

A Qualitative study of attitudes and attachment styles in senior citizens undergone self-quarantine in Covid-19 pandemic.

Neetika Pawankumar Sharma

H.P.T Arts and R.Y.K Science College, Nashik (Maharashtra)

Under guidance of: Dr. Mrs. Rajashree Kapure

Abstract

This study aims to describe the experiences of old adults during Covid 19 pandemic their positive and negative attitudes caused due to changes in social environment and day-to-day interactions. The coronavirus disease (Covid 19) pandemic intensified the vulnerabilities of older persons on a huge magnitude. The research examines attachment styles of the older adults and their outlook/ attitude towards Covid 19 post recovery after undergoing self-quarantine. Data were obtained using semi-structured interviews by the researcher in the form of self-prepared questionnaire from a sample of 10 participants consisting 3 senior citizen couples and 4 single senior citizens. Purposive sampling technique was used in the research. Also, A standardized questionnaire based on attachment style i.e; The Experiences in Close Relationships- Revised (ECR-R) Questionnaire developed by Cindy Hazan and Philip R. Shaver (1987) was used. The research revealed that the pandemic increased the risk of social isolation in senior citizens. It also encouraged older adults to have quality time with close family members and accept the “new normal” phenomenon post-recovery during Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Attitude, Attachment styles, Covid 19

Introduction

India is an ageing nation with the elderly, aged 60 years and above, comprising 8.6 percent (104 million) of its total population (Census 2011). The states of Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Punjab have been the front runners in population ageing. The number of elderlies in Maharashtra stands at 9.9 million persons of which 4.7 million are men and remaining 5.2 million are females. The proportion of elderly people is higher than the national average (UNFPA, 2014). In the Covid-19 pandemic May 3, Maharashtra has been the worst-hit state. Its mortality rate is one of the highest in the world, A large proportion of death have been reported among aged 60 years and above. The elderly constitutes one of the most vulnerable sections of the society even in normal times an account of deteriorating health, lack of familial support, neglect, social isolation, discrimination. Under the present crisis, it was felt all the more imperative to inquire how they were coping with the unprecedented and uncertain situation into which they have been thrust. Studies revealed that the present crisis has intensified feelings of fear, anxiety, loneliness and depression due to social distancing and isolation. (Agewell Report, 1998). While the median age confirmed for Covid-19 cases is 51, fatality rates for those over 65 years is five times the global average. This reality poses a series of direct and indirect challenges for older persons. (UNICEF, 2021).

Attitude: A social psychologist would say that we possess a positive attitude towards the Welsh rugby team and a negative attitude towards liver. Understanding differences in attitudes across people and uncovering the reasons why people like and dislike different things has long interested social psychologists. Indeed, almost 70 years ago, Gordon Allport. Attitude is defined as a more or less stable set of predispositions of opinion, interest or purpose involving expectancy of a certain kind of experience and readiness with an appropriate response. Attitudes are also known as “frames of reference. A person’s attitudes settle into a coherent pattern and to change one may require difficult adjustment in many others. Thus, a company would be well advised to fit its product into existing attitudes rather than to try changing people’s attitude. They provide the background against which facts and events are viewed. Attitude is one of the variables been studied in the research. According to Gordon Allport, “Attitude is the most distinctive and indispensable concept in contemporary social psychology”. In simple words, an “attitude” is an individual’s way of looking or an individual’s point of view at something. To be more specific, an “attitude” may be defined as the mental state of an individual, which prepares him to react or make him behave in a particular pre-determined way. It is actually an acquired feeling. Allport defined attitude (1935) as a “a mental and neutral state of readiness, organized through experience, and exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual’s response to all objects and situations with which it is related”.

As per Eagly and Chaiken (1993), “attitude is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor”. As per Carl Jung, “it is the readiness of the psyche to act or react in a certain way”.

Positive Attitude

The predisposition that results in desirable outcomes for individuals and organizations.

Negative Attitude

The tendency of a person that results in an undesirable outcome for individuals and organizations.

