

An Epidemiological Study of Mental Health Status of Geriatric Homes' Residents in Alexandria

*By S. Rashed, N. M. Hidayet, K. A. Ali, M. T. Gaafer and
A. S. Gamal*

ABSTRACT

A trial was conducted to assess : (1) some personality characteristics of geriatric homes' inhabitants in Alexandria, and (2) the relationships between different ecological factors and the discovered personality traits of elderlies in these homes.

The results showed that obsession was the most common personality trait followed by depression, psychosomaticism, anxiety, phobia and, lastly, hysteria. Statistically non significant relationships were found between these traits and sex, type of family, hobbies and emotional response for admission. The relations between the age and income and obsession, between marital status and phobia and between views on the future and anxiety were significant.

INTRODUCTION

Concepts of mental health have evolved for the most part from consideration of childhood and young adulthood. The second half of life has received little attention in theory, research and service. Increased attention to ageing on the part of the behavioural sciences is seen likely as advocacy and numbers of old people continue to increase (Birren and Renner, 1981). Now, attention is given to the numerical increase of aged persons in the present population. In 1981, the population above 60 years was 5.3 % of the total Egyptian population (about 2 millions) (M.P.H., 1981) compared to 10 % of the U.S.A.

population in 1978 (Freedman et al., 1978). It has been said that a civilisation can be judged by how it treats its older members. Researches have recently begun to focus to a greater degree on personality factors in old age (Maneini, 1980). Each person is a product of his social environment. An individual is a product of group influences such as family, work, association, social groupings of peers and colleagues and of social class, religion, racial and ethnic norms (Spencer and Dorr, 1975). The mistaken notion prevails that when maturity is reached, there is a long period of physical stability and then suddenly a rapidly accelerating downhill slide. McCrae et al. (1980) stated that there is stability of personality organization throughout the adult years and for use of personality tests in elderly groups. He showed that relative standing of both sexes on personality dimensions are fairly constant over that period of time. Howard, in 1980, confirmed these results on both sexes.

Aims of the Work :

1. To study some personality characteristics of geriatric homes' inhabitants in Alexandria.
2. To reveal the relationship between different ecological factors and the discovered personality traits of elderly in these homes.

METHODOLOGY :

The hypothesis underlying this piece of research states that psychological well being is the product of interaction between personality and ecological factors.

Data were gathered via, firstly, an epidemiological sheet enquiring about relevant personal characteristics, socio-economic status, psychological and social environment of the inhabitants secondly, the colloquial standardized Arabic translation of the Middle Sex Personality Test translated by Gawad, Girgis and Rakhawy. The forty-eight items of the personality scale measure anxiety, phobia, obsession, depression, hysteria and psychosomatic tendencies.

Scattered all over Egypt there are 26 public homes for the elderly under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Insurance and Social Affairs. Of these eleven homes are present in Alexandria City. A stratified random sample of 25 % representing the elderlies living in the eleven homes of Alexandria was chosen for this study, the sample totaled 152 persons. All classes within these homes were represented in the sample. Seven homes out of the eleven were voluntarily managed and directed by foreign agencies, while the rest were purely national. A translator from the investigated homes facilitated verbal communication whenever needed.

Data obtained were then coded and punched. Analysis was done by Digital PDP 11/70 computer at the Faculty of Engineering. Chi-Square was used as a test of significance where the 5 % level was chosen as the level of significance. Under the same conditions Z test was used whenever chi-square was unapplicable due to small numbers.

RESULTS

The age of 152 elderly living in public Homes for the Elderly in Alexandria ranged from 60 years to 92 years with a mean of 74.44 years. About one quarter (25.66 %) were males and the remaining were females. The mean age of females was 74.26 years and that of males was 74.94 years. None of the index sample was engaged in any type of work. The married population was 57.24 % , those who never got married constituted 31.58 % and the widows were 11.18 % . The income ranged from L. E. 10 per month to L. E. 120 per month. Those who claimed an income of L. E. 80 and more were 9.87 % , while 18.42 % and 71.7 % claimed a monthly income between L.E. 40 to 80, and less than L.E. 40 respectively.

The study of the personality traits of the 152 elderly using the Middle Sex Personality Test revealed that those who ranked high on the scale of obsession topped the list (50.66 %) followed by those who ranked high on the scales of depression (34.87 %), psychosomatism (21.71 %), anxiety (17.11 %), phobia (14.47 %) and hysteria (8.55 %).

