

Emotional Support and the Well-Being of Aged Persons of Bamboutous Division of West Region of Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

Many people associate old age with changes in the functions of the body or body functions but many do not recognize the fact that there are also emotional changes that come with age. As people grow old, their emotional needs also increase. Understanding more about the emotional needs of the elderly can be a great step towards helping to provide the right support. The study used the concurrent triangulation research design. The sample comprised of 250 aged persons purposively selected from 4 subdivisions of the Bamboutous division and 16 social workers purposively selected from the social centers of the same area. The instruments used were a questionnaire and an interview. A null hypothesis was formulated using analysis of variance (ANOVA) at 0.00 level of significance and bi-variate regression was used to test the variables with significant impact on the well-being of aged persons. The findings show that emotional support has a significant effect on the well-being of aged persons in Bamboutos. It was recommended that when providing emotional support to aged persons focus should be on the quality and not just the quantity, so it's not enough to have people around but people who will actually support them. Also each family, community and country should organize emotional support given situations were by aged person always have someone to provide this support like family members, social worker, counselors, psychologists.

KEYWORDS: *Emotional Support, Wellbeing, Aged Persons*

INTRODUCTION

Old age is a normal stage in human development but as normal as it is, it is characterized by events and concerns that make the aged persons to be uncomfortable. These events include: limitations in cognitive and functional abilities (Abdi et al., 2019), emotional and social problems (Singh, 2014). Many changes in terms of physical, psychological, relationships, social, environment, situation, behavior, spiritual and intellectual (Kiau, 2016) also do occur.

There are psychological and social issues related to ageing: the social issues such as living arrangements and type of daily activities influence the older persons risk and experience of illness (Berkman & Kaplan, 2021). The psychological issues include distress that manifests as depression, anxiety, confusion, demoralization and grief. Social issues further includes: loss of ability to fulfill potentials and meet obligations, financial challenges and interruption of

social aspects of everyday life like connectedness, maintaining social networks and the ability to do daily task (Rodriguez-Prat et al., 2016).

According to Ayranci and Ozdag (2004), ageing has been divided into different groups: biological, physiological, emotional and functional. Biological ageing is concerned with changes occurring in the structure and functions of the human body; physiological ageing is concerned with individual and behavioral changes; emotional ageing describes changes in one's attitude and lifestyle and finally functional ageing is the comparison of individuals of the same age group in terms of those within the group being unable to maintain their functions in society (Ayranci, & Ozdag, 2004). All these different groupings give a picture of challenges that are found in the ageing process thus making us to see the need for support of the aged persons. Moreover, old age is

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a situation in which the quality of life decreases, with chronic diseases causing physical, social and emotional aspects of life to deteriorate, requiring extensive care and rehabilitation. This brings a substantial burden on the health and economic status of the elderly, their families and society. Studies have demonstrated that older people having chronic diseases had lower quality of life in comparison to those without chronic disease (Desmukh et al., 2015; Ponirou et al., 2015).

According to Gumaer (2019), some of the emotional needs as identified by the Home care institute include; anxiety about safety due to consciousness of vulnerability, diseases like Alzheimer's creating shortened attention span which leads to impatience, agitation, aggressiveness and loss of confidence, issues of retirement can also cause boredom and depression due to inactivity. Unfortunately, depression is quite common among the elderly added to the feelings of loneliness and isolation. As the years go by, social circles naturally dwindle, friends move, they become busy or pass away, family members also visit less, thus loneliness sets in (Sante'Cares, 2019). As the elderly experience depression, it might lead to lack of self-worth which often culminates in breaking off of emotional connections with people. Emotional support is a desirable quality that can produce in aged persons and their care or support providers a sense of attachment that is intimacy and comfort, also belonging and alliance to others, guidance and assurance of one's worth (Macini & Blieszner, 1992; Weiss 1969, 1974). Low levels of emotional support may create loneliness, isolation, anxiety, uncertainty, a sense that life is meaningless (Rock 1987, Weiss 1974) and vulnerability to stress (Streobe & Streobe, 1995). Equitable exchange of a resource like emotional support creates positive emotion and intimate social contacts, imbalanced exchanges of emotional support creates negative emotions or negative feelings. The perception of the availability of more emotional social support and its reception even under low stress conditions has been linked to positive outcomes such as higher subjective wellbeing the fact that the relations between children and their parents last for a longer time, that is, that a larger number of people live with their family for a longer period is linked to population aging.

