

The Mental Health Status and Influencing Factors of the Elderly in Nursing Homes

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Abstract: The base of the elderly population in China is increasing year by year, and the acceleration of population aging has led to more attention to the psychological problems of the elderly. It is also imperative to discuss the mental health status of the elderly population in current nursing homes. The paper discusses the current psychological status of the elderly in nursing homes, points out various factors that currently plague their mental health, and proposes countermeasures for improving their mental health in the future, providing a reference for related research.

Keywords: Nursing homes, The elderly, Influencing factors, Mental health.

1. Introduction

Mental health means an effective, satisfying, and sustained state of mind. Mental health problems are related to the physical health status of the elderly [1]. In the research of nursing homes, it is found that there are certain problems in the current mental health status of the elderly. This paper thoroughly discusses this issue.

2. Overview of the Mental Health of the Elderly in Nursing Homes

2.1. Definition of the Elderly Population

Countries use different methods and standards to define the elderly population according to national conditions. Presently, there are mainly two definitions for the elderly in the world, one is 65 years old, recommended by the United Nations in 1956, and the other is 60 years old, recommended by the World Assembly on Aging in 1982 [2]. These two classification methods apply to people with significant differences in socioeconomic development and educational levels in different countries and regions. The former is generally adopted in developed countries, while most developing countries recognize the latter view. According to this principle, all countries have enacted laws and regulations on elderly security and services. The newly revised *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly* in 2012 stipulates that "the term 'elderly' in this Law refers to citizens aged 60 and over."

2.2. Connotation of Mental Health

Mental health refers to a person's good mental state or stable state of mind. In a broad sense, all kinds of psychological factors affecting physical and mental health can be categorized into mental health [3]. Mental health is a psychological term opposite to mental illness. It refers specifically to an individual's physical, psychological, and social adaptations, all of which are benign psychological qualities.

3. The Current Mental Health Status of the Elderly in Nursing Homes

In nursing homes, the psychological problems of the

elderly are as follows. 1. Feeling lost. As they grow older, the elderly gradually feel lonely and isolated. They yearn for the attention and care of others, but they are unwilling to communicate with people and socialize. In addition, they experience a psychological loss due to long-term separation from loved ones. There are many reasons for the sense of loss in the elderly, mainly illness and widowhood, changes between social roles and family roles, and so on [4]. When the elderly are relatively withdrawn, adapting to a healthy mentality by themselves is difficult. In this case, the elderly will feel lonely. At this time, if the nursing home staff cannot carry out targeted training, it will cause the elderly mental health problems; if the elderly are too sensitive or overly nervous, it is easy to cause anxiety, which will affect the elderly's quality of life. 2. Psychological loneliness. Due to the lack of communication with the outside world, a sense of loneliness is formed. In nursing homes, the opportunities for the elderly to contact the outside world are reduced, and the amount of social information they have is small, which makes them feel isolated. In addition, due to a lack of communication with family members, they will experience a state of loneliness. At this stage, the elderly are mainly indifferent to others, ignoring things and even having suicidal thoughts; moreover, because of a lack of communication with others, the elderly are prone to loneliness, depression, and other emotional states. 3. Psychological terror. The elderly are a special group in nursing homes and often face various physical or mental pressures. Elderly people in nursing homes will suffer a lack of self-confidence due to the decline in physical function, worrying too much about their health problems, and panicking about physical aging or disease. Once the elderly are ill, they will become anxious and fear that they are about to die.

4. Factors Influencing the Mental Health of the Elderly in Nursing Homes

4.1. Social Activities of Nursing Homes

With the growth of age, the physical and psychological endurance of the elderly is weakened. Their social activities are less and less, so they are prone to loneliness. How to let the elderly get more care and help in providing for the elderly is one of the key issues of current social concern. Some

nursing staff willing to interact with the elderly lack professional communication skills, such as trust nursing, psychological counseling, etc., to meet the needs of the elderly [4]. Therefore, how to design social activities to improve the elderly's quality of life is a problem people must face and solve.

