

Elderly's perceived social support

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■ **ABSTRACT :** The study was conducted to know the perceived social support of elderly of Dharwad, Karnataka and Sibsagar district of Assam. A differential research design was used to compare the perceived social support of elderly residing in rural areas of Northern Karnataka and Upper Assam. The sample of the study 60 constituted 60 elderly aged 60 years and above, were randomly selected from two rural areas namely Kuburgatti (Dharwad district) and Halwating (Sibsagar district), comprising of 30 samples (15 male and 15 female) from each area. The tools used were the self structured questionnaire, Socio Economic Status (Aggarwal *et al.*, 2005) and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet *et al.*, 1988). The result showed that 51.66 per cent of elderly of both the regions received high support from their spouse, family and friends, followed by 40.00 per cent who reported moderate support and 8.33 per cent who reported low support. Significant relationship was found between family type, family size, marital status, education, occupation, socio-economic status and perceived social support of elderly. Thus, age, education, occupation, marital status, family type, family size and socio-economic status might be the associated factors for perceived social support among older people. Apart from spouse, family members and friends also played non-negligible roles on the elderly's wellbeing. Frequencies of contacting with family members and friends were more strongly associated with life satisfaction, happiness, and self esteem of the elderly.

■ **KEY WORDS:** Perceived social support, Region, Age, Gender

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The elderly population is now becoming a considerable concern around the world. The population of people aged 60 and over is growing faster than any other group. Compared to 1950 population estimates, by 2050, the projected elderly population is expected to increase to 223 per cent. Between the year 2000 and 2050, the world wide proportion of persons over 65 years of age is expected to increase more than double from the current 6.9% to 16.4%. Elderly people have spent a lot of time in the world and have

experienced things that future generations will never witness and certainly will not understand. They have taught us respect, manners, traditions, appreciation of things, and how to accept and deal with life experiences.

The quality of life (QOL) of the elderly people has become relevant with the demographic shift toward an aging society. There are indications that the concepts and concerns related to QOL in the elderly people are different from those of the general population. A majority of the elderly people evaluate the QOL positively on the

basis of social contacts, dependency, health, material circumstances, and social comparisons. The family provides individual emotional, social, and economic support. The ability of the aged persons to cope with the changes in health, income, social activities, and so on, in their old age depends, to a great extent, on the support they get from their family members. In India, majority of older people live with their immediate family members and the family continues to be the main provider of eldercare. Eldercare is the fulfillment of the special needs and requirements that are unique to senior citizens.

In a social milieu where family networks continue to be the major source of psychosocial support and deep rooted cultural norms and perception regarding the family, although apparently dwindling in the near past, the role of spouse, families as well as friends are the crucial source of support for the elderly people assumes a greater significance. Thus, perceived social support is a key component of the overall well-being of the elderly people.

Perceived social support has been found to be an important determinant for improving the QoL of older people. *Perceived support* refers to a recipient's subjective judgment that providers will offer (or have offered) effective help during times of need. Especially, the support of spouse, family as well as friends can make an important contribution to older adults' well-being. These social networks can give older adults a sense of belonging. Therefore, to get a better understanding on perceived social support of elderly the following objective undertaken for the study-

- To know the association between selected variables and perceived social support on elderly of Dharwad, Karnataka and Sibsagar district of Assam.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

A differential research design was used to compare the perceived social support of elderly residing in rural areas of Northern Karnataka and Upper Assam. The sample of the study 60 constituted 60 elderly aged 60 years and above, were randomly selected from two rural areas namely Kuburgatti (Dharwad district) and Halwating (Sibsagar district), comprising of 30 samples (15 male and 15 female) from each area. Elderly who were diseased and Bed ridden were excluded from the study. Face to face interviews were conducted and information was noted down.

Tools used for the study:

Self-structured questionnaire:

The self structured questionnaire was used to elicit general information of the samples.

Multidimensional scale of perceived social support (MSPSS):

The MSPSS is intended to measure the extent to which an individual perceives social support from three sources: Significant Others (SO) (Items 1, 2, 5 and 10), Family (FA) (Items 3, 4, 8 and 11) and Friends (FR) (Items 6, 7, 9, and 12). The MSPSS is a brief, easy to administered self-report questionnaire which contains twelve items rated on a seven-point Likert- type scale with scores ranging from 'very strongly disagree' to 'very strongly agree'. Scores ranging from 1 to 2.9 is considered as low support, a score of 3 to 5 is considered as moderate support; a score from 5.1 to 7 could be considered high support.

