

Understanding Loneliness in Retired People Why are they Getting Lonelier

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Abstract

Loneliness, or the feeling of all alone runs like a deep ache in the heart of those suffering from it, though initially it may feel like no big problem, loneliness has often been associated with giving rise to psychological problems like depression and countless health issues. Loneliness brings emptiness into a person's life and he feels disconnected from the world. Loneliness can lead to anxiety, negative, self destructive thoughts and emotions. Though people of any age can suffer from loneliness but retired people are more vulnerable to it because of the problems that old age brings like restricted mobility and other age-related issues. Decreased social contacts and social support makes them socially and emotionally isolated. In India, due to joint family system, loneliness in elderly was not much of a problem, but due to disintegration of joint family system and emergence of nuclear families the retired people often find themselves isolated and trapped in a small space. The present research is concerned with loneliness in elderly population and the problems that it might bring like depression, anxiety and other health related issues.

INTRODUCTION

Retirement is sometimes regarded as the golden period of one's life. But often it is not what it seems. Old age is associated with problems of its own whether psychological, social, or physical. Though after retirement, there is relief from routine-work and endless deadlines at work, there are also problems ranging from minor inconveniences due to old age to serious issues such as depression, loneliness and other health related disorders.

Joint Family system in India

In India, while living in joint families, after retirement, elderly rarely faced loneliness as their time was preoccupied by playing with their grandchildren, discussing important familial issues and other relevant matters. They were considered the head of the family and were treated with respect and almost no decision was taken without their approval. Surrounded with children, grandchildren and other family members there was rarely a time they would have suffered from loneliness. Happily their time was spent in telling stories to their grandchildren often explaining them how different their time was from their grandchildren and instilling wisdom and values in their grandchildren. But as now joint family system is disintegrating gradually, elderly are now more and more feeling alone and isolated. With emergence of nuclear families, the family size has reduced and the family members do not have time for elderly as they are preoccupied in their own work and elderly often feel trapped in a small space, alone and isolated, with nobody to share their feelings with. Listening stories from grandparents has also become a

thing of past. Grand children are no longer interested in the stories but are more preoccupied in their smart phones and social media related activities, online gaming etc. There is void created in their lives of the elderly in which they cannot even share problems with their close family members as they don't want to be considered as a burden and often due to financial constraints and change in moral values, in today's society elderly are considered more of And often because of being retired, most of their friends at work are no longer in contact with them or they have certain issues of their own which hinders the communication.

Effects of loneliness on elderly

Elderly people feel that they have nobody to communicate their feelings and opinions to and in such a case, they feel a kind of oblivion, a feeling of detachment from the world. The world often feels too sorrowful and their mind is constantly hovering around unnecessary negative emotions. With time, life changes, situations change and we must adapt to the changes but transition to old age is often not easy. With aging, everything degrades. Loneliness is shown to be associated with being divorced or widowhood or lack of social support and living with spouse less chance that elderly fall into the trap of loneliness. Old age is often associated with loss of strength, loss of memory, loss of mobility, loss of energy, and health related disorders, psychological disorders like depression, dementia, Alzheimer's etc. With memory fading due to old age, it is often hard to remember even small things. It may seem like there is nothing positive about old age and everything is withering away, with time quickly slipping with every passing day. Feeling negative emotions could make retirees sink into loneliness. Isolation in retirees is not only limited to social isolation which happens when their communication with their social network becomes more and more difficult and less frequent due to health issues, or they not able to regularly meet friends and close relatives because of mobility issues which distances them from their social group resulting in loneliness. Another aspect of isolation in retirees is emotional isolation. A isolation that is created by the emptiness that is within the self of not able to express their emotions and how they feel even when they are surrounded by close family members and they constantly feel as if nobody understands them. They are not able to let their feelings out often feeling emotional emptiness and they are not able to relate themselves to the people on emotional basis. They want to share their fears, their problems, but they feel that nobody is capable of helping and listening to them. So they keep their feelings bottled inside themselves and are not able to express them maybe fearing that others would judge them and consider them awkward and awful or simply because they do not want to bother others with their thoughts and emotions. There is a sort of irrepressible irritation within them because of the emotions that they are not able to explain. A constant conversation is going in their minds which makes them behave in impulsive and irrational way and they start to feel annoyed with themselves and the world. We often label it as something common in old age to yell at unnecessary things but the deep issue is the isolation and loneliness that they are facing. Even if they gather courage to speak out and seek help, people around them are often too busy in their own lives that they don't bother much. The modernized world has made people indifferent and inconsiderate towards elderly and other people emotions whether it be some stranger or even people closer to them like elders.

