

Assessing Levels of Loneliness among Elderly People Residing in the Nursing Homes of Baghdad City

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Abstract

Background: In the course of aging, elderly people experience declining physical and psychological function and deteriorated general health. One of the psychological deteriorations is the feeling of loneliness which may contribute to major health problems among the elderly people and its connections are still in argument.

Objectives: To assess levels of loneliness among the elderly and to find out the relationship between these levels and some demographic characteristics.

Methodology: A descriptive design study has been conducted from March 10th, 2017 to the July 10th, 2017. A non-probability sample of 52 elderly people was recruited, and a questionnaire was constructed which has two parts: five demographic characteristics of elderly people: gender, age, level of education, marital status and previous occupation; and 20 items represent UCLA loneliness scale.

Results: 69.2% of elderly people are 60 years old and more; about half of them are married; 33% have secondary level of education and more; and 51.9% are retired. Half of elderly people have high and extremely high levels of loneliness. There is a significant relationship between the levels of loneliness and gender and age of elderly people.

Conclusion: More than half of elderly people were with the levels of loneliness ranged between high to extremely high level. Women are with more levels of loneliness than men are.

Recommendations: Elderly-related special services should be provided aiming at decreasing levels of loneliness and social isolation. These can be considered largely into one-to-one interventions.

Keywords: Assessing; Loneliness; Elderly people; Nursing; Homes; Baghdad

Introduction

The resident elderly people refer to the individuals, who are 65 years old or older, and live in nursing homes [1-6]. Residents in nursing homes have many physical and psychosocial needs, as elderly people who move into nursing homes experience rapid changes in their psychological and physical balance [7]. It is argued that the risky associate of loneliness among the elderly people was connected to the decreased quality of life, poor subjective health, disability, risk of cognitive deterioration, low grade of elderly people in community, inhumane treatment, absence of sense in life and carelessness by relatives [8]. Loneliness has been recognised as a substantial threat to health. However, some health care systems and nursing care have limited means to identify elderly people who may agonise from loneliness and to ease loneliness with nursing intervention [9].

The loneliness of elderly people varies from loneliness among other age groups [10]. Loneliness shows a critical part in elderly people's social ability [11]. Alterations in social performs, such as less visiting among family, relative and neighbours, and altering socio-

demographic forms, such as a larger number of older people living alone, have led some older people to experience reduction in communication with others [12].

Objectives

The study aims to assess the levels of loneliness among the elderly people who live in nursing homes of Baghdad city; to determine the distribution of these levels according to demographic characteristics of those elderly; and finally to find out the relationship between the levels of loneliness and some demographic characteristics of those elderly people.

Methodology

Descriptive study was conducted from March 10th, 2017 to the July 10th, 2017. A non-probability sample of 52 elderly people; 33 male and 19 females, from two nursing homes in Baghdad city: Al-Rashad and Al-Silekh nursing homes, participated in the present study. To assess the levels of loneliness among elderly people a questionnaire was constructed, this questionnaire consists of two parts: five demographic characteristic, age, gender, marital status, level of education and previous occupation, and 20 items represent UCLA loneliness scale

(version 3) of Russell [1] which supposed to measure the levels of loneliness among the elderly people. Each item scored from one as never; one as sometimes; two as most time; and three as always. The total score ranged from 20 to 80 for the total loneliness scale. The total items scores were measured scored and finally rated on 4-level rating scale. Four levels were determined by applying quartile descriptive analysis; low level is with cut-off point ranged between 36 and 45; moderate level is with cut-off point ranged between 46 and 54; high level is with cut-off point ranged between 55 and 63; and extremely high with cut-off point ranged between 64 and 80. Data were analysed by different statistical analysis: descriptive analysis such as distribution, cross-tabulation, frequency, percentages; and an inferential data analysis: Chi-square.

Results

Descriptive data analysis

Description of Demographic characteristics is presented by applying the frequencies and percentages (Distribution) Results of Table 1 reveal that 75.0% of elderly people are male; 36.5% are 70 years old and more; 40.0% are with secondary school level of education; 84.6% are married and 51.9% are retired.