It is difficult to categorize someone as having a positive attitude and a negative attitude. People show positive attitude for some things and negative attitude for somethings. This varies depending on a person’s goal, economic status, motivation, skill, self-belief and opportunities.

Attachment Style

It is a psychological, evolutionary and ethological theory concerning relationships between humans. The theory was formulated by psychiatrist and psychoanalyst John Bowlby. Attachment means an affectional bond or tie between an individual and an attachment figure (usually caregivers). John Bowlby (1969/1982) proposed that attachment system is influential “from the cradle to grave”. It leads to attachment-relevant phenomenon likely to occur after young adulthood i.e.; older adulthood. A person's attachment style is their specific way of relating to others in relationships. According to attachment theory, first developed by psychologist Mary Ainsworth and psychiatrist John Bowlby in the 1950s, attachment style is shaped and developed in early childhood in response to our relationships with our earliest caregivers. Essentially, our adult attachment style is thought to mirror the dynamics we had with our caregivers as infants and children.

Statement of the problem

To study the attitude and attachment styles of senior citizens undergone self-quarantine in Covid-19 pandemic.

Purpose of the study

This research/study is been conducted by the researcher to understand the personal attitude of senior citizens towards self-quarantine leading to better lifestyle, improve quality of population in old adults as a whole, avoid conflicts on an interpersonal level and promote healthy ageing. It studies how attachment styles have a positive or negative impact over the quarantine period among old adults which help develop an understanding how supportive partnership plays a crucial role in old age and it can benefit the old population by improving over their emotional disturbances, personal turmoil and dependencies. It is important for healthy ageing to improve interpersonal attachment styles and hence, positive and negative attitudes play a vital role in developing the same. It helps eliminate interpersonal as well as social conflicts.

Objectives

1. To understand the personal attitude of senior citizens undergone self-quarantine in Covid-19 pandemic.
2. To study attachment styles of senior citizens undergone self-quarantine in Covid-19 pandemic.

Review of literature

Biswas (2020) Indian Psychiatric Society, Bombay Psychiatric Society, National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Central Institute of Psychiatry (CIP) and LokopriyaGopinathBordoloi Regional Institute of Mental Health (LGBRIMH) in association expressed that the older adults who had to stay back in the metros are required to deal with loneliness, anxiety, and depression. As of now, we do not have the numbers of those who have migrated or precise strategies activated by the older adults to mitigate feelings of loneliness anxiety and depression.

Blalock et.al; (2015) found that secure-attachment individuals usually exhibit the most adaptive behaviour in times of stressful events. Blalock proposed an inner working model of a secure attachment may help one cope using an adaptive response to stressful events, while anxious attachment might compromise an adaptive response. Individual characterized by secure attachment tend to have high self-efficacy and well-established self-esteem, share their feelings, trust others, and seek closeness and social support. When facing threats, they have confidence in their environment to help them to cope; they are optimistic about the consequences of the stressful event, have a sense of efficacy and self-worth, and thus, believe in their ability to face the threat. Levy et.al; (2011); Mikulinceret.al; (1993); Sharabany (2013) stated that in times of stress individuals with secure attachment can assess their abilities and limitations in facing the threat and thus respond by employing optimized and adaptive mechanisms. Moccia et.al; (2020) Sung et.al; (2020) suggested on the other hand that

insecure attachment individuals tend toward maladaptive emotional response and behaviour when faced with stressful events.

Lewis, Shah, and Abrams (2018) observed that living alone with little familial and social support has increased the feeling of loneliness, accompanying anxiety and depression. Physical distancing though necessary to avoid the risk of infection has intensified social isolation. Studies show that elderly with chronic conditions and physical or cognitive disabilities are more likely to feel socially isolated than adults who do not have these health issues. Such isolated persons are more prone to have emotional, mental and financial issues and are less likely to receive timely, good quality care and support than those who do not report feeling alone. Saklofske et. al; suggested that personality differences might affect levels of adverse emotional reactions.

