

## A study of elderly life experiences as potential conditions for reducing risk factors of chronic diseases.

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** The human life span has different phases, the final stage of which is old age, is not itself a disease, but elderly people are more liable to chronic illnesses than young people. Many chronic diseases affect all aspects of the elderly life and this indicates the need for the continuous or periodic changes in the physical, occupational and social activities. This research aimed to study the elderly life experiences as potential conditions for reducing risk factors of chronic diseases.

**Materials & Methods:** This study applied phenomenology method. The purposive sampling was conducted among those elderly came to the parks to spend their spare time and they interviewed deeply. The data was analyzed through Colaizzi method.

**Results:** The interviews were analyzed and the related concepts were extracted as the initial codes that were classified in to 5 themes including: leisure time, spending time, freshness, peace of mind and memories.

**Conclusion:** Of primary concern are age-associated changes and the presence of multiple chronic diseases. Moreover, the healthy life style in an ageing period requires increasing the expertise and attention of all chairmen and planners especially in the public education field. This study showed that everyday activities of the elderly are a stroll in the park to help the m to prevent chronic diseases.

**Keywords:** Leisure time, Stroll in the park, Freshness, Peace of mind, Chronic diseases.

### Introduction

The human life span has different phases, the final stage of which is old age, is not itself a disease (1) however, elderly people are more liable to chronic illnesses than young people (2) and they are at greater risk of having chronic disabilities . These changes make elderly people more prone to health problems so that 80% of elderly people (65 years and over) have one or more chronic diseases and about 50% of this group have activity limitations (3). According to WHO the most common health problems in elderly persons are: osteoporosis, vision, hearing, mental health, incontinence, stroke and falls. However, there is not enough information to determine the morbidity trends in various

populations, particularly in the elderly but the majority of people who live to extreme old age will experience a period during which some functions become impaired (4).

The aged population is our country's greatest user of scarce health resources because of their high incidence of chronic and acute illnesses. Related to this is the issue of impaired independence in activities of daily Living (eating, bathing, continence, mobility, communication leisure activities, and social skills (5).

Older people are more likely to suffer from chronic disease than younger people because of increasing the life expectancy, improving health system and new life style amongst the community (6). Life style is changing with

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increasing the life expectancy and the pattern of diseases has been changed from the acute diseases to the chronic diseases as a result of industrialization (7). The chronic diseases affect all aspects of the patient's life. In chronic diseases, like acute diseases, all life activities become disrupted during a temporary phase (8). Despite of this fact, chronic diseases may require the continuous or periodic changes in the physical, occupational and social activities (9). On the other hand, an outbreak of the non-contagious chronic diseases relates to the change of nutrition pattern and lifestyle. Moreover, increasing the blood pressure, diabetes, cancers and cardiovascular diseases are resulted from changing the lifestyle (10).

The recent studies have shown that 80% of the elderly affected by -at least- one chronic disease, can be exposed to the danger of disability and death more than others (11). Improvement the life condition, increase the length of life and life expectancy have been made special phase in human life which has been defined as an ageing and generally followed by retirement in the urban communities. In traditional communities, retirement period is synonymous with disability and physiological ageing (12). The developed countries were among the first nations which experienced an ageing but recently, this case has been revealed in the most of developing countries and, in the near future, most of countries will encounter an ageing phenomena (13). According to the report of WHO, there were nearly 200 million elderly people in all over the world over in 1950 that this figure reached to 350 million in 1975. It is estimated that this figure will exceed one billion and 100 million elderly by 2025 (14).

In Iran, we had more than 5 million people with 60 years of age in 2006 which included 7.3% of total country population. However, the number of the elderly people in the urban areas reached from nearly 2.25 million people

in 1996 to 3,28 million people in 2006 (15), as such, during the period of 10 years, population of the elderly people in the urban areas has been 1.5 times while, during the same period, the number of the elderly people in the rural areas increased much more slowly than urban areas and reached from 1.73 million in 1996 to 1.84 million in 2006. Considering that nearly 6.6% of the total population of 65 million people in 1995 and 7.2% of the total population of 70 million people in 2004 were 60 years old and over, it is estimated that it will reach to ten million by 2019 (16). Totally, during the years of 1375-1385, the growth of population with 70 years of age and older, in comparison with 60 years of age and over, and the growth of population with 80 years of age and over, in comparison with 70 years of ages and over has been more and this indicates that population getting older especially population of our elderly (15).