Socio-economic scale:

The socio-economic status was ascertained by using Socio-economic status scale by Aggarwal *et al.* (2005). The scale consists of 22 statements which assess education, occupation, monthly per capita income from all sources, family possessions, Number of children, Number of earning members in family, education of children, domestic servants in home, possession of agricultural land and non-agricultural land along with animals and social status of the family.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A close view on the Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of elderly residing in Kuburgatti and Halwating area. From the table it can be seen that 83.3 per cent elderly from Kuburgatti and 80.0 per cent elderly from Halwating region belong to Young Old category, followed by 13.3 per cent from Kuburgatti and 20.0 per cent from Halwating belong to Old Old category and only 1 elderly (aged 110) from Kuburgatti was under Oldest Old category. With respect to education 66.7 per cent elderly were illiterate from Kuburgatti followed by 23.3 per cent reported primary pass but <10th, 23.3 per cent from Halwating reported just literate but no schooling followed by 20.0 percent of elderly had passed primary school but <10th and 20.0 per cent were illiterate. Regarding occupation 80.0 per cent of elderly from

Sr. No.	Variables	Category	Dharwad	Sibsagar
1.	Age	Young Old (60-74)	25 (83.3)	24(80.0)
		Old Old (75-84)	4(13.3)	6(20.0)
		Oldest Old (85+)	1(3.3)	-
2.	Education	Primary pass but <10 th	7 (23.3)	6(20.0)
		<Primary but attended school for at least one year	2 (6.7)	3 (10.0)
		Just literate but no schooling	1 (3.3)	7 (23.3)
		Illiterate	20 (66.7)	6 (20.0)
3.	Occupation	Self employed e.g. shops, remedies or petty business with income >5000	6 (20.0)	14 (46.7)
		Self employed with income <5000 (labourer, housewife)	24 (80.0)	16 (53.3)
4.	Monthly Income (Rs.)	20000-49999	7 (23.3)	7 (23.3)
		10000-19999	6 (20.0)	15 (50.0)
		5000-9999	12 (40.0)	8 (26.7)
		2500-4999	5 (16.7)	-
5.	Marital Status	Married	20 (66.7)	26 (86.7)
		Widow	10 (33.3)	4 (13.3)
6.	Family Type	Nuclear	11 (36.7)	5 (16.7)
		Joint	19 (63.3)	25 (83.3)
		Extended	-	-
7.	Family Size	Large (≥ 8)	2 (6.7)	-
		Medium (5-7)	17 (56.7)	26 (86.7)
		Small (≤ 4)	11 (36.7)	4 (13.3)
8.	SES	Upper SES	11 (36.7)	13 (43.3)
		Low SES	19 (63.3)	25 (83.3)

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

Kuburgatti and 53.3 per cent from Halwating reported as self employed with income <5000 (labourer, housewife). With respect to marital status 66.7 elderly from Kuburgatti and 86.7 per cent from Halwating reported were married. Both the region, Kuburgatti (63.3 %) and Halwating (83.3%) belongs to joint family with a medium family size, having lower middle socio-economic status, respectively.

An examination of Table 2 depicts that 51.66 per cent of elderly residing in Kuburgatti and Halwating region received higher support from their spouse, family and friends, followed by 40.00 per cent reported moderate support and 8.33 per cent report low support. Bowlby's attachment theory Ainsworth (1985) noted that adults who possess a secure attachment style tend to develop mental models of themselves as being valued and worthy of others' concern, support, and affection. Significant others are described as being accessible, reliable, trustworthy and well intentioned. Secure individuals report that they develop closeness with others easily, feel comfortable depending on others and having others depend on them, and rarely are concerned about being

abandoned or others becoming extremely close to them. Their romantic relationships, in turn, tend to be characterized by more frequent positive affect, by higher levels of trust, commitment, satisfaction and interdependence, and by happy, positive, and trusting styles of love.

Sr. No.	MSPSS Categories	Frequency (%)
1.	Low Support	5 (8.33)
2.	Medium Support	24 (40.00)
3.	High Support	31 (51.66)

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

Table 3 shows the percentage distribution of MSPSS subscales on social support of elderly; here we can see that 55.0 per cent of elderly reported high support from significant other/spouse, 48.3 per cent from family and 71.7 per cent moderate support from friends. One longitudinal study showed that married couples were at less risk for cognitive decline than those who were widowed, divorced or separated (Fratiglioni *et al.*, 2000).

Table 3 : Percentage distribution of MSPSS subscales of elderly (n=60)

Sr. No.	MSPSS Categories	MSPSS Subscales		
		Significant other	Family	Friends
1.	Low support	15 (25.0)	7 (11.7)	4 (6.7)
2.	Medium support	12 (20.0)	24 (40.0)	43 (71.7)
3.	High support	33 (55.0)	29 (48.3)	13 (21.7)

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

A close view of Table 4 shows the association between age and social support of elderly. This table reported elderly belonging to young old category received 51.0 per cent high support followed by 38.8 per cent moderate support. 50.0 per cent of elderly from old old category reported both high and moderate support. No significant association was found between age and perceived social support of elderly ($\chi^2=2.252$). Comparison of mean scores revealed no significant difference between age and perceived social support (56.00, 57.00 and 60.00, respectively). The F-value of 0.049 was not significant.

