

Mental Health and Daily Activities of Retired Elderly People(Males) of Kolkata in the Wake of Second Wave of Covid-19

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Abstract

The present online study was an attempt to assess the mental health and daily activities of 60 public sector retirees, selected from Kolkata city areas through the snowball sampling method, during the second wave of Covid-19. To measure the mental health and to assess the daily activity status, Mental Health Inventory(Local adaptation by Jagdish&Srivastav, 1983) and a self-devised questionnaire respectively were used. The findings of the study revealed that the state of mental health of older retirees was worse than that of the younger retired group. Also, their activity level was lower compared to the latter. Besides, the condition of all retirees as a whole worsened because of remaining confined at home more than their frailing health. The covid pandemic had more impact on the mental health of the older group than the younger group, which were suffering more from covid induced mental illnesses. On the basis of the present findings, it is suggested that the family members, counselors, and health professionals should plan a strategy to combat the mental health issues of such elderly people.

Key Words : Covid-19, Mental health, Daily activities, Retired elderly people, Kolkata

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic's impact on the health of the elderly seems to be greater compared to other age groups(Vahia, *et al.*,2020). Though majority of the cases are mild, a considerable number of them can lead to mortality. But older adults are at significantly greater risk of complications from COVID-19 and case fatality rates increase significantly with age due to reduced immunity(Bandaranayake and Shaw, 2016). It was found that during the first wave, 20 percent of deaths were above 60 years of age in China(Wu & McGoogan, 2020). Based on The Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention data, the fatality rate among 60–69 years old was around 3.6 percent, which increased to 18 percent above 80 years(Chih-Cheng Lai, *et al.*, 2020). An age-wise comparative study by Kai Liu, *et al.*,(2020) showed that patients of COVID-19 above 55 years had three times increased mortality. They also had increased hospitalization, delayed clinical recovery, increased pulmonary involvement, faster disease progression, and co-morbidities of diabetes, hypertension, history of cerebro-vascular accident(CVA) and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease(COPD). In India too, the situation is no different. Over 50 per cent of the dead were people aged over 60 years(Times of India, May 22,2020).

The prolonged pandemic situation is not only causing physical damage to individuals, but also a collective form of intense stress worldwide(Lee *et al.*, 2020). As on others, it is causing immense harm to mental health of the elderly people. "Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community."(WHO, 2018). In covid situation, older adults experienced disproportionately greater adverse effects from the pandemic including more severe complications, higher mortality, concerns about disruptions to their daily routines and access to care, difficulty in adapting to technologies like telemedicine, and concerns that isolation would exacerbate existing mental health conditions(Vahia, *et al.*, 2020). For this, the mental health of the elderly requires more attention and care because they are the demographic group who experience social isolation for the longest duration(WHO, 2020). Additionally, as previous studies on the elderly have shown, social isolation is a "serious public health problem"(Gerst-Emerson & Jayawardhana, 2015) that increases the risk of cardiovascular, autoimmune, neurological, and mental health problems, the mental health problems of the elderly caused by COVID-19 should be more carefully discussed and addressed as a public health crisis.

In India also, uncertainty and fear caused by COVID-19 had a major impact on the mental health of senior citizens(Agewell Foundation,2021). There has been an increase of over 50 percent among this age group when it came to such mental health disorders and symptoms of this stress included anxiety, sleeplessness, nightmares, depression as also weakness and fatigue, The Agewell Foundation(2021) conducted a study over 5000 elderly persons. It was found that majority of respondents complained about mental health disorders and symptoms of this stress including anxiety, sleeplessness, nightmares, depression and also weakness and fatigue. 82.4 percent of respondents complained poorhealth and anxiety, 70 percent complained of sleeplessness, insomnia or nightmares due to poor quality of sleep, 63 percent developed symptoms of depression due to loneliness or social isolation, and

55 percent expressed feeling of weakness or fatigue due to the restrictions imposed on their movement, their altered lifestyles and other factors.