Gender	No.	%	Previous Occupation	No.	%
Male	39	75.00%	Self-employed	15	28.80%
Female	13	25.00%	Retired	27	51.90%
Total	52	100.00%	Housekeeper	10	19.20%
			Total	52	100.00%
Age (years)	No.	%	Level of Education	No.	%
40-49	2	3.80%	Illiterate	6	11.50%
50-59	14	26.90%	Read and write & Primary	13	25.00%
60-69	17	32.70%	Secondary	21	40.00%
≥ 70	19	36.50%	Institute, college & more	12	23.10%
Total	52	100.00%	Total	52	100.00%
Marital Status			No.	%	
Unmarried			4	7.70%	
Married			44	84.60%	
Divorced			1	1.90%	
Widowed			3	5.80%	
Total			52	100.00%	

F= frequency; %= percentage

Table 1: Distribution of the total sample according to the Demographic Characteristics of the Elderly People participated in the study.

Distribution in the levels of Loneliness according to the sample Table 2 indicates that about half of elderly people have high and extremely high levels of loneliness (48.1%); and 30.8% have moderate level and only 21.2% of them have low level of loneliness.

Total No.	Low		Moderate		High		Ext. High		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
52	11	21.20%	16	30.80%	17	32.70%	8	15.40%	52	100.00%

Low with cut-off point: 36-45; Moderate with: 46-54; High with: 55-63 and Extremely High with: 64-73.

Table 2: Distribution of the sample according to the levels of Loneliness.

Demographic characteristics such as gender Table 3 shows that 30.8% of male elderly are with high and extremely high levels of loneliness and 17.3% of female elderly are with high and extremely high levels of loneliness. Age Table 4 reveals that 17.3% of elderly who

have high and extremely high are 70 years old and more but 24.1% of sixties have low and moderate levels of loneliness.

Gender		Levels of Loneliness				Total
		Low	Moderate	High	Ext. High	
Male	No.	9	14	9	7	39
	%	17.30%	26.90%	17.30%	13.50%	75.00%
Female	No.	2	2	8	1	13
	%	3.80%	3.80%	15.40%	1.90%	25.00%
Total	No.	11	16	17	8	52
	%	21.20%	30.80%	32.70%	15.40%	100.00%

Low with cut-off point: 36-45; Moderate with: 46-54; High with: 55-63 and Extremely High with: 64-73

Table 3: Distribution in the levels of Loneliness according to the Gender of Elderly.

			Levels of Loneliness				Total
			Low	Moderate	High	Ext. High	
Age	40-49	No.	0	0	2	0	2
		%	0.00%	0.00%	3.80%	0.00%	3.80%
	50-59	No.	1	4	7	2	14
		%	1.90%	7.70%	13.50%	3.80%	26.90%
	60-69	No.	7	5	2	3	17
		%	13.50%	9.60%	3.80%	5.80%	32.70%
	≥ 70	No.	3	7	6	3	19
		%	5.80%	13.50%	11.50%	5.80%	36.50%
	Total	No.	11	16	17	8	52
		%	21.20%	30.80%	32.70%	15.40%	100.00%

Low with cut-off point: 36-45; Moderate with: 46-54; High with: 55-63 and Extremely High with: 64-73

Table 4: Distribution in the levels of Loneliness according to the Age of Elderly.

Marital status Table 5 indicate that 40.3% of married elderly have high and extremely high levels of loneliness but also in the same time 44.2% of them have low and moderate levels of loneliness. Level of education Table 6 reveals that 21.2% of the elderly with secondary school and 13.4% of institute and more level of education have high

and extremely high level of loneliness. Previous occupation Table 7 indicate that 32.7% of the retired elderly have moderate and high levels of loneliness; and only 3.8% of elderly with previous self-employed have high level of loneliness.

			Levels of Loneliness				Total
			Low	Moderate	High	Ext. High	
Marital Status	Single	No.	1	2	0	1	4
		%	1.90%	3.80%	0.00%	1.90%	7.70%
	Married	No.	10	13	15	6	44
		%	19.20%	25.00%	28.80%	11.50%	84.60%

	Divorced	No.	0	0	0	1	1
		%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.90%	1.90%
	Widowed	No.	0	1	2	0	3
		%	0.00%	1.90%	3.80%	0.00%	5.80%
Total		No.	11	16	17	8	52
		%	21.20%	30.80%	32.70%	15.40%	100.00%

Low with cut-off point: 36-45; Moderate with: 46-54; High with: 55-63 and Extremely High with: 64-73.

Table 5: Distribution in the levels of Loneliness according to the Marital status of Elderly.

