

Measurement of the Factors Influencing Senior Citizens' Urban Life Quality in Nishapur and Ashgabat

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

The number and ratio of senior citizens (60 years old and above) in the world is increasing. Although the number and ratio of them varies in different parts of the world, its ratio to the total population of the earth has increased from 8.6% in 1980 to 12.3% in 2015 and is expected to reach 21.5% in 2050. Although this is a promising issue, aging and the increase in the number of the elderly is a phenomenon which, if neglected, can create a lot of serious problems for many societies in the future. In Iran, the ratio of young people to the total population is higher compared to other age groups, which makes our country a young one, in terms of demographics; however, the findings of the general census conducted in 2012 shows that nearly 8.19% of Iranian population are seniors. According to the general census of population and housing, the population of seniors from 1977 to 2012 has increased by more than three times. During these 35 years, the population of seniors in urban areas has increased 5.3 times reaching 3.27 million in 2007 and 4.23 million in 2012 from the initial 800 thousands in 1977 and it is expected that in 2050, the ratio of seniors will be more than 31%. Thus, considering the increasing trend in seniors' population and the rapid increase in the population of seniors in urban areas in recent decades, the necessity for taking the welfare, well-being and life quality of the urban seniors into account is felt more than ever. To this end, the main objective of the present study is to investigate the factors influencing senior citizens' urban life quality in Nishapur and Ashgabat, and to offer suggestions for enhancing senior citizens' quality of life in the abovementioned cities.

2. Theoretical Framework

No discussion regarding senior citizens, as a vulnerable section of the society, who live in cities and whose quality of life is highly dependent upon urban spaces, was seen in the previous studies. Quality of life contains both corporeal and incorporeal aspects. Physical and social environment, economic, social and cultural factors together with personal independence, as well as physical and psychological well-being are among the underlying factors influencing people's quality of life. Relationship with family and friends, social relations, personal well-being, independence, activity, emotional well-being, spiritual state, economic conditions, leisure time, and the atmosphere of home are also among the factors influencing seniors' quality of life. In the present study, using a mental approach, from each domain (personal independence, declared satisfaction, physical and mental welfare, economic and social status, environment's quality, purposeful activity, social solidarity and cultural factors) some components were chosen and investigated. The components that were used include physical and mental ability, mental well-being, availability and quality of healthcare, liveliness, social relations, nutrition, cultural and sport activities, social interaction, relations with progeny and relatives as well as the possibility of leisure activities.

3. Method

The present research was conducted through scaling using a questionnaire, where interviewers approached the interviewee in person. The research population includes 150 senior citizens or older ones, who were selected randomly using Cochran's sample size formula in cities of Nishapur and

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Ashgabat in Nishapur county. In addition, the temporal and financial limitations of the research were also taken into account. In order to investigate the mental aspect of the quality of life, thirty-six closed ended questions on a five-point Likert scale ranging from totally dissatisfied to totally satisfied were used. The questionnaire starts with some questions regarding the general quality of life followed by questions pertaining to satisfaction with various indicators of life, and at the end, once more, questions concerning the general status of life are asked. The final question regarding the quality of life has been used as the basis for more analysis. Descriptive statistics for investigating the general status of quality of life and regression for identifying the factors influencing seniors' quality of life were used.

4. Discussions and Conclusion

Considering the fact that the population of senior citizens in Iran is increasing, the necessity for taking their issues and needs into account is felt strongly. The findings revealed that nearly 40% of the participants were satisfied with their quality of life. The analysis of major components revealed 10 key factors for determining aspects of quality of life in urban areas including: mental well-being, liveliness, availability and quality of healthcare, physical ability, status of individual's memory, participation in religious and group activities, social relations, social solidarity, participation in cultural and sport activities, and nutrition. Among the ten extracted factors, four factors, namely, liveliness, social solidarity, participation in religious and group activities, and social relations were categorized as the most important factors influencing the quality of seniors' life in urban areas emphasizing the importance of improving their quality of life. Liveliness, together with such factors as enjoying life, feeling of youthfulness, meaningfulness of life, satisfaction with the ability to perform daily tasks, general health status, enjoyment of life compared to the past and physical disabilities that hinder performing tasks in the first place, are the most influential in the quality of seniors' life in urban areas. In fact, mental factors are very influential in seniors' quality of life. Secondly, social solidarity factors with such components as relationship with relatives, satisfaction with abode's condition, degree of satisfaction with social relations and dependencies, and presence of someone to talk to are highly influential in seniors' quality of life. The

component of participation in religious and group activities, with indicators of participation in religious activities (0.843) and participation in group activities (0.767), is the third category of factors which can highly influence their quality of life. In fact, networks of social relations and membership in groups, for instance participation in religious groups and other group activities, are very influential in improving the quality of life. Similarly, Martinez (2010) showed that there is a statistically significant correlation between participation in religious activities and quality of life. Among the theories pertaining to the elderly, the theory of activity corroborates this fact. Finally, the component of social relations, with indicators of participation in friendship groups, relationship with progeny, satisfaction with having personal relation with others, satisfaction with transportation facilities and having a close relation with neighbors were among the factors which influence the quality of senior's life in urban areas, and delineate the role of social networks such as friendship, family and neighbor networks. For instance people who are more in touch with their progeny enjoy a higher degree of mental health and quality of life. Having a relation with friendship groups and being in touch with them, relationship with progeny, kids and relatives and other groups play a major role in improving the quality of seniors' life. Such social groups, not only do provide seniors with emotional and other types of support, but also improve their physical and mental well-being. The emotional support provided by these networks plays a major role in seniors' quality of life. Children's emotional support and that of those close to the elderly person can prevent seniors' depression as there is a negative correlation between emotional support and seniors' depression. As Kaur, Kaur, and Venkateshan (2015) state, families' support of senior citizens for their wellbeing and welfare is a crucial issue for and plays a pivotal role in determining their quality of life.

Suggestions: The overall findings of the study indicate the multifaceted nature of seniors' quality of life and can be used in urban policy making, with the aim of improving seniors' quality of life and well-being. It seems that preparing cities for a better and a more healthy presence of seniors in urban environment can be very effective through creating coherent neighborhoods, developing seniors' social network, and encouraging them to participate in social activities.

Kew Words: Life Quality, Senior Citizens, Urban Spaces, Nishapur, Ashgabat.

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