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SPIRITUAL SUPPORT DURING THE ACTIVE AGING

Abstract:

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the contribution of spiritual support in order to increase old people's life quality and help them take active roles during active aging period. In the study, data was analyzed by reviewing the literature on what to be done to ensure old people's participation in the active ageing period and the literature about why they should be provided with spiritual support during this period. When the related literature was reviewed scanned, it was found that there have been many studies on active ageing while there are few studies on spiritual support/care during old age. The most distinctive feature of this study is that this is the first study aiming at analyzing the spiritual care during active ageing. Conclusion; In order for the old to take part in the active ageing life and this participation to be continuous, there is a need to offer the old who demand spiritual support services besides providing proper accommodation, working, health, solving psychological and economical problems and establishing solidarity environment. Considering the fact that the difficulties the elderly people experience including physical, mental or health collapse and that they feel densely that they have one foot in the grave, it's an indispensable need to satisfy their mind, logic and soul. Spiritual support service is the only solution for such psychological difficulties as well as physical ones. Spiritual support services should be used and provided for the old in order to help them involved in active ageing, to take part in the active ageing process continuously so that they feel the need for an active life and stay motivated for an active life.

Keywords:

Active Aging, Spiritual Support, Spiritual Care , Aging, Elderly, Spirit, Moral Values

JEL Classification: D46, Z12, I19

Introduction

The notion 'active ageing' was introduced by World Health Organization in the 1990s and by declaring 'International Senior Citizens' Year' in 1999; it was emphasised that the old should be perceived as people who have contributed to their families and the society until they get old and they would lead an active and productive life from then on. 'Ageing 2002 International Action Plan' was published by 'International Ageing Assembly'. The goal of this plan was set and declared as ; "Guaranteeing people age safely and augustly all around and guaranteeing them to go on living as a citizen with all the rights in his society" (Gökçe Kutsal , 2016).

When the related literature was reviewed, many studies can be seen on active ageing while there are few on the issue of spiritual support/care during old age. The most distinctive feature that distinguishes this research from the others is that this is the first study analyzing spiritual care during active ageing. In this research paper, the notion 'active ageing' has been described in general, and what should be done to include elderly people in the active ageing process has been discussed. In our study, definition and description of the term was inspired from Kavas and Kavas': 'Spiritual support is a support service which is offered to inspire the old who demand spiritually, to support them mentally (spiritually) and morally, to guide them to contribute to the humankind within the bounds of possibility and to support their vital resistance' and in the light of this definition, related data about the contribution of spiritual support for old people was analyzed by reviewing the literature on the issue.

The Term Old Age

World Health Organization defines old age as the decrease or failure of the skill of adapting to environmental factors. Chronologically, people over 65 are treated as old. The old's becoming dependant on others generally occurs over 75. Old age has four different aspects. They are chronological ageing, biological (physiological) ageing, psychological ageing and social ageing. All the human beings live through these four aspects in different ways during ageing period. Besides these, ageing brings medical, social and psychological needs with itself (Şeker, 2016).

Nowadays what the scientists deal with is that not living long but "successful and healthy aging" is important. Successful and healthy aging is closely related to our activities and relations and contains many factors under our own control (Asi Karakaş, 2012). Successful and healthy aging is a term that shows the overall well-being not only in terms of health but also in terms of psychological and social aspects (Kurt et al. 2008). Healthy and successful ageing can be achieved by active ageing.

Active Ageing

Old age period is the period in which individuals start to experience differences in their physical capacities and when their abilities start diminishing (Kalaycıoğlu et al. 2003). Ageing is all of the irremediable structural and functional changes in individuals' organisms, molecules, cells, tissues, organs and systems, which appear in time. Ageing is a process with physiological, psychological, economical and social aspects

caused by the decrease in the biological capacity. Many factors like life style, environmental factors, diseases and people's way of dealing with negative situations are effective in people's life expectancy (Gökçe Kutsal, 2016). Detached from from productive or consuming roles in the modern life, the old people begin to feel themselves useless because of the losses in their roles in the society and start to collapse. Feeling of old take them to the position in which they lose their skill to be an actor in the society (Kalaycıoğlu et al. 2003). For active ageing, support services should be planned and put into practice in order to help them to adjust to the retirement period (etc. gradual retirement) and the post-retirement period. In order for the old not to detach from social and working life, a system should be established, in which they, as wise old, will find opportunity to offer consultancy about their jobs or the field they are proficient in during their retirement (ankara.edu.tr). The more an old individual realize how much useful his capacity and skills are, the better s/he may connect to life.

