is likely to increase by 60% by 2050. The projections for population over 60 years in next four censuses are: 133.32 million (2021), 178.59 (2031), 236.01 million (2041) and 300.96 million (2051). The increases in the elderly population are the result of changing fertility and mortality regimes over the last 40-50 years. The concept of Active and Healthy ageing needs to be promoted among the elderly, that includes preventive, primitives, curative and rehabilitative aspects of health. With the achievement in science and technology a decline in both birth and mortality rates and consequent increase in life expectancy at birth and older ages. Irrespective of socio-economic status, the non-communicable diseases are increasing and it requires health and social care in old age. Disabilities resulting from these affect the activities of daily living. Treatment for these chronic diseases is also very costly, especially for cancer treatment, joint replacements, heart surgery, neurosurgical procedures etc., are very costly and family cannot afford and even financially sound families also are not ready to spend money for older persons. Even though many government schemes are available for older persons the procedure requirement for the same is very lengthy and time consuming and thereby they face difficulties in getting treatment. According to national sample survey, the prevalence and incidence of diseases as well as hospitalization rates are much higher in older people than the total population. It is also reported that about 8% of older Indians were confined to their home or bed. The proportion of such immobile or home bound people rose with age to 27% after the age of 80 years. Women were more frequently affected than males in both rural and urban areas. It is possible that many older people take ill health in their stride as a part of "usual/normal ageing." This observation has a lot of significance as self-perceived health status is an important indicator of health service utilization and compliance to treatment interventions.

Social work interventions in dealing with the problems of elderly are of significant importance especially in preventive, promotive, curative and rehabilitative aspects. Problems of elderly are many fold with different dimensions. Therefore a holistic approach is needed. Creativity in social work to confront with problems of elderly would bring long lasting result. The primary and secondary methods of social work can be used to deal with the problems of aged.

Individuals over 65 are affected by ageist attitudes. Ageism (Dickman, 1979) is prejudice against people based solely on age. Prejudice and rejections are based largely on misconceptions and myths. Social work profession is committed to preventing and fighting ageism, negative stereotypes, myths and negative practices that affect older people. The older people who live in poverty or homeless, victims of older abuse or having health related diseases are in need of direct social work interventions.

The goals of gerontological social worker are to promote and advance social, emotional and physical wellbeing to make them to live more independent and satisfying lives. Gerontological social workers use an ecological approach. They analyze the dynamics between client and family, client and neighborhood, client and social supporter, client and medical support client and other system. Social worker uses the knowledge of biological and physical aspects of aging, cognitive process, emotional psychological development, sociological aspect of aging and economical aspects of aging. Social worker can help the elderly in modifying the lifestyles and homes so they can continue to enjoy satisfying and productive lives.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find out the problems of elderly
2. To assess the general engagement of elderly\
3. To evolve social work interventions to enhance the quality of life of elderly

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data was collected from focused discussion conducted with elderly and members were from the association of aged in Satara district Maharashtra. Some of them were the inmates of the old age home. Also through questionnaire method, data was collected from 103 elderly who are the members of the association. Reports of newspaper and TV also constitute the source of data. Personal observation and discussion with the authorities of the Christian institute for the aged in Kerala revealed valuable information.

IV. FINDINGS

70 % of aged is feeling isolated and lonely. 10% of the respondents reported that they are abused physically and verbally by family members and community members. 40% of women have no economic capacity to take care of their personal needs. The major need of the elderly is emotional support, recognition and care from family members and society around.

Major social work intervention which is practiced in the Christian run institution for aged is engaging them in different activities. It is found to be fruitful in keeping them mentally and physically engaged. The engagement gives them satisfaction and makes the body and mind fresh and active. It prevents them from wandering their mind here and there. It relieves them from all types of stress. While engaging, social workers see that activities are of their interest and capacity. Those who believe in God are encouraged to spend time in prayer. They are also trained in helping other inmates who have difficulty in doing their day today activities. Recreational activities are also introduced to engage them. Many of the inmate's family members are reluctant to take them home as they found it difficult to take care of them. Therefore they feel sad about the negligence of family members. But when they engage with different activities under the loving care and supervision of care takers in the old age home they feel at home.

It has been found that senior citizen's association regularly conducts meeting and attendance at the meeting is an average of 90%. This indicate that even though many of them are physically not strong enough, they make sure attending the meeting at any cost. This clearly shows that their emotional needs are fulfilled through their sharing in the meeting. They also share information about sick members and pay homage to departed souls. Every member is concerned about all others. Meeting place also give them an opportunity to ventilate their sad and bad experience at home. It is being found that association activities strengthen them emotionally and act as a supporting system. Association act as a networking system to fulfill the member's needs. Occasionally association arranges get together and have recreational programme which include songs, jokes, experience

sharing. Usually this get together are of one day duration. They arrange food and travelling facility for all members. Police department arrange vehicle on their request free of cost. It is being observed that almost all members attend the get together.