Table (1) shows insignificant relation between age and the six personality traits studied except obsession. A trend of decrease in prevalence of high scores of anxiety, phobia and hysteria with increase of age was observed. High scores of obsession were significantly less encountered among the very old age group. Insignificantly higher scores of the six personality scales were encountered among females than among males (Table 2). Table (3) portrayed that although widows and widowers were significantly more susceptible to higher scores of phobia than ever and never married individuals ($X^2 = 9.1627$ and 7.8906 respectively), they were significantly less susceptible to high scores of obsession when compared with the never married group ($X^2 = 4.8375$), and tended to have the highest scores on the scales of anxiety and psychosomatism. No significant differences were observed between marital status and the remaining four personality traits. Table (4) reflects the relation between monthly income and the Six Personality Traits. There was a trend among those with an intermediate income to enjoy the lowest prevalence of anxiety, phobia, psychosomatism, depression and hysteria. They were also significantly less susceptible to high scores of obsession than those of lower and higher income ($X^2 = 3.9571$ and 4.7205 respectively). High scores of anxiety and depression were most prevalent among elderly who had no families. While high scores of phobia, psychosomatism and hysteria were most prevalent among elderly who came from incomplete families (one parent or siblings only), and those who came from complete families tended to be the highest scorers on the obsessional scale. The differences observed were statistically not significant. Those who did not mention their family type had the highest scores on all personality traits except hysteria (Table 5).

The emotional response for admission to Public Homes was studied in relation to the six personality traits. High scores of anxiety, obsession and hysteria were least encountered among those who had favourable response while high scores of phobia, psycho-somatism, and depression were least prevalent among those who had indifferent response on admission. Those who admitted to have fear or grief response

TABLE I
The Relation between Age and the Six Personality Traits.

	No.	Anxiety	Phobia	Obsession	Psycho-somatism	Depression	Hysteria						
Age	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No. %						
1) Young-old	45	8	17.78	10	22.22	26	57.78	8	17.78	15	33.33	5	11.11
60 —													
2) Middle old	63	14	22.22	8	12.70	38	60.32	15	23.81	20	31.75	6	9.52
70 —													
3) Very old	44	4	9.09	4	9.09	13	29.55	10	22.71	18	40.91	2	4.55
80 +													
Total	152	26	17.11	22	14.47	77	50.66	33	21.71	53	34.87	13	8.55
Test of		●		●		● ●		●		●		●	
significance													
(X ²)													

(●●) Insignificant
(●●●) Significant

TABLE II
The Relation between Sex and the Six Personality Traits

Sex	No.	Anxiety		Phobia		Obsession		Psycho-Somatism		Depression		Hysteria	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Males	39	4	10.26	2	5.13	17	43.59	6	15.38	10	25.64	3	7.69
Females	113	22	19.47	20	17.70	60	53.10	27	23.89	43	38.05	10	8.85
Total	152	26	17.11	22	14.47	77	50.66	33	21.71	53	34.87	13	8.55
Test of													

Significance

(X^2)

(●) Insignificant

TABLE III

(●) Insignificant
(●●) Significant

TABLE IV

The Relationship between Income and the Six Personality Traits

[illegible]

TABLE V
Relation between Type of Family and the Six Personality Traits

Type of Family	No.	Anxiety		Phobia		Obsession		Psycho-Somatism		Depression		Hysteria	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Complete	36	5	13.89	5	13.89	19	52.77	6	16.67	10	27.78	4	11.11
Incomplete	42	6	14.29	6	14.29	21	50.0	9	21.43	12	28.57	6	14.29
Without *	66	13	19.70	8	12.12	30	45.45	14	21.21	26	39.39	3	4.55
Not mentioned	8	2	25.0	3	37.5	7	87.5	4	50.0	5	62.5	—	—
Total	152	26	17.11	22	14.47	77	50.66	33	21.71	53	34.87	13	8.55
Test of significance		●		●		●		●		●		●	
(X ²)													

* Without = Orphans and illegitimates
(●) Insignificant

TABLE VI

The Relation between Elderies' Views on the Future and the Six Personality Traits

Futures' views	No.	Anxiety		Phobia		Obsession		Psycho-Somatism		Depression		Hysteria	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Optimism	73	6	8.22	6	8.22	32	43.84	11	15.07	19	26.03	7	9.59
Pessimism	34	13	38.24	8	23.53	21	61.76	10	29.41	15	44.12	3	8.82
Indifferent	45	7	15.53	8	17.78	24	52.33	12	26.67	19	42.22	3	6.67
Total	152	26	17.11	22	14.47	77	50.66	33	21.71	53	34.87	13	8.55
Test of significance (χ^2)													

(●) Insignificant

(●●) Significant

for admission to public homes tended to be the most to suffer from high score levels of all the six neurotic scales of middle sex personality test.

As regards the relation of hobbies to the six personality traits, it was found that the elderly with more than one hobby were least to have high scores of the six personality traits except hysteria. However, the results were statistically insignificant. Studying the views on the future among elderly in relation to the six personality traits revealed the prevalence of high scores of anxiety, phobia, obsession, psychosomatism and depression among pessimistic outlookers. It was among optimistic outlookers only that hysteria ranked the highest in prevalence. These differences were statistically insignificant except in the case of anxiety, where $X^2 = 14.3106$ (Table 6).