The retired persons become more vulnerable in the period of second wave of covid-19. Their mental health was affected seriously due to remaining in isolation, imposition of various restrictions on their activities and leading a confined idle life for a longer period. This situation led to long-standing psychological effects on them.

There have been little studies on the mental health of this retired group of elderly people particularly in Kolkata. Keeping this in view, an attempt was made to conduct this online study to assess the mental health of retired elderly persons aged over 60 in Kolkata (West Bengal).

METHOD

Sampling

60 retired elderly persons were selected through convenience and snowball sampling method from different parts of Kolkata. Subjects with known history of significant physical/mental illness and those unable to provide online information were excluded from the study.

Tools Used

(i) *Mental Health Inventory* (Local adaptation by Jagdish & Srivastav, 1983/56-item) was used to collect data to study the Mental Health of the respondents. This inventory encompasses various aspects, viz. positive self-evaluation, perception of reality, integration of personality, autonomy, group-oriented attitude and environmental mastery of the person. Scores were categorized as Very Good (Above 195.89), Good (175.45 – 195.89), Average (157.01 – 176.45), Poor (137.57 – 157.01) and Very Poor (Below 135.57).

(ii) *Daily Activity Questionnaire* (7-item) was used to collect data about their daily activities. It covers various types of physical activities (light work, heavy work, outside movement, job or volunteering and physical exercise) and mental activities (use of telephone/social media and hobbies/creative activities.) that the person did in his daily life during last one month. Finally, daily average of duration of such activities was calculated (Low : Below 2 hours, Average: 2-4 hours, and High : Above 4 hours).

Procedure

The subjects were approached telephonically and the objectives of the study were explained to them. The data were collected online through WhatsApp, mail and telephonically. The data was treated statistically.

RESULTS

(a) Table showing Mental Health and Activity Status of two categories of retirees

Table-1

	Younger Retirees		Older Retirees	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Mental Health	170.066	16.705	166.933	15.809
Activities*	338.83	228.31	226.66	136.21

*(in minutes)

It was observed that both the groups of younger retirees and older retirees on the whole had Average mental health. However, their central tendencies indicated that health status of the younger retirees was better than that of older retirees.

In respect of daily activities, the younger retirees were found to have high activity level (338 minutes, i.e. more than 4 hours of physical and mental activities on average daily) on the whole, whereas the older retirees' activity level was average (i.e. between 2 and 4 hours).

(b) Percentage analysis of mental health and activity status of retirees

Table-2

		Younger Retirees	Older Retirees
		Mental Health	Very Good
	Good	36.66%	36.66%
	Average	33.33%	33.33%
	Poor	16.66%	23.33%
	Very Poor	3.33%	6.66%
Activity Status	High	50%	30%
	Average	40%	43.33%
	Low	10%	26.66%
Covid induced mental problem		6(20%)	10(33.33%)

Percentage analysis of mental health of the two groups of retirees indicated that 10 percent of younger retirees had very good mental health, 36.66 percent good, 33.33 percent average, 16.66percent poor and 3.33percent have very poor mental health. On the other hand, the percentage of older retirees was 0, 36.66, 33.33, 23.33 and 6.66 in the very good, good, average, poor and very poor categories respectively.

It was observed that though the percentage of good and average mental health was same in both the groups, the percentage of poor and very poor retirees was higher among older retirees. Similarly, while 10 per cent younger retirees had very good mental health, there was none in thiscategoryamong older retirees.

In the activity front, the percentage of low and average active retirees was higher in the older group compared to the group of younger retirees On the other hand, percentage of highly active retirees was higher among the younger retirees than the older group.

Besides, it was also observed that percentage of persons suffering from various mental health problems in the wake of Covid-19 was higher among older retirees than younger ones.

(c) Analyses of ‘t’ value indicating differences of mental health and activity level of retirees

Table-3

		Younger and Older Retirees
Mental Health	t-value	0.734
	p-value	.466
	p	<.05
	Result – Not significant	
Activity Level	t-value	2.9746
	p-value	.002099
	p	<.05
	Result - Significant	

As observed in the above table, there was no significant difference in respect of mental health between younger and older retirees.

