Psychological State and Self-Esteem of Elderly Living Alone in Relation to Socio-Demographic Characteristics

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to identify the relationship between sociodemographic characteristics of elderly living alone and psychological state as well as self-esteem. For this purpose, survey was conducted on living-alone elderly in the cities of K and C in Gyeongsangnam-do Province. The collected data went through chi square test, t-test, correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis, using the SPSS program with 5 percent level of significance. The results are as follows: first, analysis on the psychological state according to the socio-demographic characteristics of elderly living alone revealed that education level and whether or not the person has disease or disability has statistical significance with psychological state, whereas sex and age factors did not. Second, correlation analysis between the psychological state and self-esteem showed that all elements of self-esteem (self-respect, self-identity, self-satisfaction) have positive correlation with all sub-factors of psychological state (proactive thinking, anticipation for future, value consciousness, emotional stability). The implication of this study is that it will help policy making to improve the quality of life for senior citizens by providing a theoretical basis about the psychological state and self-esteem for the elderly living alone.

Keywords: Elderly Living Alone, Psychological State, Quality of Life

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The aged population is on rapid increase and raising problems associated with aged societies. Among these problems, those related to elderly’s deterioration of health, fear of death, solidarity, isolation, absence of economic capability, issue of support and loss of role that deteriorate psychological stability by causing stress and depression [1] are becoming very serious social problems. According to data released by Statistics Korea, 12.7% of the population was over the age of 65 in 2014 and is constantly increasing. The sex ratio per 100 women is 71.3 men and will increase up to 87 men by 2060. Korea’s aged-dependency-ratio is 17.3 which means that 5.8 working men (between the age of 15~64) is supporting 1 aged person. In 2014, 1 in 5 households (20.1%) were aged household; 7.1% were aged households living alone; and the ratio of aged population was high in the Jeollanam-do area, low in Ulsan area[2].

In addition, the burden of elderly support was found higher in the families that support seniors with dementia than families that support seniors who do not have dementia. In the case of the former, the stress level and psychological state of the supporting families were serious in terms of somatization, obsessive-compulsive neurosis, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, anxiety, hostility, fear anxiety, paranoia and psychoticism [3]. In particular, elderly people living alone are vulnerable to isolation, solidarity, depression etc. socially and psychologically, as they are socially, economically and physically weak. In addition, the elderly who live alone was found to lack emotional interaction with their children due to children’s economic difficulties. They were also limited in social activities due to disease and economic poverty and they were also habituated to chronic loneliness [4]. In order to guarantee everyone a happy life in their senior years, it is necessary to make sure that people maintain healthy partner relationship and high self-esteem starting from the early years and sustain a healthy living away from depression [5]. In other words, decent standard of living and psychological stability during the senile years can come only if one is physically and psychologically healthy from early on.

Although many previous studies addressed issues related to elderly’s psychological state and self-esteem [3,4,5] their focuses were limited to analyzing factors related to either the psychological state or the self-esteem. There lacks research about the relationship of sociodemographic characteristics to psychological state and self-esteem. Thus, this study attempts to investigate how the psychological state and self-esteem differs according to the sociodemographic characteristics of elderly living alone.

1.2 Question

The specific research questions under investigation are as follows:
First, what are the socio-demographic characteristics of elderly people living alone?
Second, what is the relationship between the socio-demographic characteristics of elderly people living alone and their psychological state?

2 Method

2.1 Study Subject

Survey was conducted with subject group of 250 elderly people living alone in the city K of the Gyeongsangnam-do Province from June 8 to July 5, 2015. Among the collected data, 25 questionnaires that had missing data or considered inappropriate were discarded and the remaining 225 were analyzed. Frequency analysis, t-test, one-way ANOVA, Scheffes multiple range test, correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis was conducted. Empirical analysis was done within 5 percent level of significance, sample size was derived using the test power analyzing program G*Power 3.1 which calculated based Cohen sample size formula within 5 percent level of analysis and 95 percent statistical power, effect size was set at midpoint 0.15. The minimum sample size required was calculated to be 129 and a total of 225 actual data was collected. SPSSWIN 18.0 program was used for statistical analysis.