Research done by Lawton et al (1994) and Bengston (2001) shows that despite the changes in the social structure (which some estimate weaken the contacts and solidarity between the younger and older generation), vertical family relations are preserved as an important source of social support that never tends

to disappear completely: parents and their (adult) children help each other throughout their entire lives, even when they live in separate households. Adult children and their parents do not break their emotional ties and do not stop providing emotional support. The care for emotional well-being (through the offer of emotional support) is moving in the direction of reciprocity, exchange and codependency.

The new reciprocity ethos amongst family members means that both, parents and adult children, tend to lean towards the development of a mutual understanding 'through talking and listening, sharing thoughts, showing feelings' (Jamieson, 1998). Jamieson talked about 'disclosing intimacy', which is based on verbal communication, deep knowledge and understanding, as well as trust, that is, 'faith that confidences will not be betrayed and privileged knowledge will not be used against the self. Giddens also ascertained that intimacy in late modernity was constructed as a field in which emotion as 'communication, commitment and cooperation with others is especially important' (Giddens, 1992).

Problem statement

In Cameroon like other African countries, ageing is an emerging issue due to the change in cultural system and the traditional family. The population of aged persons of Cameroon like other African countries is increasing, most of them are living in rural areas and they depend greatly on care from family members who are also struggling to cater for their own needs and that of these aged relatives (Aluh, 2021)

According to the Mental Health Foundation (2006), the aged face issues like loneliness and isolation because social networks, friends and mobility have been lost. Even those surrounded by friends and social networks at times can feel lonely due to the absence of meaningful and satisfying relationships in their lives (Lee, 2006). Older people have a lifetime of experience to share but there are barriers to their participation. They want to feel needed and wanted, thus they must be valued and encouraged. Many elderly fear that they will not get old gracefully as such they become stressed up, disengaged and unable to handle change, which can lead to isolation and poor self-esteem. But even though the above challenges have been mentioned, the population of aged persons in Bamboutos keeps increasing and their well-being is been positively affected thus this study seeks to find out the effects of emotional support on the well-being of aged persons.

Method

Participants: 250 aged persons and 16 social workers

Procedure: A letter of authorization from the university was given to the researcher to use in carrying out the research. Upon her arrival on the field, she presented the letter to the delegate of social affairs for Bamboutos Division who gave authorization letters to the researcher to be able to work in the social centers of the different subdivisions. The participants were purposively drawn from the 4 subdivisions of the Bamboutos division. They were selected based on their age range and ability to respond to the questionnaire items. Also 16 social workers were purposively selected to respond to the interview. All participants gave their consent after been assured of anonymity and of the confidentiality of the study.

Measure: Measure of emotional support: This was measured using the likert scale that varies from strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The items used in measuring emotional support were 14 one of which was include; I always have someone to talk to,

Results: The descriptive and inferential statistics were used and analysis was done using the bivariate regression analysis and SPSS version 21.0

Research question: What is the effect of emotional support on the well-being of aged persons in Bambotous?

