

# Family Support And Successful Aging Of Retired-Older Adults

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## Introduction

Ageing is a continuous yet irreversible part of human life that is accompanied by a gradual decline in physical, cognitive, and emotional functioning. But with the advent of technology and new resources, life expectancy has improved, and it is resulting in an increase in the older population. So, over time, psychologists have shifted their attention from quantity to quality regarding ageing (Cha, Seo, & Sok, 2012). Successful ageing (SA) is a new concept that has focused on the quality of ageing, and this concept has been used interchangeably for a number of other concepts like positive ageing, ageing well, productive ageing, and healthy ageing. According to these terms, it can be inferred that later life is concerned with well-being and health (Martin et al., 2015).

Retirement life is concerned with a number of psychological issues that a person has to face and older adults have to adjust to the changing lifestyle that will affect their relationship and life due to retirement. Retired older adults might have different expectations from their lives as well as from their families. So this is the crucial period of one's life where they need quality support from their loved ones that will help them in improving their health and well-being: in short, successful ageing. But every individual has different experiences of supportive behavior and it is shaped by the global cognitions of how that support is being provided to them. So, the literature adds that available support is interpreted by the individual who is receiving it rather than by the person who is giving it (Uchino, 2009). Lakey and Cassady (1990) have explored that individuals who perceive others' attempts to support them to be quite unhelpful, and few actually perceive others as quite unsupportive. In the case of retired older people are experiencing a drastic change in their lives, and they are in dire need of family support, but most of the time, they perceive others to be quite unsupportive. Yet, family is considered the cornerstone of human society and is the closest of all that affects human lives remarkably.

Although a number of studies are available on social support and the quality of ageing, there is a need to identify family support in promoting the successful ageing of older adults after their retirement. As there are a number of contextual and psychological factors involved at this time period, this study will be helpful in identifying the relationship between two variables. Particularly, research on life after retirement is scarce and, in relation to successful ageing, is quite few in numbers. So, to address the gaps in literature present study will serve two important aims. First, it will examine the difference in given family support by the spouse and perceived support to older adults after retirement. Secondly, this study will find out the effect of family support on the successful

ageing of retired older adults.

## Literature Review

Ageing experiences at any age are interpersonal and are influenced by the people who surround us. Emotionally close families and those who share information regarding their life events are considered strong predictors of successful ageing (Hagestad & Dykstra, 2016), especially in old age. Research also adds that the structure, along with the function of these relationships, alters over time, and this change is due to major life events. When parents are in their retirement phase, they need more instrumental support, and this sort of support affects the relationship quality between families. Our lives are considered to be linked with each other, and this actually reminds us that we are influenced by each other. People living in a family are linked by their genetic similarities and thus share the life experiences that they encounter during their lives. And is linked with life satisfaction in retired-older people along with greater personal control in later life (Antonucci, 1990). So, literature shows that positive forms of family support serve as a buffer for older people and minimize the impact of stressful life events, thus leading to well-being. Retirement is the biggest life event, so family support should be appropriate to cause life adjustment.

## Theoretical Considerations

A number of theories serve as important evidence for the explanation of successful ageing. Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (SST) suggests that at the time of retirement, motivational goals change to emotional regulation from information gathering (Reed & Carstensen, 2012). So older adults at this phase of their life are concerned with active engagement with their social relations, and that is why social support becomes important for them at this time period. Furthermore, the SOC model (Freund & Baltes, 2007) based on selection, optimization, and compensation focuses on the process of adjustment throughout their life and is crucial for a higher level of functioning. So at the retirement phase, older adults have to adapt to the transition and at the same time, they have to be functional in society as well. So, in the present study, the SOC model fits the best as it explains the process of retirement rather than its outcome. The SOC model has been used successfully in the work setting and explains what people encounter during their occupational life and afterwards. SOC principles might be used in the post-retirement phase for having balance, harmony, family commitments and involvement in daily life events.