Table 5 shows the association between gender and social support of elderly, were 53.3 per cent of male and 50.0 per cent of female reported high support followed by 43.3 per cent of male and 36.7 per cent of female reported receiving moderate support. However, Chi-square analysis shows no significant association between gender and perceived social support of elderly ($\chi^2=1.999$). Comparison of mean scores revealed no significant difference between gender and perceived

social support (56.36 and 56.16, respectively). The t-value of 0.034 was not significant.

An examination of Table 6 shows the association between area and perceived social support of elderly. A glance in the table shows that 70.00 per cent of elderly residing in Halwating reported high support, followed by 30.00 per cent of elderly reported medium support, whereas 50.00 per cent Kuburgatti elderly reported moderate support, followed by 33.3 per cent perceived high support. There was a highly significant association found between area and perceived social skills of elderly ($\chi^2=10.403^{**}$). The comparison of mean scores showed that elderly from Halwating (61.43) perceived better social support compared to Kuburgatti (51.03) elderly. The F-value was found to be highly significant difference ($F= 2.85^{**}$).

An appraisal of Table 7 shows the relationship between the selected variables and perceived social support of elderly. Family type was highly significant with family size (0.475**), occupation (0.267*) and perceived social support scale (0.383**). Marital status was found

Table 4: Association between age and perceived social support of elderly (n=60)

Sr. No.	Age	Low support	Medium support	High support	Modified χ^2	Mean (SD)	F
1.	Young old	5 (10.2)	19 (38.8)	25 (51.0)		56.00±15.16	
2.	Old old	-	5 (50.0)	5 (50.0)	2.252 ^{NS}	57.00±15.39	0.049 ^{NS}
3.	Oldest old	-	-	1 (100.0)		60.00	

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

NS=Non-significant

Table 5: Association between gender and perceived social support of elderly (n=60)

Sr. No	Gender	Low Support	Medium Support	High Support	Modified χ^2	Mean (SD)	t
1.	Female	4 (13.3)	11 (36.7)	15 (50.0)		56.36±16.81	
2.	Male	1 (3.3)	13 (43.3)	16 (53.3)	1.999 ^{NS}	56.16±13.29	0.034 ^{NS}

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

NS=Non-significant

Table 6: Association and comparison between region and social support (n=60)

Sr. No.	Area	Low Support	Medium Support	High Support	Modified χ^2	Mean (SD)	F
1.	Dharwad	5 (16.7)	15 (50.0)	10 (33.3)		51.03±14.66	
2.	Sibsagar	0 (0)	9 (30.0)	21 (70.0)	10.403 ^{**}	61.43±13.57	2.85 ^{**}

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 7: Relationship between selected variables and perceived social support of elderly (n=60)

	Age	Family type	Family size	Marital status	Income	Education	Occupation	SES	SS
Age	1	0.025	0.131	0.062	-0.049	-0.023	-0.164	-0.036	-0.032
Family Type		1	0.475**	0.291*	0.030	0.158	0.267*	0.212	0.383**
Family Size			1	0.080	0.206	0.199	0.051	0.181	0.058
Marital Status				1	0.291*	0.238	0.390**	0.160	0.638**
Income					1	0.678**	0.207	0.746**	-0.139
Education						1	0.238	0.787**	-0.014
Occupation							1	0.417**	0.370**
SES								1	0.011
SS									1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

to be significant with income (0.291*). Income was highly significant with education (0.678**) and socio-economic status (0.746**). Education and occupation was highly significant with socio-economic status (0.787** and 0.417**, respectively), occupation was also found to be significant with perceived social support scale (0.370**). Significant correlation was seen between family type and marital status (0.291*). Marital status had significant correlation with occupation (0.390**) and perceived social support (0.638**).

Conclusion:

The findings showed a positive significant relationship between the family type, family size, marital status, education, occupation, socio-economic status and perceived social support in the elderly. Firstly, older people who have a higher educational level, occupation and socio-economic status may have better communication ability and interpersonal skills through which they can utilize support resources actively. Secondly, the widowed, single, and divorced elderly experience poor social support compared with the married elderly; possible explanations may be the loss of the source of support or the negative effects of living alone. With a healthier marital status, older people may tend to perceive that more social support is available to them, and they may be able to build and maintain larger social networks. Thirdly, apart from spouse, family members and friends also played non-negligible roles on the elderly's wellbeing.

Frequencies of contacting with family members and friends were more strongly associated with life satisfaction, happiness, and self esteem of the elderly.

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