Table 1: Emotional support of aged persons (ESAP)

Items	SA	A	TOT	D	SD	TOT
I always have someone to talk to	20 (8.0%)	196 (78.4%)	216	34 (13.6%)	0 (0%)	34
I often meet with family members	68 (27.2%)	142 (56.8%)	210	36 (14.4%)	0 (0%)	36
I always have someone who listens to me	48 (19.2%)	172 (68.8%)	220	26 (10.4%)	4 (1.6%)	30
I always receive comfort when I need it.	92 (36.8%)	104 (41.6%)	196	50 (20.0%)	4 (1.6%)	54
I am always reassured no matter what	12 (4.8%)	128 (51.2%)	140	98 (39.2%)	4 (1.6%)	102
I always receive advice from others	20 (8.1%)	96 (39.0%)	116	114 (46.3%)	16 (6.5%)	130
My birthday is always celebrated	4 (1.6%)	84 (33.6%)	88	84 (33.6%)	78 (31.2%)	162
I have people that I trust to help me solve my problems	52 (20.8%)	128 (51.2%)	180	62 (24.8%)	8 (3.2%)	70
I have friends who are more interesting than me	16 (6.5%)	124 (50.4%)	140	102 (41.5%)	4 (1.6%)	106
I have people who are always happy for my accomplishments	16 (6.4%)	176 (70.4%)	192	48 (19.2%)	10 (4.0%)	58
There is someone that I feel comfortable talking about my intimate problems with	36 (14.4%)	148 (59.2%)	184	60 (24.0%)	6 (2.4%)	66
Most people I know think highly of me	68 (27.2%)	80 (32.0%)	148	96 (38.4%)	6 (2.4%)	102
There are several different people I enjoy spending time with	24 (9.6%)	208 (83.2%)	232	12 (4.8%)	6 (2.4%)	18
When I feel lonely there are several people I can talk with	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0
Total	476 (14.7%)	1786 (55.3%)	2262	822 (25.5%)	146 (4.5%)	968
Grand total	2262 (70%)			968 (30%)		

From the frequency table above measuring the construct Emotional Support of Aged Persons (ESAP), 216 of the respondents affirmed that they always have someone to talk to while 34 of them did not affirm to this assertion. Also 210 of the respondents agreed that they often meet with their family members while 36 of them did not agree that they often meet with their family members. 220 of them also asserted that they always have someone who listens to them while 30 of them debunked this claim. 196 of the respondents accepted that they always

receive comfort when they need it while 54 of them did not affirm to this. 140 of them agreed that that they are always reassured no matter what while 102 of them disagreed with this. Moreover, 116 of the respondents affirmed that they always receive advice from others while 130 of them debunked this assertion. Furthermore, 88 of them accepted that their birthdays are always celebrated while 162 of them did not accept this claim. Also, 180 of the aged persons agreed that they have people who can always solve their problems while 70 of them disagreed with this. Also, 140 of them affirmed that they have friends who are more interesting than them while 106 of them did not agree that they have friends who are more interesting than them. 192 of the aged persons also affirmed that they have people who are always happy for their accomplishments while 58 of them debunked this claim. Also, 184 of them agreed that they have no one they feel talking about their intimate problems to while 66 of them did not agree with this assertion. Still, 148 agreed that many people they know feel highly of them while 102 of them did not affirm to this. 232 of the respondents also agreed that there are several different people they like to spend time with while 18 of them debunked this assertion. Therefore, from the table above, 70% of the aged persons affirmed that emotional support has an effect on their psychological wellbeing while 30% of them did not see effect of social support on their psychological wellbeing.

From the interview guide, the respondents who were social workers in the Ministry of social Affairs of the social centers were asked if in their opinions, love, trust, and affection have an effect on the wellbeing of aged persons. 16 (100%) of the social workers affirmed that love, trust and affection which are all indicators of emotional support have an effect on the wellbeing of aged persons. One of the social workers said “yes, especially love and affection, love gives strength to overcome many challenges”. To this social worker, love stands out as the most prominent amongst the others as it affects even the physicality of aged persons by providing them strength which they could use to overcome other challenges and thus affecting positively their wellbeing of aged persons. Another social worker also affirmed to this assertion by saying that

Yes they affect the wellbeing of an aged person in that when aged persons are loved, they are less anxious and show less signs of depression

From this statement above made by a social worker, it shows that when aged persons are loved, anxiety in them reduces and the possibility of them becoming depressed reduces as they will intend have less or no signs of depression. That is love goes a long way to boost the wellbeing of aged persons by reducing anxiety and depression in them. Another social worker said

“Yes, everyone feels great when loved. You feel important when people love you, so the aged also needs love”. To this social worker, the aged persons will feel more important when loved and this will thus go a long way to improve their wellbeing.

