

Adjustment of the Elderly in Relation to Living Arrangement, Gender and Family Life Satisfaction

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Abstract: This research explored the impact of living arrangement, gender and family life satisfaction on adjustment of the elderly. The study used factorial design, which analyzed the data collected through an Adjustment Inventory and Family life satisfaction Inventory for the elderly from the city of Oyo in the southwestern part of Nigeria. The Adjustment Inventory has 6 measures such as home, social, emotional, self, health and general adjustment. An analysis of variance performed on the data revealed that there is a significant effect of living arrangement on emotional adjustment, gender on general adjustment and family life satisfaction on emotional and general adjustment. The findings, in general, underscore implications of organizing programs for the elderly focusing on strengthening the familial bond with a particular note on the widowed group.

Key words: Living arrangement, family life satisfaction, general adjustment, emotional adjustment, widowhood

INTRODUCTION

The global phenomenon of aging population affects Nigeria too. As per U.N. classification, the African society would progress from a 'mature society to an aging society'. The demographic transition has been accompanied by a social and cultural transition that gives rise to many psychosocial problems for the elderly. The social forces such as modernization and urbanization have not only disrupted the traditional social life of the elderly, but also led to the desertion of the elderly by their children migrating to urban centers. The effects of children leaving home could be one of the emotionally threatening forces by the aged. Losing the spouse is yet another disruptive event in the life of an elderly person. Widowhood in general results in social isolation and loneliness (Bowling and Cartwright, 1993); guilt and anger (Glick, 1994) and increased probability of emotional illness (Ferraro, 1995). Adjustment problems in widowhood should also be seen in the light of shift in the family structure.

The socio-demographic transition gives rise to presenting different types of living arrangement for the elderly. Living arrangement should be treated as an important component of the well-being of the elderly. The elderly regards family residence as the most secure place (Biswas, 2004). However, the traditional family support system of older person is experiencing a change. Researchers show that adjustment of the aged has been treated as a gender based issue. Hence, a study on adjustment of the elderly with specific reference to their

emotional adjustment in relation to living arrangement, gender and family life satisfaction is planned.

The importance of relationship between living arrangement and well-being of the elderly is highly emphasized in the literature. In a study, Lazarus (1989) observed a significant difference between spouse living and spouse not living groups of elderly in emotional and general adjustments. Marital satisfaction is found to be the best predictor of mental health and global happiness for both men and women (Gove *et al.*, 1983).

Also, it was observed that satisfying relationship of elderly spouse and children would contribute to overall satisfaction. Lack of companionship provided by the spouse results in psychological distress among the elderly (Gover and Gover, 2007). A long term longitudinal study by Mussan *et al.* (1982) suggested that there are gender differences in personal and social factors that make adjustment in old age. A significant gender difference was also found in emotional and general adjustments. Peil (1991), Sijuwade (1994) and Oppong (2006) in their investigations revealed that elderly females had significantly, a greater degree of emotional maturity than elderly males. In the area of life satisfaction, it's found that elderly males are more satisfied than females. Liang (1992) found no systematic sex difference in adjustment among the elderly.

Specific studies on the adjustment of the elderly living in various home living arrangements have not been reported in Nigeria. Importance of satisfying family relationships and familial ties for the overall life satisfaction of the elderly are very much stressed in

gerontological literature (Medley, 1996). An exploration on the impact of family life satisfaction on adjustment of the elderly, therefore, deserves much attention. The available studies on family relationship of the Nigerian elderly are limited to certain aspects such as mother-in-law, daughter-in-law conflict, husband and wife communication and intergenerational distance (Obadina, 2005). In Nigeria, there is paucity of studies focusing on the effects of family life satisfaction on adjustment of the elderly in the context of changing living arrangement. The present study is designed to address this gap. This study has brought out a standardized inventory known as 'Family life Satisfaction Inventory for the elderly.'

Problem: The present investigation intends to examine the relationship of living arrangement, gender and family life satisfaction with the general and emotional adjustment of the home living elderly.

Hypotheses: The following null hypotheses were formulated for testing:

- There will be no significant difference in general and emotional adjustment among living arrangement group.
- There will be no significant difference in general and emotional adjustment between male and female elderly.
- There will be no significant relationship between family life satisfaction and general and emotional adjustment.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample: The sample consisted of 100 home-living elderly (56 males and 44 females) in the age group 60-79 years from the city of Oyo in the southwestern part of Nigeria.

