EDITORIAL

The Necessity of Community Connectedness in Iranian Older Adults during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Samira Olyani[1,2]   Hadi Tehrani[2,3*]

1. Student Research Committee, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, Mashhad, Iran
2. Social Determinants of Health Research Center, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, Mashhad, Iran
3. Department of Health Education and Health Promotion, School of Health, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, Mashhad, Iran

In the last decade, COVID-19 outbreak was one of the major crises encountered the world [1]. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Iranian people have been advised to stay at home and far away others. If it is essential to leave their residence, people have been urged to avoid gathering and maintain physical distance from others. Community disconnectedness for older adults was primary prevention specially for elders with comorbidities [2]. For the first time, most of Iranian older adults were experiencing an unwanted and prolonged separation from others.

In the Middle East, Iran has one of the largest ageing populations. Regarding the importance of the mental health in older adults, more attention needs to be paid to them as a vulnerable group when a crisis emerges [3]. Health system decisions not only should be focused on reducing the spread of the disease but also mental health issues of older adults like depression should be considered.

In fact, the root of depression which can lead to suicide is loneliness. Perceived community disconnectedness or loneliness is a major risk factor for physical and mental health in older adults. Community connectedness is important for promoting mental health and protecting from the development and progression of physical diseases. Community connectedness is a significant contributing factor in deducing morbidity and mortality in older adults.

*Corresponding Author:
Hadi Tehrani,
Social Determinants of Health Research Center, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, Mashhad, Iran; Department of Health Education and Health Promotion, School of Health, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, Mashhad, Iran;
Email: Tehranih@mums.ac.ir

The perceived absence of community connectedness has been linked to diminished longevity, especially between older adults in whom decreasing economic resources, illness, widowhood, and impaired mobility.

Loneliness in older adults is associated with multiple undesirable outcomes, including depression, cognitive dysfunction, disability, cardiovascular disease, psychological distress, impaired immune system functioning and increased mortality rates [4].

In recent years, the internet has revolutionized people communication. Nowadays, the internet is an appropriate option which facilitate communication with families, friends and society for older adults then for overcoming loneliness, community connectedness with the aid of internet can be appropriate selection which should be considered [5].

Encouraging older adults to begin using the Internet to communicate with others could help to improve social contacts and decline loneliness. The result of a study indicated that the internet use was associated with lower levels of loneliness among elderly. Loneliness among the elderly is associated with a higher chance for metabolic syndrome [6] and an increased risk of death. The maintenance of personal relationships through the Internet could be critical to well-being for older adults. Moreover, among the general population, using the Internet to maintain communication with family and friends has been associated with well-being [7], further providing support for the idea that going online could be beneficial for older adults.

Care, love and support are the natural responses to individuals who are sick then at the time of social isolation. The importance of community connections, especially for vulnerable groups or those who are sick is undeniable. Loneliness and social isolation are realties that influence many aspects of life. In time of crisis, for addressing all physical and mental health issues, an integrated holistic care should be developed.

In conclusion, the Internet use has a significant effect on decreased perceived loneliness. In fact, online activities may be an effective tool for reducing loneliness among older people by maintaining the levels of social contact.

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