Hypothesis 1

Ho₁: Emotional support does not significantly affect the wellbeing of aged persons.

Ha₁: Emotional support significantly affects the wellbeing of aged persons.

Table 1: Emotional support and Wellbeing (Relatedness)

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.682 ^a	.465	.463	1.81771
a. Predictors: (Constant), ESAP				

From the model summary table above, 46.5% of the variability of the wellbeing (meaning of life) of aged persons can be accounted for by the emotional support to these aged persons.

Table 2: ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	644.175	1	644.175	194.965	.000 ^b
	Residual	740.109	224	3.304		
	Total	1384.283	225			
a. Dependent Variable: WBML						
b. Predictors: (Constant), ESAP						

The ANOVA table above reveal that emotional support to aged persons significantly predict their wellbeing (meaning of life), F (1,224) = 194.965, P = 0.000

Table 3: Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	.274	.811		.338	.736
	ESAP	.575	.041	.682	13.963	.000

a. Dependent Variable: PWBML

From the table of coefficients above, the regression intercept is 0.274, and emotional support significantly predict the wellbeing of aged persons (meaning of life).

To conclude, from the quantitative and qualitative analysis done above, it shows that emotional support is an important ingredient which promotes the wellbeing of aged persons.

Discussion: The above findings are consistent with Villines (2022), who found out that emotional support helps a person cope with emotions and experiences. Showing them that they are not alone makes a substantial difference to a person's well-being. She said giving emotional support like listening to a person including aged persons without judgment and showing that you understand by responding emphatically is a way of helping them feel connected and less alone. This is because loneliness is one of the situations that the aged go through, thus when emotionally supported they can easily overcome this.

This is also in line with Suhita (1995), who says emotional support make senior citizens feel loved and have comfortable feelings so they can face problems better, handle uncontrollable situations and influence well-being. This love which can be expressed in the celebration of birthdays, comforting and reassuring aged persons in times of trouble. Also Burleson (2003) say by providing emotional support to another person, you offer them reassurance, acceptance, encouragement and care, making them feel valued and important. When you directly express affection and concern, when you reassure them that they are loved and important, you may help them cope with upset feelings or challenging situations and thus affecting well-being.

Conclusion: The study provides information on the importance of emotional support to the well-being of aged persons especially on their meaning of life. When aged persons see their lives as meaningful they feel well and are more enthusiastic about life. This is vital because the population of aged persons keeps increasing as the days go by and their emotional needs should not be neglected so that they can live long and live well.

Recommendation:

Based on the findings, a great majority of the aged persons experience some form of emotional support but those who do not experience it should not be neglected its hereby recommended that:

1. More awareness campaigns should carried out to explain the importance of emotional support to the well-being of aged persons. These campaigns need to be done on media, cultural associations, churches, schools and other communities.
2. Family members should show more care, love and attention to aged persons to ensure their well-being.
3. The government should consider empowering the local social centers ,that is, add to the present social workers psychologists, counselors, who would amongst other things provide more emotional support to aged persons.
4. Finally the meeting of the aged persons that takes place once a month or once every two months could be rearranged to weekly so as o create more avenues for the aged persons to receive emotional support from each other and from the social workers.

Implications: From the study, it was discovered that even though aged persons face a lot of well-being challenges those of Bamboutos are having a greater experience of a meaningful life because of the emotional support they receive from family, friends and the community as a whole. More emotional support should be provided to aged persons and the findings from this study could be used for the promotion of the well-being of aged persons especially in areas where it has been proven that aged persons are having well-being issues. One of the solutions could be emotional support.

Suggestions for further research: This same study should be carried out in urban areas to verify if the same results will be obtained.

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