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ADVANCED DEMENTIA AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT: FIELD NOTES FROM RURAL INDIA

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Dementia as an irreversible progressive disease having little effective treatment has been a great cause of concern in the fields of psychiatry, medicine and social work. The issue has become increasingly critical over the decades owing to the fact that while at present, globally, over 36 million people suffer from dementia, it is estimated that this number will possibly be doubled by 2030 and more than three-times by 2050. Recent findings suggest that a rich social network may decrease the risk of developing dementia. Post-modern societies, with their excessive individuation and inward-looking characteristic lifestyles, have posed a greater risk to their present and future generations in this regard. As industrialization reaches its pinnacles, poor social connections, infrequent participation in social activities and social disengagements predict the risk of cognitive decline in individuals especially after middle ages. Keeping this broad spectrum of risks and threats, the issue of dementia needs to be understood in a wider context cutting across disciplinary boundaries. The present paper aims at examining the influence of social networks and social engagements on cognitive decline of the elderly population. The basic objective of this research attempt is to study whether low levels of social engagements in middle and late life were associated with the risk of incident of dementia. The researcher hypothesized that active social engagements during midlife stages of the individual, having other life-chances similar, have a protective effect from the onset of dementia. Regular, frequent and positive social interaction and intellectual stimulation keep dementia away to a considerable extent. The study starts from the end-point of the cases of advanced dementia by adopting a cross-sectional, comparative sample study method. A study sample of 200 elderly individuals from rural Karnataka, South India, (N=200 with experimental n=100 and normal n=100) selected through a stratified sampling technique (matched with five vital variables) was used to arrive at conclusions on the basis of data analysis and interpretation simple statistical techniques. The study was conducted between Jan'-Jun' 2018. Analysis of data re-established and re-confirmed the conclusion that regular (daily/weekly/frequent) engagement of the elderly in mental, social or productive activities was inversely related to dementia incidence. Low social engagement in late life is associated with risk of dementia.

Biography

Vighnesh N Bhat, PhD, is a trained Psychologist-Sociologist having engaged in research and teaching in USA, India and Ethiopia. He is also the President of FCMS, Shimoga, India.

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