

Loneliness, Resilience and Psychological Wellbeing among the Elderly from Kyankwanzi, Rakai and Jinja Districts in Uganda

Mary Oliver Basemera¹ and Baguma Peter^{2*}

¹Department of Psychology, Makerere University, Kampala in Uganda

²Department of Mental Health and Community Psychology, Makerere University in Uganda

*Corresponding Author

Baguma Peter, Department of Psychology, Makerere University, Kampala in Uganda.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to establish the relationship between loneliness, resilience and psychological wellbeing among the elderly in Uganda. The study further assessed whether resilience moderates loneliness with psychological wellbeing. Three hundred participants were selected using simple random and snowball sampling techniques. Correlation and comparative designs were used. To determine the relationship between loneliness, resilience and psychological wellbeing, a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to compute the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. ANOVA was used to determine the difference in loneliness, resilience and psychological wellbeing. Model 1 of PROCESS macro was used to determine the moderation of resilience on loneliness and psychological wellbeing. The background factors such as age, sex, education and occupation levels and districts of the participants were controlled. The study followed a theoretical framework basing mainly on three theories of aging; the activity, disengagement and psychosocial theories. Results revealed that resilience and psychological wellbeing ($r = .48$ $p < .01$), were significantly associated, loneliness and psychological wellbeing ($r = -.35$ $p < .01$) had a negative significant relationship as well as loneliness and resilience ($r = -.56$ $p < .01$). Loneliness had a significant difference between the elderly, whereby Rakai ($M = 34.01$), Kyankwanzi ($M = 27.09$) and Jinja ($M = 44.26$). There was a significant difference in resilience, Kyankwanzi ($M = 56.19$), Rakai ($M = 51.12$) and Jinja ($M = 50.03$). There was no significant difference in psychological wellbeing. Kyankwanzi ($M = 49.39$), Rakai ($M = 45.39$) and Jinja ($M = 46.11$). Results revealed that for all levels of resilience, psychological wellbeing decreases. When psychological wellbeing is high, loneliness is low. Conclusively, it is always important to maintain high levels of resilience and psychological wellbeing among the elderly so as to reduce the impact of loneliness. Further studies would be undertaken to determine other factors that affect psychological wellbeing among the older persons. A qualitative study would be done to determine the impact of loneliness among the elderly.

Keywords: Loneliness, Resilience, Psychological Wellbeing, Elderly

1. Introduction

Loneliness refers to an emotion that causes individuals to react differently in an attempt to cope with it [1]. Loneliness is commonly experienced by all human beings in the course of their lives regardless of age, gender, ability, race, religion or socio-economic status [2]. Some studies confirmed that, loneliness is experienced by all age groups (Mund et al., 2020), though the elderly are more susceptible to feeling lonely. It was reported that the percentage of the elderly suffering from loneliness is usually higher in people aged 80 and above [3]. When people age they are confronted with many challenges such as physical and cognitive decline, experience pain, being affected by disruptive stressors, or loss of family or friends something which may lead to social or emotional loneliness [4]. Additionally, Mansfield et al., (2021) observed that loneliness can be social whereby a person lacks social relationships in terms of quantity and quality,

emotional and a person experiences loss significant others in relationships and existential something which centers around meaning and purpose of existence.

When the elderly experience loneliness, this may lead to decrease and resistance to infections, cognitive decline and mental health conditions such as depression and dementia [5]. These days several factors such as rural-urban migration, wars, poverty, diseases, unemployment, debt crisis, influence of foreign cultures and lack of alternative social systems have interfered with the treasured traditional network which have left the elderly susceptible to loneliness and other stressors [6]. The study based on the activity theory of aging which emphasizes the importance of being an active older person. Involvement in different activities is very beneficial for the psychological wellbeing and resilience of the elderly. That people who remain active and engaged tend

to be happier, healthier, positive self-concept and more in touch with what is going on regardless of their age (Powell & Biggs, 2000). When the elderly experience loneliness, their resilience and psychological wellbeing may be greatly affected. Much as loneliness has adverse effects on the lives of the older persons, little has been done to curb this challenge. Hence, there is need to establish the relationship between loneliness, resilience and psychological wellbeing among the elderly.

1.1. Objective of the Study

To establish the relationship between loneliness and psychological wellbeing among the elderly.

1.2. Literature Review

Loneliness and psychological wellbeing

Loneliness has remarkable effects on psychological wellbeing of the older persons [7]. He further pointed out that the two phenomena; loneliness and psychological wellbeing interact with each other. Defined loneliness as an emotion that causes individuals to react differently in an attempt to cope with it [1]. The older persons noted that being with others focuses their minds on matters other than their own worries and puts any concerns into perspective. Yet with loneliness their minds are greatly affected, and leads them to worry, which in turn affects their psychological wellbeing [8]. Many people experience loneliness in old age, either as a result of living alone or due to lack of close family ties and reduced connections with their culture of origins which results in inability to actively participate in community activities [9]. This is however, contrary to the activity theory and a challenge that affects their sense of self and belonging, and capacity to live happily, as a result their psychological wellbeing is as well affected.