Active ageing process is based on the old's involvement in social, economical and cultural activities in their daily lives. The economical, environmental, individual, behavioural and social factors determine this process to be in the intended direction. Old individuals can take part in the activities in the society even if they are disabled; they can transfer their experiences to the young generations and they can continue contributing to the society in which they live. The priorities in active ageing include; avoiding unexpected deaths in later periods of life, preventing the individuals with chronic diseases from being disabled, helping the individuals enjoy life in later periods of their lives, enabling the old individuals to take part in the social, political and economical activities of the community, lessening the health expenditures during the period and the provision of these expenditures by the government. It is very important to be healthy for individuals to be happy individuals. Health is defined as feeling well not only physically but socially and mentally as well (Aslan 2016).

In this respect, active/successful ageing means individuals' keeping their relations and social environment alive while preparing themselves to the aging period, taking necessary precautions to have the least health problems, trying to participate in physical and mental developing activities and being able to take life positively (Baran 2007).

In a study carried out to find out the views and practices of people living in Ankara about active ageing, the participants reported that they may apply active ageing practices for the purposes of living long (%74,1), for better appearance (%51,8), to strenghten their immune system and maximize their physical and mental activities (%47,8). According to the findings of the research, it was found that nearly half of the individuals do not exercise at home (%51,4), more than half of them do not have a regular check-up (%59,9) and the majority of them do not have cancer test. It has also been detected that the majority of the individuals know nothing about active ageing (%82,3). In the light of this information, it is suggested that informing studies about active ageing be started and carried out before the ageing period starts (Demirci Aksoy, 2015).

Individuals must be informed about all subjects related to the old people and ageing period through formal and informal training sessions to keep away from prejudices and stereotypes against the old people in the society and to achieve a positive point of view for this period. In raising awareness in society, the written and oral media might be quite effective. Moreover, the trainings should include subjects that will contribute to the adults' healthy ageing and the trainings should be provided by experts (Arpacı and Ersoy, 2007).

Since ageing is a process that brings about not only physiological, psychological and sociological changes in individuals but also causes changes in the drug metabolism of the old individuals and, therefore, not only the nurses and the patient but also the patient's relatives should pay attention to nutrition-drug interaction. The carbohydrates, proteins, fats, minerals and vitamins in the diet interact with the drugs used and the efficiency of the treatment might decrease. An efficient treatment/care can be provided by training and educating the nurse, patient or patient's relatives on nutrition-drug interaction (Balcı Alparslan and Akdemir, 2011).

In a research conducted to determine how old individuals see aging and how they interpret life, it was found that the factors of active/successful ageing include physical health, financial power, family, relative and neighbour relations, sociability and the patient's psychological features (İçli, 2010).

Sociability is a process of the individuals' adapting to the group, nation or community they belong to. This goes on throughout the individual's life and so the individuals' aging period is also included in this process. The individual's learning and producing process is a proof that he is sociable. The cultural heritage the individual possesses is vital in perceiving his own life quality. Because quality of life is the level of satisfaction that is provided by correspondence between the individual's aim and the realization of this aim. In the perception of quality of life, individual's maintaining his well-being is essential. As a result, there is a direct relationship between the individual's perception of life quality and sociability process (Görgün Baran, 2008).

Social values are vital in the sustainability of the social life. Values are transferred through interaction between the members during the socializing process. During this process interaction between generations is vital for the sustainability of social culture. The old people's experiences and traditional cultural elements are at risk of disappearing. The old can prevent their cultural experiences and values from disappearing by transferring their

Ageing in a nursery home and at home

Since the old who take institutional care are supported less socially, they may feel themselves more isolated and unwanted individuals and it's seen that they experience social detachment and individual worthlessness (Erden İmamoğlu et al., 2011). In a research carried out to analyze the physical, mental and social aspects of the old people living at home and at a nursery home; although the depression average point of those living at home was found to be less than those living at a nursery home, both groups were found to have medium-level depression. Furthermore, mean value of

satisfaction level and healthy life style of those living at home was found to be higher than those living in a nursery home. In the light of the findings, it can be concluded that old people living at home are in better conditions compared to those living in a nursery home and this might be resulted from the fact that family, friend and social support systems are better. As a result of these findings, it is suggested that old people should stay at home and they should be supported physically, socially and mentally (Kaçan Softa, 2015).