On the other hand, by reducing the employment time and getting retired the people in 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> decade of life, the elderly (even when they are physically and mentally can be employed), have been abandoned inevitably and they may feel worthlessness and uselessness (17), while some of the elderly choose the passive method against the problem (18). As a result of ageing process and reducing the activities and seclusion or disability in doing daily task they will be forced to the care centers (19).

An ageing period is accompanied by reducing the mental and physical activities and the elderly are not able to take part in the social activities, such as activities related to leisure times; therefore, they need our attention and support to seek comfort and peace of mind (20).

Therefore, ageing process will impose constraints on leisure time. On the other hand, lack or shortage of recreational and cultural centers and necessary equipments for the elderly to spend their leisure time as well

as, reducing their ability to do some recreational activities which need enough physical power, make the most of elderly spend last years of their lives at home, sit in front of the house, in green space of their neighborhood or in the parks if possible for them. Considering that the elderly have long leisure time, they may feel deep exhaustion, depression and blame if there were no appropriate plan and necessary equipments to spend their leisure time (21). Moreover, Increasing age is also associated with chronic diseases so elderly people are more prone to chronic diseases (22), this means increasing cost of health care for community, while, most of elderly population are in retirement and financially not able to pay cost of health care (23). Most of elderly are in need of rehabilitation services in the area of mobility, muscular, visual, hearing and mental health services. The researches of Iran Health Ministry have been shown that the elderly suffer from kinds of diseases such as blood pressure, hearing and visual impair, urinary incontinence, constipation and diabetes (24). What is arisen as the increasing trend of the elderly population in Iran is not important by itself but the effects of this increase on different social and economical dimensions, including health and treatment resources, will be important and needs serious studies (25). The elderly problems have not still been revealed critically because of the current population structure but the health systems will have encounter with it in the future (19). Therefore, it is necessary that a comprehensive plan to be made just now to deal with the issue effectively. This plan requires the detailed understanding of current status and the need of this population group. In spite of general policy of trying to provide the elderly with care services in the outpatients centers, homes, and the hospitals, still are the main place to provide the elderly who affected by severe diseases with care (26).

By ongoing increase of number of the elderly, it is estimated that the greatest amount of work activities of each nurse being spent to take care of the elderly and mostly, each nurse will get involved in taking care of the elderly in the acute care setting (27). Nurses working in acute care will increasingly need to be given the skills and knowledge of clinical specialties to be able to provide the necessary elderly care effectively; therefore, gerontology science and elderly care should be covered by nursing curriculum. Moreover, the nurses have an effective role on maintaining the health of people and especially the elderly; therefore, the nurses need enough and comprehensive information related to the elderly to fulfill such responsibility (16). In such context, the aim of this study was to study the elderly life experiences as potential conditions for reducing risk factors of chronic diseases by reviewing the nature of the elderly's life experiences as a vulnerable group to chronic diseases.

### **Materials and Methods**

The studied issue of this investigation was to understand the nature of the elderly life experiences who spend their daily lives in Isfahan city's parks; therefore, this research applied a qualitative method with a phenomenology approach which is an appropriated method to describe the meaning of life experience (27). Burns and Grove (2010) emphasized that the phenomenological research is a humanistic study that is conducted through different methods in accordance with the researcher philosophy (28). The aim of this kind of study is to describe the phenomena as experienced by participants. The study population consisted of those elderly used to go to the parks and the samples were selected amongst them purposefully. In purposive sampling, researchers try to select the participants of sample among who have

enough experiences in the studied field. In this study, sampling carried out until the information reached saturation point. Information saturation take places when researchers recognize the codes and meaning extracted from data as repetitive without any new code. In this study, number of samples reached to 10 participants as much as it was necessary for such study (29).

