ABSTRACT

Positive Aging may be defined as the sustenance of positive subjective experiences comprising satisfaction with life in the past, happiness with the present and optimism and hope towards the future in the face of decline and loss as a result of aging. Social support can be categorized into structural (number of persons) and functional support (level of satisfaction).

The present study aimed at exploring differences on the positive subjective experiences (happiness, life satisfaction, optimism and hope) and social support (structural and functional) of aging persons. The study was also directed towards exploring the relationship between positive subjective experiences and social support of the aging persons and further identifying the determinants of positive subjective experiences based on social support. The study is an innovative research based on sociograms to understand the social network of the aging persons. A pilot study was conducted to test the correlation between the English (original) and the Hindi (translated) version of the tools. Later, the tools were finalized for data collection. The study was based on a sample of 139 aging respondents aged 55 years and above drawn from Jaipur City, Rajasthan, using snowball sampling technique. The sample was classified on the basis of working status (pre-retired, retired and post retired) and gender (males and females). Subsequently, the 139 aging respondents completed the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Leeper, 1999), Life Satisfaction Scale (Chadha & Van Willigen, 1995), Life Orientation Test- Revised (Scheier, Carver and Bridges, 1994), The Adult Trait Hope Scale (Snyder et al 1991) and the short form of Social Support Questionnaire (Sarason et al 1987).

Results indicated significant difference on the Pathway sub-scale of hope [F(2136)=3.654 , p<.05] on the basis of working status. It was observed that as the respondents moved from pre-retirement to post retirement, there was a significant decline in pathway thinking. However, no significant differences on the positive subjective experiences were observed on the basis of working status and gender. Hence, positive aging occurs independent of working status and gender, except that decline in pathway thinking is likely to occur with aging. Significant difference
between male and female pre-retired have been observed only on the dimension of Life Satisfaction ($t = 1.851, p<.05$) where females were found to have higher level of life satisfaction compared to males. Moreover, no significant difference was found on the structural and functional social support on the basis of working status and gender across the sample. A further investigation into the relationship between the variables under study indicates that all positive subjective experiences are positively and significantly related to the dimensions of social support. Paradoxically, hope and optimism were mostly unrelated while only a moderate relationship existed between them in the case of the male aging respondents. It reflects that the general expectation that future will bring more good than bad is unrelated to the confidence aging respondents show in identifying goals (agency) and in finding alternative routes when the path towards goal is blocked (pathway). Regression analysis indicated that social support is of greatest importance in the lives of the retired aging respondents compared to the pre-retired and post retired ones. Structural social support explained 22.5% of variance ($F=11.035, p=.002$) in positive subjective experiences and functional social support explained 28.7% of variance ($F=15.266, p=.000$) in positive subjective experiences of the retired aging respondents. The results signify that there is greater importance of functional support in explaining positive subjective experiences compared to structural support. Interestingly, in the group of post retired respondents, 10.1% of variance ($F=4.720, p=.036$) in positive subjective experiences was explained by the structural support compared to only 8.8% of variance ($F=4.041, p=.051$) explained by functional support. It shows that compared to pre-retired and retired groups, for the post retired group the size of the social network is more likely to explain positive subjective experiences compared to the level of satisfaction derived from the social network.

The researcher observed interesting trends in social network based on the sociograms of aging respondents. The social network of the pre-retired group is more centered on family. The retired females show gender diversity on their support networks compared to their retired male counterparts. Observations made on the basis of sociograms revealed that the post retired, compared to pre-retired and retired, depend more on “themselves” under different situations which demand support from others.
and those who were depended on “self” had better functional support and more structural support compared to those who replied “nobody”. The importance of supportive neighbors and same sex friendships increased significantly in case of post retired males whereas family (children, grandchildren and relatives) remained the pivotal support system for the post retired women.

Keywords: Aging, Positive Subjective Experiences, Positive Aging, Social Support, Sociograms.