Found that limited contact with others leads to loss of intimacy, which further exacerbates loneliness among the elderly, leading to impaired psychological wellbeing [10]. The older people who tend to be lonely have an impoverished social network, less frequent in-person contact with friends, fewer supportive people in their lives and fewer people who can discuss important matters. This in turn may greatly affect their psychological wellbeing [11]. Observed that loneliness is an individual's subjective experience of lack of satisfying human relationships [12]. This lack brings about a negative feeling causing distress to the older persons and thus impairs their quality of life, psychological wellbeing is inclusive. Hence, the elderly can improve on their psychological wellbeing by having better social relationships that are very fundamental and vital component of human life and has important impact on health as well as psychological wellbeing (Ryan & Willits, 2007) Having good sleep, decreased anxiety and depression, life satisfaction among others can as well improve on the psychological wellbeing of the elderly (Friedam et al., 2017).

According to research findings by expressed their concern on the effect of loneliness on psychological wellbeing especially where they have no social networks or family ties [13]. This situation renders them to feel disconnected to society and as a

consequence maintaining a better psychological wellbeing is difficulty. Observed that the elderly with poor health and poor psychological wellbeing, coupled with anxiety tend to feel isolated and lonely and that loneliness was found to be a high predictor of health and psychological wellbeing [14]. Pointed out that loneliness is looked at as a strong predictor that worsens the psychological wellbeing of the elderly and it may easily escalate their process of death [15]. Holt-Lunstad et al., (2015) observed that loneliness increases the risk of dementia, stroke and overall mortality and this would in turn have a greater impact on the psychological wellbeing of the elderly.

Vander (2012) found that persistent loneliness and being very lonely is destructive to the psychological wellbeing of the elderly. He further noted that loneliness doesn't only affect psychological wellbeing, but it is a precursor to psychological disorders, mental health problems, depression and suicide. The elderly who live alone have a poor quality of life and health compared to those who live with others. Due to lack of social integration, loneliness becomes a problem that has a great impact on the psychological wellbeing of the elderly (Lim & Kuo, 2011). However, if the elderly had good family or social ties this would help them to battle the consequences of loneliness since social or family ties have a number of benefits such as improved health and psychological wellbeing, reduced risks of infections, illness, cardiovascular diseases, overall cognitive and physical decline among others (Crittenden, et al., 2014). Furthermore social ties can as well provide a platform an exchange of emotional, psychological and material support (Ali et al., 2018) and this would in turn be helpful in reducing loneliness and thereby improve the psychological wellbeing of the elderly.

Loneliness is associated with unhealthy lifestyle behavior such as less physical activities, obesity and smoking something that can lead to poor psychological wellbeing (Richard et al., 2017). However, when it comes to a persistent state, then loneliness has deleterious effect on psychological being of the aged. Additionally, the psychological wellbeing of the elderly would be impaired by loneliness due to its detrimental effects on the physical and mental health such as cardiovascular diseases (Hodgson et al., 2020) stress perception, depression and suicidal ideations (Geller, 2020). Jhan and Shneen (2014) observed that loneliness has a negative impact on the psychological wellbeing of the elderly. Stephanie (2007) also observed that loneliness has adverse effect on psychological wellbeing of the elderly especially where they have no social networks or family ties.

Much as loneliness has adverse effect on the psychological wellbeing of the elderly, leisure activities can be of much help. These leisure activities are used as interventions to prevent and alleviate loneliness (Teopoeel, 2013). Loneliness has a much stronger impact on the psychological wellbeing of the elderly and the situation would be worsened where social relations were not satisfying. Braam et al., (2011) observed that loneliness significantly impacts on the psychological wellbeing of the elderly and this may increase the predisposed risks of suicide among older persons.

1.3. Hypothesis

There is a significant relationship between loneliness and psychological wellbeing

2. Methodology

2.1. Introduction

In this study the researcher's actions and beliefs were guided by standards or principles referred to as paradigm. I used a research paradigm of the positivist approach which is associated with quantitative research strategy. A correlation research design was used to establish the relationship between loneliness and psychological wellbeing. This research design seeks to establish a relation, an association or correlation between two or more variables that do not readily lend themselves to experimental manipulation. This research design was used because it establishes the relationship between variables (Onen & Oso, 2008). This research design has some advantage. Some of its advantages are: it allows the researcher to study the link between variables that could not be studied in any other way, although this research design does not establish a causal relationship, it suggests possible avenues of further clinical examination of variables that may not otherwise be tested, it can be used to study variables that are not easily produced in the laboratory and it is rather cheaper when it comes to data collection using questionnaires among others (Gregory, 2013).

2.2. Population

The study targeted older persons aged 60 years and above from three districts of Kyankwanzi, Rakai and Jinja. Kyankwanzi is in the Northern Central part of Uganda and the population of the aged comprised 4,435 males and 4,558 females. Rakai is in the Southern part of Uganda and comprised a population of 10,968

males and 13, 923 females of the aged. Jinja is in the Eastern part of Uganda and the population of the aged comprised 6,885 males and 9,218 females.

