Predicting Mortality
and the Importance of Social Interaction:
A Five year Follow-up Study in Japan

Tokie Anne

Abstract

Objectives. This study examined the association of social interaction and mortality by five years longitudinal study.

Methods. Participants were all the community-dwelling person aged 60 and over in a farming community near major urban centers in Japan (n=925). 153 subjects were deceased within four years period after survey. The contents of the questionnaire were about social interaction (i.e.: a) Independence, b) Social curiosity, c) Interaction, d) Feeling of Safety, e) Participation in the society), health status and life style, their feeling about themselves.

Results. 1) Age, mobility, and activity of daily living were significantly related to the mortality after five years. 2) Under 75 years of age, lack of "Reading books", "Having active role", and "Feeling of importance" for male, and "Life style motivation", "Active approach", and "Feeling of importance" for female were significantly related to higher mortality. 3) Over 74 years of age, lack of "Reading books" for male, and "Reading newspapers", "Having active role", "Participation in neighborhood affairs", "Life style motivation", and "Active approach" for female were significantly related to higher mortality. 4) By logistic analysis adjusted for age, sex, education, mobility independence, daily living independence, and health status, odds ratios to mortality were examined. Higher score of "Independence" subscale (odds ratio 0.72) was significantly related to lower mortality. Age, sex were also significant but education, mobility independence, daily life independence, and health status were not significant. Controlled age and sex, higher score of "Independence", "Social Curiosity", "Participation in the society" were significantly related to lower mortality. With no controlled items, higher score of "Independence", "Social Curiosity", "Participation with society", "Interaction" were significantly related to lower mortality.

Discussion. Social interaction related to mortality. Improvements in social interaction appear more effective in reducing mortality. Further research is needed on this cohort to develop a more effective scale of social interaction which can predict precisely the mortality related to socio-psychological factors.

Professor, Research Institute of National Rehabilitation Center for the Disabled, Japan
1. INTRODUCTION

Social interaction have been reported to reduce morbidity (Wallston, Alagna, DeVellis & De Vellis, 19831)). Because of increased rates of physical disability, social interaction attain even more importance for people of advanced age. Social interaction includes social relationship, social ties, and social support takes an important role in maintaining independence of the elderly in communities. Motivation of the elderly to keep contacts with society is also found to be a critical factor in maintenance of physical well being (Anme, 19932)).

The needs for health and human services have increased dramatically, but the resources are limited. So the useful utilization of the services are highly expected and methods should be developed to find the ways to use the service effectively (Anme, 19953)). The basic concept of the 21st century is 'self care'. Every person should aim for independence and the purpose of support is to encourage the self-care, in which social interaction may take important role, because the process of aging is affected by the interaction between the individual and the environment.

Past research has shown correlation between self-reported subjective health and physical health as well as mental well being. In the past, the magnitude of the correlation between social interaction and physical factors has been exaggerated (Schaefer, Coyne, & Lazarus, 19814)). A clarification of this relationship between lack of social interaction and physical decline is important because the elderly are at higher risk for almost all morbidity and mortality (Seeman, Kaplan, Knudsen, Cohen, & Guralnik, 19875)). But social interaction must be focused not only on the question of how amount of social interaction is related to mortality, but also whether there are distinct patterns of aspects perceived social interaction that result in different level of risk of mortality.

At the time when the physical function and the ability of adaptation to environment has declined, elderly are affected seriously by the acute changes of the daily environment. It is very important for health social professionals to find the person at risk before their situation deteriorate, and to support them with adequate methods. By taking such procedure, the risks to those people can be diminished or eliminated, and these kinds