In this study, data were collected by unstructured interview to get deep information about phenomenon. As the recording interviews on tape is the best way to record all statements and words, the researchers don't forget the important answers and can pay attention to the participants nonverbal gestures and make eye contact (30). In this study, researchers asked participants' permission for interviewing and researcher assured that the information and the participants statements would keep confidential as much as possible. All interviews were recorded on tape, interview were started by an open question to allow the participants to describe their experience about the considered phenomenon completely. Time and place of interviews were determined through coordinating with participants. The interviews were carried out in the parks and on a bench and face-to-face. This method increases the quality of records and also allows participants to speak without interruption. Length of the interview time depends on the participants, subject of interview and methodology of research. In this study, considering the free time of interviewers, maximum time of interview was 30-40 minutes. In unstructured interview, the researcher uses open questions such as what experience do you have of...? that this question has no distinct answer. The usage of this question is to allow the respondent to describe the experience freely so, the interviews started with a general and comprehensive question: How do you spend your spare time in the park?

And the next questions asked during interview and with relation to the statements and conditions of participants. Moreover, researcher paid attention to the non-verbal gestures like crying and voice tone of participants during the interview and made a field note.

All recorded interviews were analyzed following Colazzi method. After carried out each interview, the researcher listened to the recorded interviews carefully and repeatedly and transcribed them word-by-word on interview book. In the next step researchers read the transcripts deeply and highlighted the words or sentences related to the phenomenon (28). In the third stage, researchers formulated and extracted each sentence as primary codes. In the 4<sup>th</sup> phase, the primary codes were combined as the complete description of the phenomenon under study to get the clear whole concept of phenomenon without ambiguity.

At the end, the final validity was obtained by refereeing the finding to the participants to check the accuracy of study. Validity which means the expression achieved by the experiences would be real for the ones who actually shared them as it was considered in the present study.

Transferability means whether the findings in a field could be transferred to similar participants or situations, transferability of findings were obtain by considering the variety of participants. Dependability was achieved when the participants replied identically and no contradiction was observed in their replies (31).

### **Ethical considerations**

The researchers introduced themselves to the participants. The purpose of the study and the study process were also explained to them. The permissions were obtained from the participants for taking part in the interviews and recording their voices. In addition, they were assured that they were free to cease

cooperation in every stage of the interview or the research. Researcher assured that the personal information would not be revealed (29).

### Results

According to the first phase of Colazzi, at the end of each interview, each transcript, were read, then words and statements related to the under-study phenomenon were underlined and the important concepts determined. For example, the participant number 2 states:

**I spend my leisure time in the park, take exercise and go hiking...**

The underlined parts are the most important statements which related to under-study phenomenon . At the third phase, the primary codes were extracted from these statements. In this manner, more than 380 codes extracted. Examples of primary codes presented in table 1. According to the 4<sup>th</sup> phase of Colazzi, the primary codes classified into conceptual categories so much so that main themes appeared which represented in table 2 and discussed. These themes are included: leisure time, spending time, freshness, peace of mind, life memories

**Table1: Examples of classification of the initial codes in to the conceptual categories**

Initial codes	Conceptual categories
Taking a nap	Rest
Rest	
Sleeping	
Spend time with family on Friday	Putting importance on family Family friendly
Interested in family	
Have lunch with family	
Gathering together the family member	
Being together with family is the best fun	Intolerance of stay-at-home Reduction the physical ability
Accompanying the family member	
I feel good with my grandchildren	
If men stay at home, they go mad	
I can't do anything	An outdoor walk Economical problem
I don't have physical ability anymore	
Foot pain and heart pain	
I can't do many thing I did in the past	
Sitting in the park	Variety Seeking Seeking relaxation
Income and expenditure don't fit together	
Received salary is not enough to live	
Park is exhausting	
I don't like crowded around	Ageing
When you are alone, talking to water make you relaxed	
It is certain comfort with flower and water and landscape	
Changing of mood in the park	
I like the calmness exists in the park	Feeling a pain
Our stress being removed and our mood changed	
Retirement will be good if not followed by any problem	
Retirement is followed by other problems	
I am aching all over	

**Table 2: Examples of classification of conceptual categories in to the themes of phenomenon**

Conceptual categories	Themes
Early rising	Peace of mind
Rest	
Interests/variety seeking	Free time
An outdoor walk	
Study	
Getting information	Freshness
Seeking relaxation	
Sense of satisfaction	
Sense of pleasure	
Relaxation	
Sense of inclusion	Spending time
Spending time	
Daily activity	
Not watching TV	
Returning to the past memories	Memories

### Discussion

Within an ageing and retirement period, wide range of daily life factors changes in addition to the mundane issues and leisure time which each of them effects the satisfaction of life. Findings of this research indicate the experiences of the elderly who go to the Isfahan parks and those included leisure time, spending time, freshness, peace of mind and memories which have been discussed as follows.