One of the most important social problems during aging period is the care of the old. Although every old above 65 are not sick and do not need health care, because of their potential risk of being ill and because of their physical insufficiencies, their possibility of needing in such care increases. During this period, because of their functional and physical disabilities the old and their families are often faced with choosing one of the social care alternatives. Home care service should be seen as a service model in which the services are provided to the old and his family at home environment by handling their health problems as well as their social needs with the help of interaction and coordination of the members from different professions. Home care service aims to raise the quality of life by enabling the old to live independently in their homes or environments. Therefore, home care services cover the most part of social and health services. Families and society play a key role in the protection, care, support and treatment of old individuals (Öztop et al. 2008). In this sense, it is necessary that the intergenerational solidarity should be given priority in terms of social support, active labor market, economical support, care support, psychological emotional and spiritual support for the old people (ankara.edu.tr).

In a research analyzing the morale level of the old individuals over 85 in Switzerland; the researchers have found that the individuals' not having depression symptoms and those living at home instead of a nursing home, not feeling alone, and those who continue taking part in social activities and who consider themselves healthy provides high level of morale for them (Von Heideken Wagert , et al., 2005). In another research conducted to investigate the effect of level of morale and depression in people living at home and nursing home on functional situation; low level of morale and depression affects the old people's activity levels and body functions negatively. Particularly, morale and depression levels of those living in nursing homes were found to be worse and because of this, their active/lively living and functional activities was found to be insufficient (Büker et al., 2010). Therefore, we should do our best to provide the old people with an opportunity to live with their family and social environments. The nursing home should be considered as the last option. The design of the places that the old live in should be arranged to make their lives easier.

The concept of location in the old's access to services

Age-friendly cities should be designed and constructed for active ageing which is described as the process of making use of the health, participation and security facilities to increase the old individuals' life qualities during their aging period because availability and accessibility are prerequisites to participate in daily life. All human

beings' participation in daily life can be provided by accessibility regardless of their age, sex, religion, nation, physical and mental competence (Tutal and Üstün, 2009). The old individuals also have the rights to have comfortable life with proper, safe and healthy environments. The equipment and arrangement of the institution, home or their environment should be organized accordingly to solve or minimize their problems. This is because of the fact that design of a suitable environment inner and outer environments and the facilities play a more important role for the old individuals. Generally during the designing and construction stage of the institutions and buildings, the factors like security, ergonomics, cleanliness and healthy environment are not taken into consideration enough. Considering and analyzing the particular needs or possible needs of the old people while designing and planning a building is one of the most important factors (Kalınkara, 2010). The old population is increasing day by day. As a result, naturally it is necessary that the old people should be able to pursue an independent life for a long time. It is particularly necessary that the present institutions, places and residences or the ones that will be designed for old people should be designed appropriately to make their lives easier and to help them keep active during aging period. The places and environments that support the old individuals' daily lives not only help them live in their own environment but also increase their life quality (Kalınkara, 2015).

The religiousness of the old and morale

The religiousness of the old have distinctive features different from the other age groups. Old people are more inclined to religion than other age groups. So there is a meaningful relation between age and religiousness. Old participants have more interest in both basic religious behaviours and traditional folk religious practices (Arslan, 2009). Elderness is not a period of consolation. Elderliness can only be a meaningful and productive period when it is discovered with wisdom and knowledge. The individual who builds up his mental world stays young even if their body collapse. It is a shocking experience to be really aware of elderliness. In order to overcome the sadness, sorrow and shock caused by this realization of elderliness, spiritual support might be necessary. Religion is the most important source of spiritual care service which builds up individual's world life and afterworld (Sambur 2015). It can be concluded that one of the most effective ways to provide the old people with morale support is religious activities and teachings.

It is true that there will be role losses, physical or mental retardations or disabilities to struggle with but it is not natural to experience this aging period with a feeling of permanent sadness, depression and the thought of keeping away from everything. Though it might be natural not to be able to do the things that an old individual used to be able to do in the past, it is not natural to lose his/her interest in the things that once attracted his attention and that s/he liked doing. And decrease/loss of interest and desire might be one of the most important symptoms of elderly depression (Oral, 2012).

In the study in which Sigstad et al. compared hope/morale, coping ability and quality of life with 55 patients, it was found that the patients who had low quality of life had low hope and less coping strength, while the patients with high quality of life had high hope and higher coping strength (Sigstad et al., 2005). In a study carried out in our country by using geriatric morale scale on the patients having heart attacks, it has been seen that %56,4 of the subjects had low morale (Pınar and Öz 2011). Morale during active ageing period is an important determinant of both the well-being and quality of life (Benito-Leon vd 2010). While active ageing will play an important role in the decrease of geropsychiatric problems, it will also provide morale support to overcome other age-related diseases. Therefore, the active ageing process might provide a decrease indirectly in the health expenditures due to elderliness (ankara.edu.tr).

