



The impact of Ecotourism on quality of life of elderly orientation

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to assess the impact of ecotourism on quality of life and the life orientation of the elderly people. The method was a quasi-experimental study with pretest-posttest control group, respectively. 32 retired seniors of Retirement Center in Shiraz departments with the lowest score in the studied variables were chosen as sample and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. Data collection tools were life quality questionnaire of sf-36 and life orientation questionnaire of Antonovsky. Test group experienced an ecotourism program including a one-day entertainment program for 16 sessions across natural areas with beautiful and scapes. Analysis of the results showed that ecotourism puts a significant impact on improving the score of life quality and orientation of the elderly and this difference was the same between men and women samples.

Keywords: quality of life, life orientation, the Elderly.

INTRODUCTION

Aging is a process that encompasses all living organisms, including humans. Aging, increasing age, is not a disease but a vital phenomenon in which everyone is included and is actually a natural process during which the physiological and psychological changes occur in the body. [1]

Aging, is a relative matter and a hundred-year-old man might be more head had and more succulent than a 65-year-old. [2]

It should be noted that we are in the early years of the 21st century; a century in which, life expectancy of human has crossed the border of 66 years. [3]

On the other hand, world population is also aging rapidly. In 2006, people aged 60 and older were about 650 million that, this amount will be doubled in 2025 and will reach 3.1 billion. In 2050, people aged 60 and above will form more than 2 billion of the world's population. [4]

In Iran, although the proportion of younger age groups in the total population has a higher percentage, and this has located our country among young countries in terms of population structure, but according to the census 2.6 percent of the country's population in 1335, 5/6 % in 1345, 2.5 percent in 1355, 4.5 percent in 1365, 6.6 percent in 1375, 3.7 percent in 1385, and 3.8 percent of the population in 1390, were over 60. It is estimated that this ratio will reach 5.10 percent in 2025 and 7.21 percent in 2050. [5]

People above 50 years old, regard their gradual changes of personality because of aging, as if the futility feeling and lack of activity is essential to aging. In general, the character undergoes changes like frustration and lack the means in old age. [6]

Basically, elderly population requires special attention on various issues. People elderly, as physically, are prone to various diseases and disabilities, are also among vulnerable groups in terms of mental health problems. [7]

The World Health Organization (WHO) has defined mental health an essential requirement and vital to improve the quality of human life. This organization defines mental health as "a state of complete psychological, social, and physical health (rather than the absence of disease or disability)." [8]

Due to the ability of a person to the health, productivity, and integrity, Antonovsky also adopted salutogenic approach rather than the pathogenic one whose focus was on disease-causing factors, and treating diseases. [9] Seniors whose reciprocal actions are restricted and sometimes negative, are possible to say: ((maybe it's good that I do not associate with many people as possibly I would look old, infirm and stupid to their mind)). This kind of thinking makes them avoid contact with others and this causes their negative thoughts and cynical way of life about themselves to increase. [10]

A person with an optimistic orientation to the future, evaluates stressful situations with a positive outlook and has a good calculation of his ability to pass difficult. [11] Antonovsky knows the sense of coherence as equivalent with the orientation of life. [12] Sense of coherence that is the main and basic structure in salutogenic approach, refers to a general direction in which a person has a sense of stable and sweeping confidence, but is dynamic in the case of internal and external environment stimuli. [9]

According to him, the sense of coherence has three parts: comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. Comprehensibility refers to a person's perception that how much order, structure, and logic there is in the external and internal stimuli ahead. Manageability suggests the extent to which a person accesses the resources needed to deal with life challenges. Meaningfulness indicates to what extent a person feels life is emotionally meaningful. People with a strong sense of meaningfulness consider events as a positive challenge and with an optimism that are well worth the required investment emotionally responsibly is. [13]

Studies consistently have shown a strong sense of coherence, is the dominant feature of people who are well coping with stressful situations [14]. Moreover, the relationship between the sense of coherence and quality of life, fatigue, depression, loneliness, low anxiety [15], self-esteem [14], health [16], quality of life, sense of well-being and its amount of social network for the elderly, adaptability with cardiovascular diseases [17] has been reviewed and approved.