But in respect of daily activities, there was significant difference between the two groups of retirees.

(d) Correlation between mental health and activity level of retirees

Table-4

Groups	r-value	p(two tailed) value	Explanation
Younger Retirees	0.20566	0.27559	Weak positive correlation
Older Retirees	0.15007	0.42864	Weak positive correlation

It was seen(from the above table) that a positive correlation(though weak) existed between activity level and mental health in older retirees.

In the younger retirees also, there was positive correlation(though very weak) between their activity level and mental health.

Discussion

The study found that though both younger retirees(aged 60-70 years) and older retirees(aged 70-80) on the whole had Average mental health, yet their central tendencies and percentages indicate that mental health status of the younger retirees was better than that of older retirees. The percentage of retirees with poor and very poor mental health was higher in the older group compared to younger group. Also, a considerable percentage of retirees having very good mental health was in the younger group, while there was none in the older group. It is quite natural that mental health of older persons deteriorates with the increase in age. Fry & Debats(2002) also found that “Although many older people maintain a satisfactory condition of life, risks related to loneliness and psychological distress grow with age.” But their mental health was affected more in this covid situation than others. This is in line with other studies. Caroline Abraham of ‘Age UK’ in a study(conducted during 20th August – 3rd September,2020) found that “psychological impact of living with so much stress, uncertainty and isolation, led to increased loneliness among other problems in older adults.”

In respect of daily activities also, the younger retirees were found to have high activity level on average, while the older retirees have average activity level. A considerable percentage of younger retirees were found very highly active, while there was none in the older group. Besides, the number of low and average active persons were higher among older retirees compared to the younger ones. It is in consonance with other findings. A decline in functional capacity (strength, endurance, agility, and flexibility) is seen with advancing age and causes difficulties in daily living activities(Hulya, et al, 2009). Furthermore, older adults tend to be less active with advancing age, although it is well-known that physical activity is important for independent living, prevention of chronic health problems, and quality of

life(Hardman & Stensel, 2003; Brill, 2004). But physical distancing and confinement in home under the Covid situation made the situation worse.

Besides, a positive correlation, though weak, was found between daily activity level and mental health of retirees belonging to both the groups. In fact, activity, both physical and mental, is important for maintaining good health in the elderly persons. This is supported by other studies. “Physical activity could be a way to improve the quality of life through positive mental health and wellbeing outcomes in older adults”(Kadariya, et al, 2019). “Participation in light and moderate physical activities have been known to be effective on delaying the functional decline among older adults, thereby promoting healthy ageing in them”(Makino, et al, 2015). However, weak correlation between activity level and mental health of the retirees in this study may be due to the fewer sample size.

Also a good number of retirees was found to be currently suffering from various mental problems/uneasiness, and number of such persons was higher in the older group compared to the younger one. This was probably due to the ongoing pandemic situation in which their normal life has been affected more than others. Similar views have been expressed in various other studies. “In the context of COVID-19, older adults are at the increased risk of stress, anxiety and depression”(Wu, et al, 2019). As per National Academics of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, Washington DC(2020), “approximately one-quarter of community-dwelling older adults are considered to be socially isolated, and 43% of them report feeling lonely.”

Conclusion

The covid pandemic had more impact on the mental health of the older group than the younger group, which were suffering more from covid induced mental illness. On the basis of the present findings, it is suggested that the family members, counselors, and health professionals should plan a strategy to combat the mental issues of such elderly people.

Limitations of the study

The study was carried out on a limited number of retirees during the month of July 2021. As it was not possible to contact the retirees physically and sit with them for data collection, it could not be done on a large scale.

Secondly, the retirees in general were not much tech-savvy, majority of them were not using e-mail or whats-app. For this, it was difficult to collect online data easily from them and the study had to be limited to fewer number of subjects.

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