Raju (2020) found the present crisis has intensified feelings of fear and anxiety, of loneliness and depression due to social distancing and isolation, though all respondents were in touch with their children over the phone or WhatsApp. The burden of household work on the elderly has increased, making them more vulnerable to ill health. Most participants reported keeping themselves busy to divert their mind from negative thoughts as a way of coping with the present crisis.

Based on the 75th round of the **National Sample Survey (NSS) 2017-18**, the study published in the prestigious international journal *Globalization and Health*, the vulnerability of India's elderly increases across economic levels, and other dimensions such as the place of residence, gender, social group (caste), marital status, living arrangements, surviving children, and economic dependence. The current COVID-19 pandemic poses a greater risk of social isolation among the elderly, which may cause detrimental health impact. Missed treatments, unavailability of drugs also poses a major health challenge to elders.

Sample

This research follows the qualitative research method with a sample size of 10 senior citizens who have undergone self-quarantine in Covid-19. The sample size age is mainly from 65-75 years age.

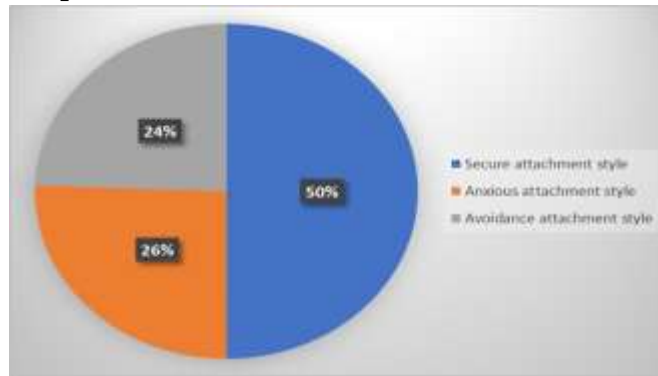
Sampling method

Purposive sampling is a sampling technique in which researcher relies on his or her own judgment when choosing members of population to participate in the study. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method and it occurs when "elements selected for the sample are chosen by the judgment of the researcher. Researchers often believe that they can obtain a representative sample by using a sound judgment, which will result in saving time and money".

Tools

Qualitative research gathers participants' experiences, perceptions, and behaviour. It answers the how's and why's instead of how many or how much. Qualitative research at its core, ask open-ended questions whose answers are not easily put into numbers such as 'how' and 'why'. A consent letter was provided to all participants and were assured that their responses were only used for academic purposes. In semi-structured interviews questions such as "How difficult was it for you to cope with the pandemic?"; "Did it make your day-to-day life in any manner?" were asked. A standardized questionnaire was: The Experiences in Close Relationships- Revised (ECR-R) measures individuals on two subscales of attachment: Avoidance and Anxiety. In general Avoidant individuals find discomfort with intimacy and seek independence, whereas Anxious individuals tends to fear rejection and abandonment. The authors review the theory of romantic, or pair-bond, attachment. It was originally formulated by Cindy Hazan and Phillip R. Shaver in 1987 and describe how it has evolved over more than a decade. The procedure used in this research is a semi-structured interview to study the attitude of senior citizens in pandemic. An adult attachment style questionnaire was conducted. It took 30-45 minutes to complete the entire questionnaire. The questionnaire is namely ECR-R which measures adult attachment styles and experiences in close relationships. It consists of 7-point Likert scale and it has 36-items. ECR-R is a basic premise of attachment theory is that internal models of attachment remain relatively stable across the life span. The ECR-R, a 36- item questionnaire based on two dimensions: anxiety and avoidance, was developed by Brennan, Clark et al. The revised version (ECR-R) contains 18 items which assess romantic attachment anxiety and 18 items which assess attachment avoidance. Adult attachment impacts individuals on a variety of levels, such as personality, coping styles, relationships and health. The statements concern on how you feel in emotionally intimate relationships. It can be used in assessing how you tend to feel in close relationships generally focusing on the type of relationship with adaptation techniques along with therapeutic relationships. The results highlight the importance of using continuous rather than categorical ratings in the assessment of stability.