In order to have an active ageing period, it is necessary to change the negative perceptions and attitudes of these individuals about elderliness to positive and they should be encouraged for active ageing. In this course, it is significant that spiritual support services be made use of effectively.

Spiritual Support For Active Ageing

Since the problem of age related nursing indigence means individuals' isolation from his relatives, their detachment from their beloved families, becoming lonely and being permanently dependent on others might result in anxiety and make them hopeless and weaken them mentally. It is true that if age related nursing indigence and the reasons for it are not realized in terms of their spiritual meaning and benefits, old age and nursing indigence will be perceived as a calamity or malice considering all the negative aspects (Seyyar ve Yumurtacı, 2015). In this respect, there is a need for effective spiritual consolations in order for the old in need of care to look at life positively and favourably. In this respect, in his work "Hope and Solace for the Elderly" (2008) teach humans love the elderly people and offers the old spiritual remedies, and thus providing satisfying approaches for their mind and soul.

One of the most important reasons why the idea of elderliness and death causes depression in people is their style of perceiving the world. Living in the world as if they are permanent and they are the landlord causes people to be unhappy and depressed in their elderly period. Nursi reminds people that they are not permanent in this world but they are just guests. He suggests that elderliness is the last phase of the visit in the world and is a place of preparation to meet the beloved ones in the afterlife and it is necessary to perceive that death is not an absolute leaving or seperation but a meeting. Belief is the greatest power and blessing that enlightens and makes death, grave and old age meaningful. Addressing to the old, Nursi (2009a) states: "Dear Respected elderly men and women who feel their old age as I do! We are leaving; there is no use in deceiving ourselves. Even if we close our eyes to it, we will not be allowed to remain here. There is mobilization. The land of the Intermediate Realm of the grave, which appears to us as dark and as the land of eternal separation because of the delusions that arise from heedlessness and in part from the people of

misguidance, is the meeting place of friends. It is the realm where we will meet with, foremost, God's Beloved, upon him be peace and blessings, and with all our friends". Although the individual's body weakens during aging, he craves for a new eternal life. The desire for an eternal life is an indispensable feeling that arouses with elderliness. In the aging period, as one starts to get older and come close to death, s/he searches for a new world of wealth and hope to base on. The only source to stop existential anxiety a person comes across is to believe in God. Understanding that the human being is the most honorable and special creature God has created has a positive and healing effect on people in terms of spiritual aspect (Sambur 2015).

Nursi explains how belief can be a source of hope and peace in the afterworld, stating that: "Yes, my brothers and sisters who are elderly like me! Since the hereafter exists and it is everlasting, and it is a better world than this; and since the One who created us is both All-Wise and All-Compassionate; we should not complain and regret our old age. On the contrary, we should be happy at it in so far as with age one reaches perfect maturity through worship and belief, and it is a sign one will be released from the duties of life and depart for the world of mercy in order to rest" (Nursi, 2009a). Old age is a new period to make a start in peace. Belief in the afterworld gives the old person hope and tranquility.

Yes, my brothers and sisters who begin to stop their relations with this world like me and who tend to drift apart from this world! Allah, who created this world as a perfect and proper city like a palace, will talk and meet his important guests and fellows in that city (the afterworld), in that palace (Nursi, 2009a). Human beings pass to the reality world, the afterworld, from the world of full of illusions along with the old age.

God not only renews the universe all the time but he also makes resurrection possible after death. The afterworld is the eternal home of the human beings where they will find happiness and eternity. Belief in the afterworld makes the human beings love old age and equip them with hope and power. It should not be ignored that belief in afterworld rehabilitates elderly individuals. This link between elderly and afterworld makes it necessary for a person to love afterworld and have a belief (Sambur, 2015).

For an old individual, youth is passed but elderliness is a new start. When he awakes from youth night into the old age, an individual feels that he is getting away from the world and approaching the grave. At this of approaching to the end and getting away from this world, individuals feels a trauma and shock (Nursi, 2009a). Aging, nursing indigence because of an important and maybe a fatal disease reminds individuals of death and the afterworld. An individual who does not think much about afterlife in his daily life and who is not even aware that he is living in the darkness of unawareness changes his perspective on life as well when he is in need of further care. Since being in need of care shows how incapable a person is, the person will start to have consciousness of adoration to God in his/her mind. The person who is in need of care feels that he will give account for what he did in this world in the afterworld and will tempt to shape his life from the beginning to win the Creator's consent. Nursing indigence, with all its deficiencies, might even be seen as a divine gift because it gives individuals a spiritual point of view. If the person were not in need of nursing, s/he

might pursue his/her life partly or wholly separated from God (Seyyar and Yumurtacı, 2015).