## Research Question And Hypothesis

Research questions of the present study will include the difference in the support given by family (spouse) and the support perceived by retired-older adults and how it is related to the successful ageing of older adults after retirement.

Literature is evident that perceived family support by older adults is little that is explained by the family, as needing more support from family is linked with having little support and increased negative affect that influences one's successful ageing. On the other hand, if older adults perceive support gets equal to the actual received support from the family, then it would be thought that older adults are more satisfied. But there is most often some discrepancy in the actual and perceived support. So, the first hypothesis of the present study will be that.

*H<sub>1</sub>*: there will be a negative relationship between the support given by the spouse and the support perceived by retired older adults.

Moreover, it is expected that family support would be strongly related to life satisfaction and mental well-being. So, during the retirement phase, which is a phase full of transition and in which older adults are facing economic as well as social, cognitive, and emotional shifts, the most important thing is family support. It would evidently be linked with greater well-being, which is considered an important indicator of successful ageing. Therefore, it was hypothesized that

*H<sub>2</sub>*: There will be a positive relationship between perceived family support and successful ageing in retired older adults.

The relationship between demographic variables and study variables will also be explored.

## Research Design

The cross-sectional survey research design will be used in the present study. Family support is the independent variable, whereas successful ageing is the dependent variable in the present study. The aim of this study is to explore the difference in actual and perceived family support received by older adults, and for this purpose, data will be taken from retired older adults and their family members (spouses). The second aim of the present study is to find out the relationship between perceived family support and successful ageing, and for this purpose, both male and female retired older adults will be selected. Three questionnaires will be used to collect the data: one for assessing support given to retired-older adults, one for perceived family support, and the last one for assessing the successful ageing of older adults. Perceived family support will be measured using the Family Influence Scale, which consists of 22 items with a 6-point Likert scale where one refers to *strongly disagree*, and six refers to *strongly agree* (Fouad et al., 2010).

This scale measures four types of support, including informational support, financial support, and values/beliefs. On the other hand, the support given by the spouse will be assessed with the same questionnaire after modification. The present scale will be modified in such a way that it could assess the support given to the partner rather than perceived support. The successful Aging Inventory developed by Flood (2008) will be used to assess successful ageing in retired older adults. It consists of 20 items with five response options where 5 = almost always to 1 = hardly ever. A demographic form will also be used to take the demographic information like gender, age, number of years after

retirement, and number of individuals in the family.

## Method

The sample of the present study will include families from different areas of NYC. Sample from a family includes retired older adults and spouses. Two hundred retired older adults with a distribution of half males and half females will be identified, so the total no of participants will be 400 (200 retired older adults & spouse). Sample selection was done by reviewing literature where there is a variety in the sample size of older adults. This sample is not easily available as compared to others; therefore, due to time constraints, I have proposed to select a sample of 400 participants. Furthermore, only those retired-adults will be included in the study who were living with their spouse and were not remarried over their lifespan will be a control on the study. Moreover, only those retired older adults will be included in the study who are in their first five years of their retirement as after five years, people adjust to their environment and other things become more important rather family support.

The study will be conducted in 2 phases; firstly, questionnaires will be identified and modified, and a try-out will be conducted on a small sample. In the first phase, the Family Influence Scale will need to adapt according to the needs of the present study so that it can be filled by the spouse to determine how much support the spouse provides to the partner. Furthermore, other scales also need to be modified according to our sample. Then, the main study will be conducted using surveys. During both phases, the sample will be identified through organizations that would have a record of their retired personnel. Then, retired older adults, along with their spouses, will be identified and approached. The purpose of the study will be explained to them, and their written informed consent will be taken. They would be informed that they could withdraw anytime from the study, and a movie voucher would be given to both of them as a token of gratitude.

Pearson-product moment correlation will be used to assess the relationship between support given by the spouse and the perceived support by the retired older adult. Regression analysis will be used to test whether social support predicts successful ageing or not. The appropriate analysis will be applied to demographic variables to test gender differences in perceived support, and a successful ageing t-test for an independent sample will be used.

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