Attachment styles in participants:



Observation

In this study, it was observed that amongst 10 participants 50% of participants came under the criteria of secure attachment style depicting warm and smooth relationship. A trust worthy bond helps better recovery and health. 26% of participants have anxious attachment style inflicting anxiety and restlessness in stressful situations. Whereas, 24% of participants fall under the criteria of avoidance attachment style where it does not make a real difference to the participant to have a partner or not. These people are ignorant to the need of a partner and comfortable in their personal space. These percentages give an overall summary of how attachment style have influenced the recovery in senior citizens and help develop positive or negative attitudes respectively.

Discussion

This study consists of ten participants among which six participants fall under the category of secure attachment style. Whereas two participants belong anxious attachment style category and other two participants are anxious attachment style respectively. It was observed that all married couples above 65 years had secure attachment styles except one participant in the data gathered in the research. They were adaptive and accepting to the pandemic and were optimistic that the crisis would lessen over time and the atmosphere will improve majorly due to companionship and warmth by family and partner. Whereas in old age home set-up where senior citizens were staying together with other acquaintances they expressed feeling alone when the pandemic hit due to social distancing and isolation procedures. They recalled past trauma of losing their partner and the crisis or circumstance would have been dealt differently. Also, two of the participants belong to avoidant attachment style they expressed being bothered by the pandemic in terms of changes in lifestyle which did not set right with them. And one of the participants was secure and did not have any partner experiencing neutral response to the crisis situation. Also, one example of anxious attachment style was observed expressing feelings of discomfort due to physical issues during self-quarantine as well. Questions asked in the interview gave a insight about how and when the pandemic took a toll on their lives and when they could overcome the hardships in their daily lives. Their illnesses and hospitalization played a major contributor in their attitude formation. The difference between home quarantine and hospitals is another major contributor to the positive and negative attitude of senior citizens. Regular phone calls and being in touch with other family members played an important role to form positive attitudes. Familial set up boosted recovery was expressed. Whereas old age home set up provided economic stability but inflicted feeling of abandonment and feeling of being alone leading towards discomfort and negative beliefs. Overall, pandemic was a challenging phase for old age citizens and various coping and attachment styles helped in the crisis situation and management.

Conclusion

The research study mentions and explains the after effects of pandemic on senior citizens from attitude point of view and also tries to focus on how and why attachment towards one's life partner influences one's coping from diseased condition to comfort and healthiness.

Limitations and Suggestions

The research is conducted on a specific geographical area of people. This research has been conducted on senior citizens; it can also be conducted on different age groups as well. This research can also be conducted on different background of people as well. A broader study can be done on a larger set-up on senior citizens in different areas. This study can be used for future research on Post traumatic stress disorder in senior

citizens. A quantitative study on senior citizens can also be done on a similar topic along with other clinical issues can be applied.

References

- Agarwal, Sutapa. 2012. "Effect of Living Arrangement on the Health Status of Elderly in India: Findings from a national cross sectional survey." *Asian Population Studies* 8, no. 1 (January)
- Agewell Foundation. 2017. "Changing Needs and Rights of Older People in India: A Review". Reviewed July, 2017
- Clay, Rebecca A. 2020. "COVID-19 isn't just a danger to older people's physical health." *American Psychological Association*. March 18, 2020.
- Lewis, Corinne, Tanya Shah, and Melinda K. Abrams. 2018. "Sick and Alone: High Need, Socially Isolated Adults have More Problems, but Less Support." *The Commonwealth Fund*. January 12, 2018
- Rajan, S. Irudaya. 2006. "Population Ageing and Health in India." (January): 14-21
- Raju, S. Siva. 2014. "Studies on Ageing in India: A Review." Chapter. In *Population Ageing in India*, edited by G. Giridhar, K. M. Sathyanarayana, Sanjay Kumar, K. S. James, and MoneerAlam, 180–214. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- United Nations Population Fund. 2017. "Caring for Our Elders: Early Responses: India Ageing Report 2017." United Nations Population Fund.
2014. "Status of Elderly in Maharashtra: Building a Knowledge Base on Population Ageing in India, 2011."