The Roles of Elderly People from Their Own Perspective

Maryam Ravanipour
PhD. in Nursing
The Persian Gulf Tropical Medicine Research Center, Bushehr University of Medical Sciences, Bushehr, IRAN

Fatemeh Hajinejad
MSc in Nursing
Faculty of Nursing & Midwifery, Bushehr University of Medical Sciences, Bushehr, IRAN.
The number of elderly is increasing in Iran as well as in the world.

In the past, the elderly were sources of power in the family and they were respected by the society; they were nurturing roles and they were guardians of traditions.

However, there are concerns that the changes in modern societies and family structures may reduce the importance, power, role and value of the elderly and cause irreparable damages.

Cooperation with the elderly and preventing them from having a passive role in the family can help to put of abuse.
• Studies have shown that people are satisfied with themselves as long as they can play their roles in life and do their own daily activities, even when they have chronic health problems.

• Their roles in the family are often a result of the investments they put as a family member over years.

• Since the roles elders play have significant implications for their mental and physical health, the findings may be helpful to health care professionals and social service providers.

• Moreover, there are limited information available regarding the roles of Iranian seniors in family and society; we decided to determine this concept from the perspective of the elderly.
Method:

- A qualitative content analysis was used for this study.
- Participants were selected using criterion-based and purposive sampling among older adults aged 60 or older which were interested, willing, and able to explain and share their experiences, beliefs, and feelings concerning their roles in the life.
- Twenty-two older people who met these criteria participated in the study.
Three main questions were asked: “What do you think about your roles? What do you think your roles are for? How do you like your roles to be?”

The duration of each interview session varied between 30 to 90 minutes, based on the participants' tolerance and interests.

The analysis stages include: finding meaning units, condensing, abstracting content area that address a specific topic in an interview, emerging codes, categories.
• Credibility was enhanced through the validation of emerging codes and categories in the subsequent interviews, and the debriefing with the colleagues. Using member checking and peer checking attested to the confirmability of the findings.

• All of the participants were notified of the purpose of the study. They all provided oral and written consents.
Findings:
Coding and categorizing the meaning units leads us into two major categories of:

- **Referral Role**
  - Problem solving
  - Maintaining Secrets
  - Being the leader

- **Supportive Role**
  - Security provider
  - The role of financial supporter
Referral Role

A person who used the abilities and experiences to help people and to gain a proper social place.

- **Problem solving**

Putting effort into solving the problems of others.

A senior told: "solving any problem brings some kind of joy to a person. If you solve your own problem, you will feel a sort of peace. But if you help others to overcome their problems you will gain a bigger joy and you can make others satisfied."
Maintaining Secrets

As a source of power and self control by the ability to maintain the secrets of others and their own.

An old lady said: “if a problem occurs for my children, I will keep to myself.”

Being the leader

As the oldest person of the family, they feel that got a position of leadership, which is accepted by the all the family members.

One of the old female participants stated: “seniors take over the leadership role. A senior member of the family wants to make the other members to be friends with each other and get them in a relationship together.”
Supportive Role
Cooperation, help and supports that the elders provide for their friends and family members.

- *Security provider*

helping in home affairs, strengthening the life of their children and preserving the integrity and continuity of the family.

A senior said: "My two girls pay much attention to me. I feel that my presence in the house gives them a sense of confidence and security."
The role of financial supporter

Several of the participants still financially provided their family. However, at some points, because of their retirement and decreases in their salary, they were under pressure.

A widowed participant said: "Thank God I have no financial problems. God bless my husband. With the money he left, I can maintain my life. Now, I'm not financially dependent to others. I even help my children when they have economic problems and need money. They need me financially but I don’t need them."
Discussion:
A study on the effect of housing on the mental health of older people in London, 2011 depicts that a relative importance of housing and financial security on health increases during working life and retirement (Howden-Chapman et al., 2011).

A cross-sectional study on a total of 227 long-term nursing home residents 65 years and older without cognitive impairment in 2010, in western Norway concluded that social support, and emotional closeness to significant others from which one derives a sense of security appears to be important for loneliness (Drageset et al., 2011).
A study conducted in Turkey showed that in comparison to young women, older women have more freedom and can participate in decision making and make decisions about daily decisions or choose the type of cloths. This may be a result of the respects that the society gives the elderly. It can also be explained by the loss of the dominant position of men in that age which is due to their retirement (Keskinoglu et al., 2007).
A study has done on near 2000 older people living in Razavi Khorasan province, Iran, by the Persian version of the Geriatric depression scale-15. The GDS score was significantly related to type of living (alone or with family), source of income, and supporting system (such as charities) (p<0.01).

The depression scores in elderly with family support was significantly higher than those living with personal wealth and retirement salary (p<0.01)(Majdi et al., 2011).
In Iranian history and religion, taking care of the elderly has been one of the major commitments for the families, therefore, most families are seriously opposed to let their old patients live in institutional homes. In order to achieve a better life for the old population and their family we should create new roles for the old people in society to keep their independence, to lead productive and purposeful lives, and to encourage those who are still capable to remain in the work force. Supporting and enhancing the traditional systems of family care through the help of support groups and social workers (Noroozian, 2012).
• Conclusion:
According to the importance of elderly life roles, it seems that educational interventions are needed in order to increase the knowledge and attitude of the elderly, their companions and caregivers regarding elderly life roles and to improve their sense of worth and empowerment.
References:


Thank you for your attention