Inclusion criteria:

- Persons, male or female (60-79 years of age), resident of Oyo and living in their own homes.
- Persons living with with spouse and children, spouse alone, or the widowed living with children.
- Persons who have their children living within short distance. (This group was also included in the category of people living with spouse and children and the widowed with children).

Exclusion criteria:

- Persons with a diagnosing mental illness or serious health problems.

- Persons.
- living alone at home.
- Persons remarried.
- Persons with no children.
- Persons residing with a relative's family.
- Persons having aged parents.
- Persons living with 4 generations.

A 3 stage random sampling technique was adopted to draw a sample of 100 elderly. The latest electoral-rolls provided the sampling frame. From the electoral rolls, all the males and females aged 60-79 years of age were selected and were numbered serially so that their family units could be identified. The family units were then then arranged serially according to the living arrangement pattern of the elderly, observing nature of the family composition obtained from the electoral rolls. Thus, the final sample comprised 100 elderly.

Measures

Adjustment inventory: This inventory was standardized to measure the adjustment of elderly people. The inventory has 66 items and it is grouped on theoretical grounds into sub-scales; family adjustment, social adjustment, emotional adjustment, self-adjustment and health adjustment. The sub-scale-emotional adjustment has 15 items. High score indicated good adjustment and low score indicated poor adjustment. The test has a reliability correlation coefficient of 0.77 by odd-reliability method. The criterion-related validity of the Inventory was found to be a correlation coefficient of 0.73. 2)

Family life-satisfaction inventory for the elderly: Family-life satisfaction of subjects was measured using a standardized test developed by the investigator for the purpose of the present study. The inventory has 64 items. The Cronbach's Alpha as the index of the internal reliability of the instrument was 0.89 and split-half reliability obtained by applying Spearman Brown prophesy formula was 0.82. The context validity of the instrument was established. High score indicated high level of family life satisfaction.

Analysis of data: Analysis of variance (ANOVA) is chosen as the main tool of analysis. Test of Least Significance Difference is used for post-hoc comparisons. The means and the results of the test of least significance difference are stated along with the concerned discussion. The sample was divided into high, medium and low family life satisfaction groups on the basis of mean and standard deviation of family life satisfaction score. The mean score for the sample is 25.94 with a standard deviation of family

life satisfaction of 9.58. The cut-off point for high family life satisfaction was 35.52 and that for low family life satisfaction was 16.36. The score in between high and low satisfaction formed the medium family life satisfaction group. The terms LA1, LA2 and LA3 used in the analysis denote the elderly living with spouse and children, the elderly living with spouse alone, the widowed elderly living with children, respectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Living arrangement, gender and family life satisfaction in relation to general adjustment.

The relationship of living arrangement, gender and family life satisfaction with general adjustment was investigated by a 3-way ANOVA. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that the effect of family life satisfaction and gender on general adjustment is significant (family life satisfaction; $p < 0.01$; gender; $p < 0.05$). However, living arrangement does not hold an independent effect on general adjustment. Neither pair-wise nor combined interaction of the variance is found to be significant. The study found that the male elderly are more adjusted than the female elderly (males: $m = 34.76$; females: $m = 28.85$). This finding is in line with the studies of Medley (1996). Gender differences in adjustment can be interpreted in the light of the findings of Mancini and Blieszner (1999). They found that the life style of the elderly fathers was different from that of the elderly mothers.

The test of least significance differences with regard to family life satisfaction groups reveals that the 3 groups (low: $m = 18.18$; medium: $m = 31.79$; high: $m = 45.84$) differ significantly from each other in general adjustment. The mean scores show that the higher the level of family life satisfaction, the greater the adjustment. When social roles and activities diminish, family unit becomes an important source of satisfaction for the elderly. Medley (1996) underscores the importance of family life satisfaction for satisfaction in life as a whole by examining interrelationships among variables using path analysis.

Ramamurti (1999) found that satisfying relationship of elderly spouse and children would contribute to their overall satisfaction.

Living arrangement, Gender and Satisfaction in relation to Emotional Adjustment.