2.3. Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

300 elderly people were selected to participate in the study using the table of Klejcie & Morgan (1970). A simple random sampling technique by use of lottery method was used in the selection of the desired sample size of 100 elderly from the district of Kyankwanzi who were beneficiaries of the government grants or financial support through Social Assistance Grant and Empowerment (SAGE) program. This technique was used since it provides equal opportunity for the respondents to be selected. 100 elderly people were selected by use of snowball sampling techniques from the Rakai and 100 from Jinja Districts. This technique was used because the participants were scattered from their respective localities.

2.4. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in research are critical ethics which include norms or standard of conduct that distinguish between right and wrong. They therefore help in determining the difference between acceptable and an acceptable behavior. In other words, research ethics requirements on daily work, the protection of the dignity of respondents or subjects and publication of the information in research (Kelman, 1997). Other ethical considerations include; respect for privacy, confidentiality, anonymity, beneficence-non maleficence among others

2.5. Findings

Findings for the hypothesis: Loneliness and psychological wellbeing

Variables	Mean	SD	A	Loneliness	Resilience	Psychological wellbeing
Loneliness	35.20	12.30	.90	1		
Resilience	52.42	.9.33	.86	-.56**	1	
Psychological wellbeing	2.603	.294	.64	-.35**	.48**	1

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Variables

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The hypothesis in the study stated that "There is a significant relationship between loneliness and psychological wellbeing among the elderly. The results in Table 1 shows that there is a negative significant relationship between loneliness and psychological wellbeing among the elderly ($r = -.35$, $p < .01$). This implies the older persons who might be lonely or experiencing loneliness, their psychological wellbeing might be low or poor. Hence, their psychological wellbeing might be greatly affected. In other words if loneliness increases, the psychological wellbeing decreases. Since there is a negative significant relationship between loneliness and psychological wellbeing, this hypothesis that stated there is a significant relationship between loneliness and psychological wellbeing was rejected.

3. Discussion

Hypothesis: There is a significant relationship between

loneliness and psychological wellbeing. The results revealed a negative significant relationship between the two variables. This would mean that the older persons who experience loneliness their psychological wellbeing may be affected to a certain extent more so when their psychological wellbeing is low. Furthermore if the older person's psychological wellbeing is not high, he/she may greatly be affected by loneliness which is known to be with remarkable effects on psychological wellbeing [7]. Some of the remarkable effects of loneliness may include; lowered psychological wellbeing, severe anxiety and depression and impaired self-regulation [16, 17]. The older persons who experience have a poor emotion regulation and may not be able to use positive feelings to alleviate their negative moods or feelings of loneliness [18]. This would in turn affect their psychological wellbeing, something which is in line with the findings that revealed a negative significant relationship between loneliness and psychological wellbeing.

The results revealed a negative significant relationship between

loneliness and psychological wellbeing. This means that sometimes loneliness has a strong impact on psychological wellbeing of the elderly especially when their psychological wellbeing is low. The older persons should therefore, be helped to keep physically fit, do regular exercises and activities as emphasized by the activity theory of aging. Enhancing their psychological wellbeing also requires controlled diet and maintaining positive thinking (Park & Lee, 2007). This would help them not be greatly affected by loneliness. Although results revealed a negative significant relationship between the two variables, if the older persons participate in leisure activities such as visiting friends, having a wider social network or regular contacts, with friends and family members, hobbies and other social activities this would help them to reduce on the impact of loneliness and increase their psychological wellbeing (Pettigrew, 2007).

Much as loneliness has a negative significant relationship with psychological wellbeing, some older persons are resilient, happy and contented with their lives or have a sense of purpose and meaning in life their psychological wellbeing remains intact even when they experience loneliness. Furthermore, although the results revealed a negative significant relationship between loneliness and psychological wellbeing, if the elderly are helped to improve on their psychological wellbeing, they may not be greatly affected by loneliness.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

4.1. Conclusion

Results revealed a negative significant relationship between loneliness and psychological wellbeing. If the older persons have low psychological wellbeing, loneliness might greatly affect their psychological wellbeing. Hence, they need to improve on their psychological wellbeing or maintain a high psychological wellbeing so as to reduce on the impact of loneliness. All in all, it is important to note that when trying to reduce loneliness among the elderly, counseling psychologists, psychologists and clinical psychologists should first and foremost identify the causes of loneliness and effects. This would help them to come up with appropriate solutions to the challenge of loneliness. Furthermore, the older persons should be encouraged to remain active as explained by the activity theory and the psychosocial theory which enhances successful aging rather than the disengagement theory of aging that endorses withdrawal from active life.

4.2. Recommendation

Since loneliness was found to be affecting psychological wellbeing of the elderly, practicing counselors and government should establish wangled care homes or centers where the older person's psychological wellbeing could be taken care of by multifaceted professions such as counseling psychologists, clinical psychologists, gerontologist and doctors among others [19].

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