Unfortunately, the loneliness and isolation that the retirees face can turn into various health issues and psychological problems. Loneliness and isolation is often found to be associated with depression. The problem with depression in elderly is that elderly who are already facing other health problems, having depression and loneliness will make the problems even more worse and debilitating. In old age,

Loneliness is often associated with risk of high mortality. In elderly, depression may not show any signs but they still face issues related to as it is often undiagnosed or disguised as other health problems. Often problems like panics attacks, hallucinations, phobias become common problem in loneliness. Also loneliness is hard to detect because there are not sufficient measures to measure it objectively. (Chana,2016), Dahlberg (2018). Feelings of Loneliness should be screened in patients with health problems (Rico,2016). A significant relationship was found between loneliness and depression, Grover (2018) with feelings of loneliness often associated with mortality and has various aspects to it including psychological, physical and social (Tomstad,2017), Wang (2018). Also loneliness may also cause suicidal tendencies. The stigma that is associated with isolation, depression and loneliness often makes it hard to seek help as often they are considered as psychological disorder and having a psychological disorder is looked down upon by society as someone having problematic life and people start to consider them as invalid and they often face discrimination and further isolation. But medical help is essential if such issues become concerning in the lives of retired people. Majority of Retirees face loneliness every day in their lives. This is enough to understand the high prevalence of loneliness among retirees. In order to understand deeply the psychological state of retired people, it is important to ask about their were asked about the psychological state of elderly whether they were susceptible to other psychological disorders based on if they are feeling distress and negative emotions over past few days. Since feeling restlessness and negative emotions on a regular basis and often frequently are an indicator of brimming psychological issues, the elderly people should be monitored as they are susceptible to psychological disorders in the future and should be asked about the frequency of negative and distress in last few days. The causes of loneliness can be that that they felt neglected by their own family members which is the main cause of their loneliness or elderly attributed their loneliness to the physical disability that old age brings and the problems associated with it as the cause of their loneliness. Also death of spouse or friends and loss of social contacts are also some prominent reasons for feeling lonely. So, facing neglect from the family members emerged as the most important cause of loneliness among elderly followed by physical disability due to old age. Also retirees feel that due to old age they have become burden on their family members and they do not have that much prestige that they enjoyed when they were not retired. The main cause of loneliness among elderly people is neglect by family members and physical disability due to old age. In old age, the support of family members is crucial to the elderly because they become emotionally and physically dependent on family members. Facing neglect from the most important persons in their lives breaks them down mentally and that can result in feeling of loneliness and psychological disorders like depression and other issues related with it. Caregivers and family members should take some time to talk to elderly and pay attention to their feelings, listen to them so that the loneliness they are feeling do not become severe. In this fast paced world, where everybody is busy and do not have time for the anybody, our elderly need special attention. Most people many times ignore the elderly labeling them as too slow, always complaining about little things, always feeling sad and frustrated but the only thing that they want from us is our true love care and support. With this support they will develop the potential strength to fight all adverse difficulties of old age. Elderly above 80 years need special attention in the regard of psychological state because often they are the ones that feel the most alone, suffering from multiple illnesses and they are at high risk of emotional and health problems and of course, they are more physically and financially dependent on their family members for their day to day life which makes them vulnerable to abuse and neglect

Ways to address Loneliness

To deal with loneliness and the problems associated with it it is essential for the retired people to be aware of their emotions and not let their emotions overpower them. It is true that worry, anxiety and feeling of constantly feeling down in old age can be depressing and heartbreaking but it is necessary for the retirees to shake off anxiety and let not worry hold its upper hand over the emotions. One such thing is motivating themselves to overcome those negative self destructive thoughts and emotions and find something to hold on to whether it be a hobby, venturing into a new field, spending time with nature or anything that make them feel more alive and more happy. Doing something creative, doing charity works, participating in societal activities, engaging in conversations with people of their age will be immensely helpful in retaining the connection with the outer world. It will help them feel and experience that they are not alone in their battles and other people are going through their own issues and coming out of them victorious and it will help them share their stories of happiness and sadness. As human nature is, sharing thoughts with persons of same age will help them in feeling more at ease with their own emotions as they will come to know about that others are also facing same problems as they are and this will help them in overcoming the sadness that they feel due to feeling lonely and will get a renewed strength in overcoming loneliness. Not only socializing with people of their own age but also with the younger generation will keep them updated with the current happenings. therefore, socializing will help them overcome the feeling of loneliness. When the mind is constantly engaged in positive scenarios and experiences, it will have less time to think about worries and fears. Old age brings uncertainty with it and it is often the cause of excessive worry and anxiety among the retirees which isolates them from the world. Spirituality can help in overcoming the emptiness which they are feeling within and will help them leading a more fulfilled life. Connecting to the supreme God will help them realize the real meaning of existence. It's a time to look back at life and feel and cherish the moments that have passed. It is the duty of younger generation to make elderly feel more wanted and loved. Taking care of old age people and supporting them will go a long way in ensuring their well being as this is the phase of life where they need maximum support and care.

Conclusion

There is no doubt about that old age is a problematic phase of life but our perspective makes it so because the positive avenues of old age are overlooked and often overshadowed by the problems that old age is associated with. It is important for the retirees to remember that the journey has not yet ended, the mystery of life has not yet unfolded. A lot is to be done, understand and create.

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