4.2. Frequency of Family Visits

The lack of family support functions has intensified the problem of empty-nest elderly. There are increasingly vulnerable people, such as the elderly, the weak, the sick, and the disabled, in nursing homes, and they need more attention. With economic development and changes in population structure, only-child parents are gradually decreasing, and the number of elderly is also decreasing. The pressure of life makes young people more nervous, so they must travel far away for more opportunities. With the deepening of the aging trend in China, the traditional family nursing model has yet to be present. In addition, the reduced frequency of visits by relatives to nursing homes has made the mental health problems of the elderly increasingly severe.

4.3. The Physical Condition of the Elderly

The elderly generally experience a gradual decline in the functions of all aspects of the body as they grow older. In daily life, people often pay attention to whether the elderly are physically healthy but ignore the changes in the spirit of the elderly; that is, they pay less attention to mental health issues. Based on the analysis of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, there are many diseases in the elderly's physical bodies; therefore, their safety needs are not met, which will cause their unbalanced psychology to form misled acknowledgment [5]. Health is the foundation of living a good life, and the elderly need a good environment, comfortable space, and a warm atmosphere in their daily life. Elderly people in good health can face negative emotions positively and live an optimistic life; the ones in poor health are prone to have negative emotions such as depression and anxiety, especially when they are fighting against illness, which causes them to lack the ability to adapt to social life. In these cases, they often have insufficient self-care ability and damaged self-esteem, leading to decreased quality of life and even suicidal inclination and other problems. Their inability to effectively entertain and exercise has further affected the health of the body.

4.4. Living Environment

For convenience, most nursing homes are built in the downtown area, surrounded by high-rise buildings and roads. But sometimes, there are infrastructures under construction, the environment is noisy, and the air is not fresh enough, which is not suitable for the health care of the elderly. Moreover, the internal facilities of nursing homes are not as complete as people think. Usually, three or four residents are crowded in one room, and the basic living and entertaining facilities are lacking. These problems have affected the physical and mental health of the elderly. Nursing homes are not sound enough, lacking professional medical service facilities and equipment. For example, many medical devices, electrocardiogram machines, simple ventilators, simple first aid equipment, and necessary medicines are not equipped. In addition, the floor is not slip-proofed, and there are no handrails and call bells in corridors and rooms, and public bathrooms are inconvenient and easy to expose privacy.

5. Problems with the Mental Health of the Elderly in Nursing Homes

5.1. Declining Physical Function of the Elderly

The perceptual sensitivity of the elderly is gradually reduced, and their physical function is worsening. Therefore, the elderly are not adapted to the external environment, leading to declining quality of life and affecting physical and mental health development. Judging from the subjects of individual interviews, the elderly are inclined to judge problems subjectively, which causes difficulty in accepting other people's suggestions and getting rid of depressed and anxious moods and emotions. The elderly are generally susceptible to certain life events, especially when facing related accidents. When they hear the news of the death of relatives and friends, they generally show avoidance, negative attitude, and depression.

5.2. Low Self-identity of the Elderly

Most of the elderly see themselves as a burden to their family, and that's why they don't want to live with their children and choose the nursing home. At the same time, due to the characteristics of the elderly themselves, they prefer to carry out their daily life at home. In addition, everything in life is also a test for the elderly. The most prominent one is that the elderly lack sufficient understanding of economic income, health care, and other aspects, so they cannot meet the needs of daily life. During the on-site observation, it was also found that it is difficult for the elderly to rely on their own life experience and experience to gain the respect and recognition of others and society. Moreover, the loneliness of the elderly increases with age. These situations have accelerated the generation of an inferiority complex in the elderly and formed a low sense of self-identity.

6. Measures to Improve the Mental Health Level of the Elderly in Nursing Homes

6.1. Improve the Nursing Home System and Organize Social Activities for the Elderly

Currently, China is in the accelerated development of population aging, and it is of great practical significance to establish and improve the classified management system of nursing homes [6]. Formulating an evaluation index system and evaluation method specifically for public nursing homes is necessary. By classifying and managing different types of nursing homes, the construction of the nursing service system and the level of public services will be improved. In addition, accelerating the reform of public nursing homes has promoted the rapid development of the nursing service market. It is critical to actively promote the combination of home care and community care and encourage social forces to organize social activities for the elderly. This way, community-based home care services guidance is strengthened, relevant laws, regulations, and policies are completed, and relevant systems are formulated and implemented. Then, it is also necessary to design social activities for the elderly with the help of high-quality services, positive guidance, and promotion to enrich the life of the elderly and reduce negative emotions such as tension and anxiety.