**Leisure time:** The findings indicated that the elderly turned to the different activities to spend their spare times; their activities included an outdoors walking, reading magazines, obtaining information by meeting the former colleagues in the park, some of them- regarding their interests - were seeking diverse activities and in other opinion, attending in the park was wasting time and these findings classified in a subject cluster. In this area, we refer to 2 statements of the participants:

Participant no. 7 said that: when I come to the park I just learn what is going on, my friends inform me when the pension or allowance were paid to my account.

Participant no. 4 said that: when I feel heavy-hearted, I come here for an outdoor walking. An ageing process inevitably consists of reduction the mental and physical activities and as a result, it reduces the ability to take part in the social activities or leisure time activities. Therefore, the ageing process imposes constraints on leisure times (33). On the other hand, lack or shortage of recreational and cultural centers and necessary equipment for the elderly to spend their leisure times lead, the reducing their ability to do some recreational activities which need enough physical power(27) force the most of elderly to spend last years of their lives at home, sit in front of the house or if they can walk go to the parks or in green space of their neighborhood.

**Spending time:** The participants emphasized that they spent their time on doing daily activities or in the parks and even not in mood of watching film. In this area, one the participant stated that:

I have no plan; if I don't come to the park, I can't stand home, it is difficult for me to stay at home and here I haven't anything to do too.(participant no.8)

If there were no appropriate plans and necessary equipments for the elderly to spend leisure time, they may feel intense exhaustion and depression. Therefore, they turn to the park during the retirement period to spend the hard days of unemployment (34).

**Freshness:** That group of the elderly who seeking for the peace of mind, encountered the experiences such as sense of satisfaction and pleasure of leisure time and enjoyed peace of mind because they had experienced the sense of being included.

Thanks Allah , now I have an opportunity to enjoy my time, drop in on my children and grandchildren, travel and take best advantage of the park. (participant no.2)

An ageing process can be a good period, it is period of vitality, cheerfulness, freshness, glory and will. In the past, psychology focused on the negative emotions such as stress and depression more than positive emotions such as happiness, freshness and satisfaction of life. The happiness and freshness are such important issues to study that have been drawn the attention of the old theorist researchers of depression. One of this researchers is Seligman who believes that it is better that the happiness and freshness be paid attention rather than depression(35). In Orlan opinion, sense of comfort and peace of mind is synonymous with health(36). The physical activities which the adults aged 65 years and elder do in leisure time are included walking, gardening, sightseeing and swimming; from transportation dimension, it can be included a bicycle ride and from the occupational dimension - if they are still employed – they included occupational tasks and home activities such as different kinds of sport games or planned exercise in the field of society, family and daily activity(37).

**Memories:** Reminding the past memories is considered as part of sense of satisfaction in the elderly specially in the group of friends

and when it was about the abilities and successes achieved by the elderly. Reminding the memories in the crises help them to form their character again and return to the life. The main function of continuously reminding the memories is to help people feel self-acceptance and deal with their problems so that they can understand the meaning of the life and sense of inclusion to the others. In this case, one of the participants stated that: when I remind my memories, I fell comfort, all I have done in the past were to help others with no betrayal, no fraud and no oppression, thank Allah (participant no.5)

Reminding the memories makes the self-esteem and social cordiality increase by refreshing the past memories (32). The results indicated that reminding the memories promotes the life quality of the elderly physically and mentally. Considering that the elderly have many numerous reasons to feel depression and stress such as loneliness, sense of worthlessness and uselessness, experience of loss, economical problems and being not able to spend leisure times. Also considering that stress and depression related to the emotional components, it seems that the elderly can release their negative and positive emotions of the past by reminding their memories in the group of friends and make up with the present and this issue can result in changing the elderly attitude (14). On the other hand, it makes the elderly feel usefulness and increases their self-confidence and as a result amount of depression, stress and isolation of the elderly would have decreased (36).