DISCUSSION

This study showed that obsession ranked first in prevalence among elderlies in Alexandria followed by depression, psychosomatism, anxiety and phobia; while hysteria came last. Although, high score of obsession was the most common personality trait, however, this does not mean high frequency of neurotic incidence among the elderly. Sergeev, in 1978, stressed that with age, manifestations of obsessive-phobic neurosis become more incomplete, alleviated, stereotyped, with an increased tendency towards a non progressive development (attack like or inert). Brink (1977) announced that depression is one of the common threats to the mental health of the aged. The chief cause is interiorization of the personality and the growth of inferiority feelings due to poor adjustment to retirement, widowhood, and / or chronic physical conditions. Later in 1979 Goldstein stated that depression in the elderly is difficult to classify and may be more of a symptom than a disease entity. The core problem with the elderly is inability to handle multiple losses. Feeling of helplessness and reduced self-esteem are significant. The resultant depression often appears mild but the risk of suicide cannot be ignored. Gunby (1978) said that depression is the most frequent psychiatric disorder among the elderly, either as

a primary disorder, or secondary to somatic disease and other psychiatric diseases.

Anxiety, unlike depression, is not common among the aged. In view of the multitude of stresses accompanying later life and considering the fact that lack of success in mastering stress typically produces anxiety, one should expect a high frequency of anxiety among the aged. To explain the deficit, it is proposed that those who survive into old age have developed strategies to successfully deal with stress (Jarvik and Russel, 1979). In addition, Bell (1978) said that anxiety and physical stress levels of the young exceeded those of the aged, regardless of the damage sustained. Results suggest the coping potential of the aged to surpass that of their younger counter parts.

Psycho-somatic inclination which ranked third among the present personality findings was commented upon by Hunter and Linn in 1980. They compared volunteer workers over age sixty-five to retired elderly who did not engage in any type of work activity. They mentioned that volunteers were found to have significantly higher degree of life satisfaction, stronger will to live, and fewer symptoms of depression, anxiety and somatization. Hence participation in volunteer work appears to be salient factor in explaining psychological differences between working and non-working elderlies.

Insignificant relation was observed between the prevalence of high levels of anxiety, phobia, psycho-somatism, depression and hysteria with increase of age. Maddox and Douglass (1974) in studying ageing and individual differences longitudinally focussed on the fact that most of the social and cultural environment is transmitted through older people and that the character of an environment depends in part on the typical characteristics of its members; therefore individual differences do not diminish with age. In 1977, Costa and McCrae mentioned that the relative standing of individuals on personality dimensions is fairly constant overtime. Bassili and Reil (1981) supported that view as they said "personality mosaic" attributed to individuals in their thirties

gives way to uniform stereotyped attribution in old age. The significant decrease in the prevalence of high scores of obsession among the "very-old" age group can be explained by loss of interest and the immune response developed by aged towards life happenings (Jarvik and Russel, 1979; Bell, 1978; Barton, 1959).

Like most of the previous studies, the present work depicted that elderly females outnumbered elderly males. Also, there were insignificantly higher scores of the six personality scales among females than among males. Person (1980) in studying validity, solidity and stability as personality dimensions in a 70 year old urban population found that 70 year old men scored higher than 70 year old women on validity. He attributed this difference to the lower prevalence of neurosis and personality deviations in men. However, he did not find differences between both sexes in the other two dimensions. In 1976, Atchley who studied sex differences in selected social and psychological characteristics among 3630 elderly men and women in Ohio found that elderly women showed a greater prevalence of negative psychological characteristics compared to older men. Older women were more often lonely, anxious, unstable in self-concept, highly sensitive to criticism; and highly depressed. These sex differences may be the result of a tendency for women to be more willing, and to find it more appropriate to admit to problems. This opinion was supported by Copper Stock, 1971; and Phillips and Segal, 1969. In 1979, Linn et al, found no sex differences in overall adjustment.

Widows and widowers were significantly more susceptible to higher scores of phobia than ever and never married individuals. They were also significantly less susceptible to high scores of obsession than the never married group and tended to be the highest scorers on the scales of anxiety and psycho-somatism. Studies which differentiate unmarried status have suggested that well-being of single people tends to be roughly equivalent to that of married persons, while widowed,

divorced, and separated persons tend to have lower reported well-being (Kutner et al., 1956; Philblad and Adams, 1972).