All these observations reveals that group living enable the elderly to live more happy and satisfying life. This also strengthens their body and mind and empowers them to deal with problems in their own capacity.

Case study

An 86 year elderly lady enough active and still has ambition to involve in agricultural and livestock rearing. But family members were not able to cope up with her complaint nature, aggressive and irritating behavior. In this context a social work intervention of productive engagement introduced to her. She made to engage with the grant child telling stories and making some delicious traditional food items etc. Also facilities were made for her to continue the livestock rearing and get some income. With the introduction of these activities her behavior and approach was entirely changed. It shows engaging the elderly in their field of interest make their life more peaceful and happy.

The requirements for health-care of the elderly are also different for our country. India still has family as the primary care giver to the elderly and scope for training this lot provide support to the program. Presently, the elderly are provided health-care by the general health-care delivery system in the country. There is a definite need to emphasize the fact that disease and disability are not part of old age and help must be sought to address the health problems. Home based care of an elderly person in families is very important.

Social work interventions for elderly

1. Case work- to deal with the problems at the individual level
2. Group work to deal with the problems in group
3. Community organization at the community level
4. Social work research to deal with problems of social work practice with elderly to make the practice more effective. it is a tool for designing intervention strategies, measuring intervention effectiveness and evaluating practices
5. Social action to bring changes at the social and policy level

Social workers create awareness among families to how to take care of elderly. Physical and mental impairment due to chronic illness as well as normal changes that occur in the senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell) and sleep patterns disturbs elderly. A social worker can intervene in different ways in all these matters. Older persons with difficulties in sleeping can suggest using relaxation techniques abstaining from certain foods and drinks, taking daily walk and avoid afternoon naps.

Social workers can help client navigate stressful life such as retirement widowhood, physical decline, resident relocation, loss and approaching death. Many life and environmental factors interact to affect cognitive process. Therefore inability to learn or perform new task impairment of intelligence and memory loss are not necessarily synonymous with aging.

Anxiety in late life has been found to be a risk factor for disability (Lenz, et.al, 2001). Activity theory (Westerberg, 2004) proposes that the more active a person is the more satisfied during his golden years. Disengagement theory (Chen, 2003) asserts that to withdraw and become more introspective as one grows older as normal and healthy.

Gerontological social workers are well informed about legal issues, legislations, economic policies that affect and protect the life of the elderly. Social workers are able to work within the political system to promote the rights of the people who are older, legal system to enforce the rights of the older people and medical system to protect the rights.

Comprehensive assessments are used to determine the mental, physical, environmental, social and financial conditions of older clients. Findings are used to identify the client's strengths as well as the supports needed to help them to remain safe and independent. Networking and information and referral services are critical in helping clients and their families locate,

companionship services, home care aids, transportation services, mental programs, adaptive devices and home nurses and therapist. They are advocates of elderly and serve as liaisons to community agencies.

Social workers in gerontology work as policy makers, quality improvement specialist and administrators. They engage in multidisciplinary team efforts to improve the overall care and wellness of elders.

Inherent cultural strengths (Hooymonand Kayak, 2007) that gerontological social workers can utilize when dealing with diverse elderly, rural families traditionally provide emotional support to elderly. Honoring and showing respect to elders is significant aspects of value system, elderly have roles as wise person, a story teller and keeper of oral traditions. Kaye (2005) identified numerous skills sets that are helpful ways to intervene with aging clients. These approaches emphasis the concept of productive aging which builds on the strength based orientation to social work practice. Programs for empowerment strategies include volunteering, civic engagement, mentoring retirement planning health and wellness education and recreation. This programmes focused on healthy and productive aging.

Group work is another effective intervention with elderly. Toseland (1995) develop such group as support groups, therapy groups, social recreational and educational groups, service and advocacy groups. Social workers can use talk therapy, physical exercise sing alongs (Mackenzizie& Beck, 1996). Many needs of elderly including status, identity, love affection, usefulness and growth through learning can be met through group interaction (Ebestin, 2007). In a multi disciplinary team the social worker is the principal liason among team members, other staff and the caregivers or family members (Donald &Brown, 2003) community based service help polder person to remain in their homes and communities and provide respite for care givers. Living in prolonged poverty, language barriers, stigma associated with needing help, geographic distance, transportation problem, lack of knowledge or services are other related problems that elderly faces. Older women face more problems. Combined effects of being female and old negatively affects women's mental health (Cummings, 2002) culturally supportive services to be provided.

All policies for the welfare of aged should have national as well as decentralized vision Welfare schemes should be user friendly so that all elderly can access the benefit of it. Policies should focus on regional issues that are different in different regions. Incentives to be provided for poor families to treat and to take care for their elderly, which is so necessary in a poor country like India. Social workers can play an important role to influence the policy decisions. All social work methods traditional and innovative are utilized singly or in combination to meet reality needs and to alleviate stresses in ways to enhance or strengthen the inherent capacities of elderly.

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