To quote from Islam prophet: 'Just as when you shake a ripe trees' fruits, they fall down and similarly when a patient with faith trembles, he gets rid of his sins.' and he also showed that our physical sufferings are in fact spiritual purification chances of us which provides advantages for the afterworld. The diseases caused by old age will be an opportunity for our sins to be forgiven, the nursing indigent old people's believing in God will give them morale to put up with the problems caused by the disease.

The absolute reality ' All creatures will one day die' (Al-i İmran; 3/185; Enbiya; 21/35) is a natural incident that will happen to every creature. But death is not a separation, it's a union. It is a replacement. It is eating an eternal fruit. Nursi identifies elderliness with life, reality, afterworld, eternity and faith. Old age period is not period of collapse and exhaustion but it is time of productivity and revival. Nursi calls out the elderly to get rid of the learned helplessness. Nursi (2009a) invites the human kind to an eternal youth with a faithful life. This call shows the human beings how to combine their life with reality, hope and faith by understanding the divine and human all together.

Aging related Nursing indigence will make the elderly individuals unhappy and uneasy. In this case, not only their body, home of the soul, may get exhausted but also negative feelings such as hopelessness and loneliness may surround the individual and particularly old individual in need of care will have difficulty in finding a solution for their spiritual collapse. In such circumstances, removal of psycho social problems resulted from nursing indigence will only be possible with the help of spiritual consultancy and guidance based on religious resources, that is, spiritual support services. Moral relief that gives serenity to the soul will help the old stay hopeful and optimistic. In this respect, the elderly people in need of nursing care, who learn that God will never put overweight on their shoulders, will take the most serious situations from a positive point and will apply to moral relief sources and freshen themselves and they will complete their lives with the consciousness of devotion. As part of spirituality, nursing services will not only increase the quality of their care but also contribute to the lives of the elderly. The Elderly Tract is a referral source that will increase the efficiency of the moral nursing services (Seyyar ve Yumurtacı, 2015).

The Islam Prophet Muhammad states that ““If the Hour (the day of Resurrection) is about to be established and one of you was holding a palm shoot, let him take advantage of even one second before the Hour is established to plant it.” It means that never give up your aim even if it is the end of the world. In his work *Words* Nursi (2009b) states notes that for a person who performs prayers, permissible habitual actions may become worship with through intention, so according to the point of view, the physical sciences may become knowledge of God. Nursi clearly points out that a person that all the permissible habitual actions, who prays, are counted as worship. God turns all the permissible habitual actions into worship and fortune unless they are forbidden by religion. According to this point of view, the elderly individuals are encouraged to pursue charity affairs and continue to beneficial activities instead of detaching from community and only dedicating themselves to praying. In Islam,

protection of health is not optional but a religious duty. The protection of health and looking for proper treatment are strictly emphasized by the verses and the hadiths. Furthermore, physical and mental health is evaluated altogether in terms of maintenance of health. In this sense, all of the habitual activities of a believer person, who exercises regularly, eats properly, has check-ups, helps people in need become worship. From this perspective, while s/he lives healthily, an individual can turn his/her daily activities into worship with this consciousness (İmam Buharî, 2014; Yıldız, 2015).

Conclusions

During retirement process in order for the old not to detached from social life and work life, some certain systems should be established so that they, as wise old, can provide consulting services about their jobs or about their professional fields. Preparing occasions in which we can make use of the old for their working and brainpower will prevent them from being detached from life, which will help them feel that they are still useful and productive and that they are still contributing to society.

It is essential for the elderly to stay home as long as possible and they should be supported in terms of physical, social and mental aspects.

It is essential that ergonomic and proper the buildings should be designed and established for the old people.

It is necessary that the intergenerational solidarity should be given priority in terms of social support, active labor market, economical support, care support, psychological emotional and spiritual support for the old people.

Active aging will not only have a role in the decrease of geropsychiatric problems but also it will provide morale support to overcome age-related diseases. Therefore, the process of active aging will make a way for the reduction of health expenses because of aging.

The misperceptions of the elderly about aging should be mediated and they should be encouraged to join active aging life style. There is a need for spiritual support services to motivate and help them take active role in active aging period and to make them feel the need of active aging.

Considering that the elderly individuals experience physical and mental health deficiencies and that they feel that they have one foot in the grave, it is necessary to satisfy their mind, logic and soul. This essential need can only be met with an effective and efficient spiritual support service.

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