		Levels of Loneliness					Total
			Low	Moderate	High	Ext. High	
Level of Education	Illiterate	No.	0	3	2	1	6
		%	0.00%	5.80%	3.80%	1.90%	11.50%
	Primary	No.	3	6	2	2	13
		%	5.80%	11.50%	3.80%	3.80%	25.00%
	Secondary	No.	5	5	8	3	21
		%	9.60%	9.60%	15.40%	5.80%	40.40%
	Institute and more	No.	3	2	5	2	12
		%	5.80%	3.80%	9.60%	3.80%	23.10%
	Total	No.	11	16	17	8	52
		%	21.20%	30.80%	32.70%	15.40%	100

Low with cut-off point: 36-45; Moderate with: 46-54; High with: 55-63 and Extremely High with: 64-73.

Table 6: Distribution in the levels of Loneliness according to the Levels of education of Elderly.

			Levels of Loneliness				Total
			Low	Moderate	High	Ext. High	
Previous Occupation	Self-employed	No.	3	6	2	4	15
		%	5.80%	11.50%	3.80%	7.70%	28.80%
	Retired	No.	7	6	11	3	27
		%	13.50%	11.50%	21.20%	5.80%	51.90%
	Housekeeper	No.	1	4	4	1	10
		%	1.90%	7.70%	7.70%	1.90%	19.20%
Total	No.	11	16	17	8	52	
	%	21.20%	30.80%	32.70%	15.40%	100.00%	

Low with cut-off point: 36-45; Moderate with: 46-54; High with: 55-63 and Extremely High with: 64-73.

Table 7: Distribution in the levels of Loneliness according to the Previous occupation of Elderly.

Inferential data analysis

Chi2 was applied to find any relationship between demographic characteristics and of elderly people and levels of loneliness Table 8 confirms that there is a significant relationship between levels of loneliness and Gender and Age of elderly people but there is no relationship with Marital status, levels of education and previous occupation.

Demographic characteristics	Levels of Loneliness		
	χ^2	df	p-value
Gender	9.684	1	0.04
Age	12.794	3	0.03
Marital status	6.905	3	0.35
Levels of Education	5.984	3	0.74
Previous Occupation	6.389	2	0.38

Table 8: Association between levels of Loneliness and demographic characteristics.

Discussion

According to the results of Table 1 the majority of the sample of elderly people are male (75.0%); about 70.0% are 60 years old and more; 84.6% are married; 63.1% are with secondary and college levels of education; more than half of elderly are retired. There are wide differences between these results and other results overall the world; more than 90-98% of elderly people in nursing homes of most of Europe are 60 years old and more [4,12]; 60-70% of them are female [13] and Korea female are 94.3%; most of the elderly in Europe nursing homes are widowed (72-79%) [14,15]; and about 85.0% have level of college [12]. These differences might be due to number of elderly people who live in nursing homes of Baghdad city; two nursing homes with total number of 180 elderly that represent just less than 0.002% of the total percentage of the elderly in Baghdad according to general population of Baghdad city. Regarding the levels of loneliness among elderly in nursing homes the results reveal that 48.1% of them have high and extremely high, these results are not supported by other studies such as Okosoo and his colleagues [15] who indicate that Korean elderly have moderate level and Japanese elderly have low level, this might be in Japan so many point of view living in nursing homes as positive and may be seen as better than living in their own homes [16]. This difference might be because the good health, social, medical and recreations facilities that could be presented in these two countries. Regarding the distribution of the levels of loneliness according to the categories of each of the five demographic characteristics of the elderly people living in nursing homes, male elderly have higher levels of loneliness than female elderly have; this might be female elderly are more adapted to live at home with less number of relationship than male elderly. The minor differences in the age categories are due to difference number in each age category which gives unreal differences within the age categories. A high proportion of the married elderly have high and extremely high of loneliness; that might be as a result to the social status with good life they were used to as married and they now live completely different. Finally, the considerable differences in levels of loneliness regarding the categories of levels of education and previous occupation are due to the dissimilar numbers of each category.

Conclusion

The present study concluded that more than half of elderly people residing in the nursing homes of Baghdad city were with the levels of loneliness ranged between high to extremely high level which give a strong indicator for deterioration in the mental health of those elderly. Women are with more levels of loneliness than men are, in addition the older people are more likely to have higher level of loneliness.

Recommendations

Elderly-related special services should be provided aiming at decreasing levels of loneliness and social isolation. These can be considered largely into one-to-one interventions, elderly group services and broader community-based arrangement. The diversity of services and the different methods of assessing success of such services should be basically available. Those services that look most encouraging contain supporting structures, social group structures and community-based guides.

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