

Effective Relaxation Techniques to Reduce Stress among Elderly People

JC Helen Shaji *

"Aging is a natural experience not a pathological process." "Good health is the pre requisite for good quality of life, adding life to years." - WHO (2007)

Abstract

Among the many problems being faced by the elderly people, mental stress is perhaps most common. The present study was therefore conducted to assess existing level of stress among 60 elderly persons (majority of them 70-75 years) in old age homes of Chennai in Tamil Nadu and the effect of relaxation techniques. Application of selected relaxation therapies like pranayam and aerobic exercise revealed significant reduction in stress levels of the elderly.

Aging is coming up as one of the biggest challenges the world over. At any age, stress is a part of life, young and old alike have to face difficult situations and overcome obstacles. With increasing age, people are more susceptible to physical, psychological, social and emotional problems. The body's natural relaxation response is a powerful antidote to stress. The healing strategies such as yoga therapy and other relaxation techniques may be helpful in improving their quality of life (QOL) for reducing stress.

According to Census Report of Tamilnadu (2001), in India the total number of population above 60 years of age group is 77 million. In Tamilnadu, the total population above the age group of 60 years is 55,07,400. Among them 32,22,748 of elderly people are living in rural area and 22,84,652 in city.

The Madras Institute of Aging Survey (1995) reported that the number of elderly living in old age homes in India are 21,214 out of which 3,876 are in Tamilnadu. Sreevani (2005) stated that many older adults undergo painful life-style changes including retirement and relocation, loss of spouses, friends and at time even children. These stressful events may lead to depression or may worsen existing mental and physical illnesses. Many studies conducted to compare the quality of life and emotional well-being of elderly in old age home as against those staying in family found that QOL score was lower among elderly people living in old age home.

Objectives

This study sought to assess the existing level of stress among elderly people, find out the effectiveness of selected relaxation techniques in reducing the level of stress among elderly people, and find out the association between the post-test level of stress and their selected demographic variables.

It was postulated that practice of selected relaxation techniques regularly can improve psychological well being among elderly people, which in turn improves their QOL. Developing positive attitude towards practicing selected relaxation techniques will make elderly to inspire others also to practice.

Methodology

It was a quasi experimental study with one group pre-test post-test design in which elderly people in old age homes in Chennai constituted the subjects. The study sample consisted of 60 elderly people. Convenient sampling technique was adopted and modified stress assessment rating scale was used to assess the level of stress.

The inclusion criteria was elderly people above 55 years of age, in both sexes; willingness to participate in the study and their availability during data collection period.

The excluded category comprised those (i) having disturbances in memory; (ii) chronically ill; (iii) having disease conditions which restrict the activity like high blood pressure, heart disease etc. and (iv) having hearing loss, blindness and not using hearing aids.

Description of the Instrument

Demographic data was collected on age, sex, education, duration of residing in old age home, number of children, reason(s) for residing in old age home, supportive system and spirituality.

Modified stress assessment rating scale was used to assess the level of stress. It is a 4-point rating scale which consists of 50 items. Total score was 150.

Score Interpretation

The level of stress was considered 'Low' if score was below 50, 'Moderate' if between 51 - 100 and 'High' when it was in the range of 101-150.

* Professor, MSAJ College of Nursing, Chennai.

Data Collection Procedure

After the written consent from the participants and the incharge of the old age home, first 4 days were utilised for pre-test. Each day 15 samples were interviewed and data was collected. The samples were then gathered in one place where the selected relaxation techniques were explained through video presentation by the investigator and the elderly people were instructed to repeat the procedure; corrections were made in practice. From day 5 to 25, the intervention was given to the participants. The group was divided into 4 sub groups. Morning and evening time was utilised for intervention. The respondents were encouraged to practice in the early morning also. Pranayama therapy was given daily for 20 minutes, aerobic exercise was demonstrated for 3 days per week for 20 minutes. Post-test was conducted from day 26 to 29.

Data Analysis and Statistical Methods

Descriptive statistics was used to assess the level of stress among elderly people. Chi square test was used to analyse the association between the level of stress and their selected demographic variables.

Results

Demographic variables revealed that majority i.e. 36 (60%) of them were between the age group of 70-75 years, 31 (52%) were male and 29 (48%) were females, 39 (65%) of them didn't have any formal education; majority i.e. 46 (77%) were staying in the old age home for around 5 years, 25 (42%) had more than one child and 15 (25%) did not have any issue. Half of the subjects i.e. 30 (50%) were residing in old age home due to abuse and neglect by the children; 22 (37%) got support from their family members whereas 18 (30%) did not get any sort of support. Almost all the elderly were following spiritual practices so as to increase their coping mechanism to let out their stress.

In the pre-test, 9 persons (15%) had high level of stress whereas in the post-test, none of them had high level. Moreover, in the pre-test majority 47 (78%) had moderate level of stress and 4 (7%) had low level. However, in the post-test similar number i.e. 30 (50%) had moderate as well as low level of stress.

The result revealed that selected relaxation therapies (pranayama, and aerobic exercises) were effective ($p < 0.05$) in reducing the stress among elderly people.

There was a significant association between the post-test level of stress and supportive system ($p < 0.05$), which shows that along with stress reduction techniques a good supportive system is helpful in reducing the stress among elderly people. But there was no significant association between the

post-test level of stress and other demographic variables.

Implications

For Nursing Service : Elderly people must be encouraged to participate in relaxation techniques; Nurse as the change agent, can introduce the various relaxation techniques to improve the health status of the elderly people.

For Nursing Education : Imparting the concepts of selected relaxation techniques to nursing students; Nursing students can utilise knowledge on selected relaxation techniques to give health education in the schools, hospitals and community.

Nursing Administration: Nursing personnel can organise continuing nursing education programme on selected relaxation technique in all health sectors.

Nursing Research : The study findings can effectively be utilised by the emerging researchers.

Recommendations

Similar study can be conducted to compare the effectiveness of relaxation techniques on stress among institutionalised and non-institutionalised elderly people. The study can be conducted using control group and in a large scale in order to generalise the findings.

Conclusion

The results of the present study undertaken to assess the effectiveness of selected relaxation techniques in reducing the level of stress among elderly people in old age home showed that 78 percent had moderate level of stress in pre-test which got reduced to 50 percent level of stress in post-test. Thus the selected relaxation techniques were effective in reducing the level of stress among elderly people. Therefore these relaxation techniques can be used to improve the psychological wellbeing of the elderly people residing in old age homes.

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