This study revealed that elderly with moderate income enjoyed the lowest prevalence of anxiety, phobia, psycho-somatism, depression, hysteria and significantly lower susceptibility to high scores of obsession than those of lower and higher income. It was found that the association of income to well-being is stronger at lower levels of income (Palmore and Luikart, 1972; Larson, 1978). Blazer and Williams (1980) wrote that the frequency of widowhood, impairment in social resources and impairment in economic resources was greater for individuals with symptoms of major depressive disorders. In 1980, Mancini suggested that internal control is related to life-satisfaction independent of health levels or monetary resources.

In Alexandria, high scores of anxiety and depression were found most prevalent among elderly who had no families (orphans and illegitimates). While high scores of phobia, psycho-somatism and hysteria were most prevalent among elderly who came from incomplete families and those who came from complete families tended to be the most to suffer from high scores of obsession. It is only logic that elderly who had complete families, i.e., were brought up by two parents got more rules and regulations which resulted in more obsessive inclinations compared to those who have been reared by one parent, brothers or none. However, those who had no families or who came from incomplete families tended to suffer from more threatening neurotic traits as depression and psycho-somatism.

It was interesting to find that those who reported that they had fear or grief responses for admission to public homes tended to be the most represented on the high scores of all six neurotic scales of Middle Sex Personality Test. In 1981, Somers and Fabian said that placing an elderly relative in a long term institution is generally a last resort, used only after all other alternatives have been thoroughly exhausted. It is also frequently a very traumatic experience. The family may feel relief

but also disheartened, unhappy, frightened and guilty. Adult children feel that they are rejecting their aged parents. A recent study found that 12 % of geriatric admissions into institutions were precipitated by the inability of relatives or friends to cope with the management of an old person at home because of problems that made care of an elderly individual intolerable. It is frequently traumatic to elderly. Previously, Smith and Bengston (1979), on the other hand, suggested that institution care can serve to enhance family relations, particularly when family ties have been strained by the need of the older member.

Elderlies living in public homes who had more than one hobby were the least scorers on the high scale of the six personality traits except hysteria. Barton (1959) had described a condition called institutional neurosis characterized by apathy, lack of initiative, loss of interest, apparent inability to make plans for the future, lack of individuality and, on occasion, a characteristic posture and gait. He suggested that to avoid mental and physical ill health; it is important therefore to avoid admission of elderly people into institution whenever possible. As a solution, day hospitals, day centres, all-day clubs for the elderly, lunch clubs and hobbies together with crafts centres all have a vital function in the preventive plan.

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AUTHORS

- S. Rashed, M.D., D.P.M. & N.,D.M., Assistant Professor of Psychiatry,
Faculty of Medicine, Alexandria University.
- N M. Hidayet, D. P. H., Dr. P. H.
- K. A. Ali, D. P. H., Dr. P. H.
- M. T. Gasser, D. P. H., Dr. P. H.
- A S. Gamal, Dr. P. H.

الموجـيز

دراسة وبائية عن الصحة النفسية لكبار السن

المقيمين في دور المسنين بالاسكندرية

يبحث هذا العمل في سمات الشخصية المميزة لعينة من كبار السن المقيمين في بعض دور المسنين بالاسكندرية ، كما يبحث في العلاقات بين هذه السمات وبعض المتغيرات (مثل السن ، الجنس داخل الفرد ... الخ) .

ولقد اظهرت النتائج أن السمات الوسواسية تحتل المرتبة الاولى بين سمات الشخصية للعينة ، بينما تحتل السمات الانشائية المرتبة الثانية ، ثم تأتي بعد ذلك السمات الأخرى وهى : الجسمنفسية — القلق — الرهاب — وأخيرا الهستيريا . ولقد وجدت علاقات ذوات دلالة احصائية بين السن ودخل الفرد والسمات الوسواسية وبين الحالة الاجتماعية والرهاب ، وأخيرا بين النظرة الى المستقبل والقلق . بينما كانت العلاقات بين سمات الشخصية — من ناحية — والجنس ونوع الأسرة والهوايات ورد فعل الفرد لدخوله الدار — من ناحية أخرى — كلها ليست ذوات دلالة احصائية .

ABSTRAIT

Une étude épidémiologique de l'état de Santé mentale, des résidents d'asiles de vieillards à Alexandrie

Cette étude a été conduite pour établir le suivant :

- 1) Quelques caractéristiques de la personnalité des résidents des asiles de vieillards à Alexandrie.
- 2) La relation entre différents facteurs écologiques et les traits de personnalité trouvés chez les personnes âgées dans ces asiles.

Les résultats ont montré que l'obsession était le trait de personnalité le plus répandu, suivie par la dépression, le psychosomaticism, l'anxiété, la phobie et finalement l'hystérie.

Des relations, statistiquement non significantes étaient trouvées entre ces traits et le sex, genre de famille, passe temps et la réaction émotionnelle à la résidence dans ces asiles.

La relation entre l'âge et le revenu, et l'obsession, l'état marital et la phobie puis entre les aspirations futures et l'anxiété étaient significantes.