Physical problems are common for the elderly people such as foot problems that are the most distressing and disabling afflictions associated with old age. There are many factors that contribute to the development of foot problems in older persons. Of primary concern are age-associated changes and the presence of multiple chronic diseases. Other

significant factors include the amount of walking limitations in activity due to other causes, the length of any preceding time in hospital or institutional care, the degree of social isolation, emotional adjustments to disease and life in general, and the effects of multiple medication (35). Elderly people who get upper respiratory infections are more prone to serious problems than younger people. Of these, chronic bronchitis, pneumonia, chronic sinusitis, chronic throat and ear infection are common (6). In general, the process of normal ageing results in a decline of lung function characterized by decreases in both vital capacity and increase in residual lung volume (37). As people get older, they are more subject to chronic health problems, necessitating frequent use of both health care and social services, they are major users of hospital services, with some 45 percent of acute hospital beds (22).

Elderly people who get upper respiratory infections are more prone to serious problems than younger people. Of these, chronic bronchitis, pneumonia, chronic sinusitis, chronic throat and ear infection are common. diseases causing chronic air way obstruction are a major source of illness and death in the elderly population. In general, the process of normal ageing results in a decline of lung function characterised by decreases in both vital capacity and increase in residual lung volume (37). There are some respiratory problems in elderly people which effect lung capacity and function and make life difficult for them. The important changes in this system are: decreased gas exchange and diffusing capacity, increase in residual lung volume, decrease in vital capacity and decreased cough efficiency.

Older people with active people of the same age and argued that there was a 10-20% decline in maximum oxygen uptake in the former group. In the oral cavity, dental decay and gum recession can lead to inadequate

dentition. Salivary flow, too, is reduced in individuals after the age of 65 (25).

Retirement is an evolution and a transition from a role to another role. For such an evolution, people should adapt themselves to the change of role. Retirement makes a deep pause in life of people; they being separated from their past time and encountered their new status and being forced to adapt themselves to it. Results of a study showed that in London and America 80% of people who are at the age of 60, still, have high power of mind and enjoy complete health so that they are still able to work. Now a question is arisen that regarding the age of retirement, what should people do with this leisure time given to them? This issue will be followed by the depression, stress and sometimes astonishment for who hadn't predicted this occasion or hadn't prepared the ground for it before (38).

### **Conclusion**

During an aging process, the lifestyle is affected by the factors such as an economical, social, geographical and training status, attitude and physical features (39). Getting old is followed by the physical changes, specially reduction the visual, hearing, testing and smell power and reduction the body strength, and body conforming and reaction speed against the stimulus. According to the studies of the west social analysts and researchers, one of most important reasons of this issue is the psychological and spiritual shocks which given to some of the elderly at the first phase of retirement period (40). During the first years of retirement, most of retired people feel monotony and idleness and this sense will impel them to seclusion and can result in the chronic diseases and death if this condition continues. Moreover, failing to solve the problems and difficulties being appeared after retirement impels the elderly to the intense depression and psychosis and



in the end, results in death. Considering that the healthcare system emphasizes on the initial prevention, preparing for the retirement will be a preventive measure and needs enough information related to the retirement and the problems of this period(35).

Although prevention of ageing process is inevitable, but reducing its problems and side effects by using the preventive measures and promoting the health status is possible. Therefore, exercise, nutritional diet, appropriate hygienic habits should be paid more attentions and planning for the leisure time of the elderly is more important issue. Having healthy lifestyle during ageing period requires increasing expertise and attention of all health policy makers and planner specially in the public education field. If some techniques applied to make the elderly

active in the family, those techniques treat the disorders, maintain the elderly independence, make the elderly happy and fresh, make them to spend leisure time and as a result, reduce the spiritual disorders and simulate of illnesses. Employment of the elderly which sometimes is necessary for keeping them alive, can be included the underneath fields(40).

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