

The Interrelation of Institutional Care and Successful Aging

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Abstract : Aging population has been growing rapidly in Thailand due to several factors - namely, the declining size of the average Thai family, changing family structure, higher survival rates of women, and job migration patterns - there are fewer working-age citizens who are able to care for and support their aging family members. When a family can no longer provide for their elders, the responsibility shifts to the government. Many non-profit institutional care facilities for older adults have already been established, but having such institutions are not enough. In addition to the provisions that a reliable shelter can provide, older adults also need efficient social services, physical wellness, and mental health, all of which are crucial for successful aging. Yet, to date, there is no consensus or a well-accepted definition of what constitutes successful aging. The issue is further complicated by cultural expectations, and the gendered experience of the older adults. These issues need to be better understood to promote effective care and wellness. This qualitative research investigates the relationship between institutional care and successful aging among the institutionalized Thai older adults at a non-profit facility in Bangkok, Thailand. Specifically, it examines: a) How do institutionalized older adults define successful aging?, b) What factors do they believe contribute to successful aging?, and c) Do their beliefs vary by gender? Data was collected using a phenomenological research approach that included focus groups and in-depth interviews using open-ended questions, conducted on 10 institutionalized older adults (5 men and 5 women) ages 60 or over. Interview transcripts were coded and analyzed using grounded theory methodology. The participants aged between 70-91 years old, and they varied in terms of gender, education, occupation, and life background. The results revealed that Thai institutionalized older adults viewed successful aging as a result of multiple interrelated factors: maintaining physical health, good mental and cognitive abilities. Remarkably, the participants identified as successful aging include independence for self-care and financial support, adhering to moral principles and religious practice, seeing the success of their loved ones, and making social contributions to their community. In addition, three primary themes were identified as a coping strategy to age successfully: self-acceptance by being sufficient and satisfied with all aspects of life, preparedness and adaptation for every stage of life, and self-esteem by maintaining their self. These beliefs are shared across gender and age differences. However, participants highlighted the importance of the interrelationship among these attributes similar to the need for a secure environment, the thoughtfulness and social support of institutional care in order to maintain positive attitude and well-being. With highly increased Thai aging population, many of these older adults will find themselves living in the institutional care; therefore, it is important to intensively understand how older adults viewed successful aging, what constituted successful aging and what could be done to promote it. Interventions to enhance successful aging may include meaningful practice and along with an effective coping strategy in order to lead a better quality of life those living in institutional care.

Keywords : institutional care, older adults, self-acceptant, successful aging

Conference Title : ICHAA 2016 : International Conference on Healthy and Active Aging

Conference Location : Paris, France

Conference Dates : July 25-26, 2016