6.2. Strengthen the Structural Adjustment of Nursing Homes and Stress Mental Health Care

Under the dual effects of national policies and the market, China's elderly care institutions have shown a trend of vigorous development and are gradually transforming in a diversified direction. During the "14th Five-Year Plan" period, the development of elderly nursing homes should not only increase the total amount but, more importantly, adjust the structure, which should be the priority of the development. Efforts will be made to develop nursing care institutions for the aged. Elderly people in urban communities with a certain scale and conditions can set up nursing institutions for the elderly in their communities or neighborhood committees and provide corresponding subsidies. In the daily nursing process, communication with the elderly should be strengthened to understand the needs of the elderly, deal with their doubts, and provide timely psychological intervention when psychological problems are found.

6.3. Financial Support to Improve the Living Environment

It is essential to encourage social capital to invest in the construction of community-based elderly care facilities, allowing qualified enterprises to invest with their funds or through bank loans. The new residential area should be like building a kindergarten, or primary and secondary schools, matching the corresponding elderly care service facilities according to a certain population size ratio, and planning, designing, and constructing simultaneously. In the meantime, enterprises are encouraged to participate in construction or operation, and financial subsidies are given during project implementation. In addition, the government should start piloting the "financial construction project for elderly care services," develop financial products for the elderly and expand the market-oriented financing channels for the elderly care institutions. Regarding tax incentives, measures should be taken to reduce or exempt business tax, reduce value-added tax rates, increase income tax incentives, cancel preferential corporate income tax policies, and collect personal income tax on individuals to support the development of elderly care services. It is recommended to formulate a salary system specifically for elderly care service personnel, improving the quality of elderly care services and attracting more people to choose the elderly care service industry. Moreover, it is proposed that China start the pilot work of the "Elderly Care Service Team Building Project," establishing corresponding institutional guarantees from the government level, including clarifying responsibilities and authorities, improving the training system, increasing financial investment, and enacting relevant laws and regulations.

6.4. Scientifically Promote the Development of "Combination of Nursing Care and Medical Care" in Elderly Nursing Homes

First, the measure must be clearly defined as a "combination of nursing care and medical care" instead of a "combination of medical care and nursing care." Because the primary function of elderly care institutions is "nursing" rather than "medical care," and "medical care" is only one of its essential supporting services, the "combination of nursing care and medical care" work in elderly care institutions should not copy the practice of hospitals, but should choose a model

suitable for its development according to China's national conditions and local conditions. Second, it is necessary to clarify the particularity of the "combination of nursing care and medical care" in elderly care institutions. In China's current nursing care model, problems like a severe waste of medical resources, low medical level, and irregular medical institutions determine the necessity of a "combination of nursing care and medical care." At the same time, it is necessary to consider the characteristics and changes in the needs of the elderly so that they can benefit from medical services. Then, the service should be pragmatic and focused. Therefore, when implementing the "combination of nursing care and medical care," services must be guided by the scientific outlook on development, insist on government leadership, give play to the role of the market, and strengthen system construction. The last is lowering the threshold and simplifying the procedures so that the elderly can seek medical treatment in time without being delayed by complicated procedures.

7. Conclusion

From 1962 to 1972, there was an unprecedented peak period of fertility in China, which announced that the most significant shock wave of China's population aging was coming. Currently, China is facing an unprecedented, serious aging crisis. It can be accurately predicted that the aging population will seriously impact Chinese society. Therefore, it should arouse the greatest attention of a society that takes active measures and adapts to the situation to delay and solve the adverse effects of population aging on society to a certain level and promote the rapid growth of the elderly service industry. China has formed a multi-level and diversified elderly care service system based on home, supported by communities and supplemented by institutions. In the future construction of nursing institutions in China, the supply structure should be adjusted, and long-term care insurance for the elderly should be implemented. By driving the silver economy and promoting elderly services at the same time, the innovation of the elderly care service system can be accelerated, and the construction of China's elderly care institutions and the elderly care service industry can be on the track of healthy and rapid development as soon as possible.

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