3 Results

3.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Elderly Living Alone

The socio-demographic characteristics of elderly living alone are organized as follows. Sex for the urban elderly was 121(53.8%) ‘Male’ and 104 (46.2%) ‘Female.’ The most populated age group was ‘50-64 years old’ with 85 people (37.8%), followed by ‘65-69 years old’ with 79 people (35.1%) and ‘70-74 years old’ with 41 people (18.2%). Education Level was most populated for ‘High school graduate’ with 91 people (40.4%), followed by ‘Middle school graduate’ with 54 people (24.0%), ‘Elementary school graduate’ with 17.8% and ‘College school graduate’ with 11.6%. 40.9% had a kind of disease or disability while 59.1% did not.

3.2 Psychological State

The score of psychological state is shown as follows. Mean score of psychological state overall was 3.26. Mean score was highest for ‘Emotional stability’ (M=3.54), followed by ‘Value consciousness’ (M=3.47), ‘Anticipation for future’ (M=3.14) and ‘Proactive thinking’ (M=3.10).
3. 3 Self-Esteem

The score of self-esteem is shown as follow. Mean score of self-esteem overall was 3.33. Mean score was highest for ‘Self-satisfaction’ (M=3.41), followed by ‘Self-respect’ (M=3.32) and ‘Self-identity’ (M=3.21).

3. 4 Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Psychological State of the Elderly Living Alone

The result of psychological state depending on sociodemographic characteristics is shown as follows. The difference according to ‘education level’ and ‘disease/disability’ was statistically significant whereas difference according to ‘sex’ and ‘age’ was insignificant at 5% level of significance. For education level, mean score was highest in the order of ‘college graduate or above’ (M=3.67), ‘high school graduate’ (M=3.36), ‘elementary school graduate or less’ (M=3.09), ‘Middle school graduate’ (M=3.09). Psychological state was most stable for college graduate or above (F=7.220, p<.001) and subjects who did not have disease/disability (M=3.42) had more stable psychological state than subjects who had disease/disability (M=3.04) (t=4.794). This shows that seniors without disability are more psychologically stable than disabled seniors.

3.5 Psychological State and Self-Esteem

The correlation between psychological state and self-esteem is shown as follows. Self-esteem had the strongest positive correlation with psychological state in the order of emotional stability (r=.595, p<.001), value consciousness (r=.549, p<.001), proactive thinking (r=.495, p<.001) and anticipation for future (r=.414, p<.001). To be specific, all elements of self-esteem (self-respect, self-identity, self-satisfaction) were positively correlated with all sub factors of psychological state (proactive thinking, anticipation for future, value consciousness, emotional stability).

4 Discussion and Conclusions

This study investigated how psychological state and self-esteem is influenced by sociodemographic characteristics of elderly living alone. Discussion based on our findings is as follows:

First, in analyzing the difference in psychological state depending on sociodemographic characteristics showed statistically significant for ‘Education Level’ and ‘Existence of Disease/Disability’ whereas differences for ‘sex’ and ‘age’ was insignificant at 5 percent level of significance. This result is identical to the findings made by Si Wol Kim et al [6] that the psychological state of middle old aged living alone depending on sociodemographic characteristic is significantly different for education level. But the difference was insignificant for sex and age, which might be because the subjects of this particular study was households above the age 50.
whereas this study was based on households above the age of 65. In summary, it can be concluded that the age factor influences education level and whether or not the elderly has disease/disability.

We would like to make following suggestions based on the findings above:

First, psychological state in relation to sociodemographic characteristics was influenced by education level and existence of disease/disability. Therefore, we can conclude that high education level and absence of disease/disability is a strong predictor for stable psychological state. This result will be a good empirical reference for improving psychological state in relation to sociodemographic traits.

Further study is necessary on how psychological state influences self-esteem and quality of life focused to comparing the urban and rural elderly living alone.

References