The results of a 3-way ANOVA due to living arrangement, gender and family life satisfaction on emotional adjustment are presented in Table 2.

The results show that the effect of living arrangement and family life satisfaction on emotional adjustment is

Table 1: ANOVA: living arrangement, gender, and family life satisfaction as related to General emotional adjustment

Source	Sum of Sq.	Df.	Mean Sq.	F-Ratio	Significant level
Living Arrangement (A)	255.92	2	127.96	2.34	0.098
Gender (B)	240.29	1	240.29	4.40	0.037*
Family L.S. (C)	15754.73	2	7877.37	144.10	0.000**
A and B	101.08	2	50.54	0.92	0.398
A and C	297.79	4	74.45	1.36	0.247
B and C	26.66	2	13.33	0.24	0.784
A, B and C	134.55	4	33.64	0.61	0.652
Error	15415.71	282	54.67		

*Significant; **Highly significant

Table 2: ANOVA: living arrangement, gender and family life satisfaction as related to emotional adjustment

Source	Sum of Sqs.	Df	Mean Sq.	F- Ratio	Significant level
Living arr. (A)	65.14	2	32.57	6.06	0.003**
Gender (B)	2.58	1	2.58	0.48	0.489
Family L.S.(C)	813.44	2	406.72	75.73	0.000**
A and B	3.66	2	1.83	0.34	0.711
A and C	24.59	4	6.15	1.14	0.336
B and C	9.50	2	4.75	0.88	0.414
A, B and C	19.40	4	4.85	0.90	0.462
Error	1514.42	282	5.37		

**Highly significant

highly significant ($p < 0.01$). Gender has no independent effect on emotional adjustment. The interaction effects of variables are not significant. Pair-wise comparison of living arrangement groups shows that the elderly from LA1 group have better emotional adjustment than those of LA2 and LA3 groups.

However, the results indicate that the elderly from LA2 and LA3 are not significantly different in their emotional adjustment (LA1; $m = 6.98$; LA2; $m = 5.28$; LA3; $m = 5.29$). The finding that living arrangement is significantly related to emotional adjustment appears to be somewhat similar to the observation of Bagley (1993). He found that the elderly who migrated with spouse had better mental health than the widowed or separated. Family as an important factor affecting the mental health of the elderly is also supported by Oppong (2006). In this context, Ramamurti's (1999) observation regarding the effect of certain life events on the emotional health of the elderly is relevant. The 'empty nest' feeling arising as a result of the grown-up children leaving home in pursuit of higher education or jobs makes the elderly more lonely.

Moreover, the loss of spouse in old age would deprive the elderly of a long standing emotional bond that had provided an emotional succor and security. The loss, whenever it might occur in later years, leaves the individual lonely and at the mercy of sons and daughters-in-law. Taking all these factors into consideration, it is possible that the elderly living with spouse and children could achieve better emotional adjustment than those who are in the empty nest stage or the widowed elderly living with children.

Pair-wise comparison of family life satisfaction groups shows that there is a significant difference between low and medium, low and high and medium and high satisfaction groups (low; $m = 2.95$; medium; $m = 5.74$; high; $m = 9.07$). The importance of satisfying family relationships for the emotional or psychological well-being of the elderly is reported by Grover and Grover (2007). Grover and Grover (2007) found that family cohesion was one of the significant factors for the mental health of the elderly. They also observed that lack of companionship provided by the spouse resulted in psychological distress among the elderly. Mancini and Blieszner (1999) observes that, looking through intergenerational lens, research on aging shows that quality of parent-child relationships assessed by variables, such as affection and communication is positively related to parental psychological well-being. In short, satisfying family life may be seen as a coping resource to minimize the stressful effects of the emotional experiences of the elderly.

CONCLUSION

The findings, in general, underscores the need to understand the significance of family life satisfaction in determining the emotional adjustment and general adjustment of the elderly. The study also reveals the importance of living arrangement predicting the emotional adjustment of the elderly. Since, the satisfaction derived out of family life and presence of immediate family are important for the well-being of the aged in Nigeria, any kind of programs and policies of the elderly should be focused on strengthening the familial bond. Moreover, the findings also suggest that widowed elderly, as a special group must get priority in the welfare schemes and policies for the elderly if there is ever any in Nigeria.

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