A set of changes that occurs along with aging, especially approaching old age, such as relatives' death, loss of power, life goals, skills, physical skills and social situation as the specific issues of this period, creates a transformation. These changes and the approaching the final days of life and death, impose certain constraints on elderly people. [18]

Research has shown that optimism and positivism about life, dealing with the pressure of life and overcoming psychosocial adversity has a great impact on attempting the health-related behaviors, lifestyle modification, and ultimately reducing outbreak of the physical and psychological diseases. [19 and 20]

As it is clear, health is a fundamental right of every human being and a social purpose and all states and governments are obliged to ensure the health of individuals. [21]

Because the elderly creates significant developments in all life aspects of human societies, including a wide range of age structures, values and standards and the of creation of social organizations, meeting challenges ahead of it and taking relative policies for improving the physical, social and mental status of elderly people is very important. In addition, the aim is not just to be alive; the way and the quality of life is also important. [22]

Since the beginning of this century so far, around the world, life expectancy at birth has increased nearly three decades. [23] Supporting the elderly should not only be done with the aim to increase their life expectancy. The dynamic aging is a purposes today; this means that along with increasing aging population, the quality of their lives must also be given attention. [22]

Quality of life is one of the most important issues in health care today and is one of the largest health goals to improve the health of individuals, and in recent years it is well known as one of the most important factors affecting the lives of people, especially the elderly and people with disabilities. [24]

The World Health Organization has provided a broad definition of quality of life that is the person's comprehension of the life situation in terms of culture and values governing the society which is along with the goals, standards and interests of individuals. In his definition, Fassino also states that today, quality of life is a fundamental indicator and since quality of life involves numerous aspects of physiology, performance and the person's existence, considering it is of utmost importance and the aspects above should be noted to evaluate it properly. According to this comprehensive definition, quality of life associates with physical and mental state, personal beliefs, self-reliance rate, social relationships and the environment. [25] Or the quality of life means the emotion that a person shows about social, emotional, and physical well-being, and this feeling is affected by the fact that to what extent the person has achieved private satisfaction within different circumstances of life. [26]

Hughes introduces eight factors as the productive ones and part of the conceptive model of life quality: individual autonomy, declared satisfaction, physical and psychological well-being, socio-economic status, environmental quality, meaningful work, social cohesion and cultural factors. [27]

Studies have known many factors affecting the quality of life of elderly people. In Bergland's study, these factors include social practices, good health status, having personal housing. [28]

Cavallero's study, in Italy (2007), has expressed environmental and social conditions as factors affecting the elderly satisfaction and optimal quality of life. [29]

Due to the large number of elderly people who include almost 7 percent of the country population [24] and increasing the age of life expectancy, as well as sensitivity and vulnerability of this group, studying and attempting to enhance their quality of life is worthy of investigation and reviews.

As mentioned, the elderly, both physically and psychologically are among vulnerable groups. [7] The world's population is also aging rapidly [5], so checking the orientation and quality of life can be important as factors affecting rising health of these people.

Moreover, green space in addition to the physical health leads to mental comfort, higher work efficiency and superior quality of life. [30]

Including impacts caused by living in green space, is a reduction of the negative effects of stress that has greatly increased today. Prolonged stress leaves serious effects on all vital organs such as the heart and blood vessels. So if people do not find a way to reduce stress their health is endangered in different ways, and as it was said being present in nature and green spaces is a factor reducing stress. [31]

Also, according to Ulrich theory of improving stress, being in a natural positions will expand positive emotional responses. This can help the person previously exposed to stress improve it. [32]

As mentioned, a series of changes for the elderly and approaching the end of life and death imposes certain pressures like the death of someone close and loss of power on them. [18] Therefore, we must look for ways to reduce stress and increase these people's health for which being in nature seems to be effective due to the findings stated.

In the field of preferring landscapes, evolutionary theories also explain natural scenery usefulness in such a way that features of views satisfy human biological needs. [33 and 34]

High levels of stress and psychological pressures can cause fatigue in the elderly, as well as natural conditions that have highly attractive incentives and enable involuntary attention, and lead to support the restoration and improvement of fatigue. [35]

In addition to the items listed, we might know the positive effects of being in nature due to the effects that colors make on humans. Colors motivate different emotional and cognitive effects. For example, green color has a calming and painkiller effect. [36]

Experiencing the spectacles of nature can help improve the activity of the right hemisphere of the brain and generally increase the arrangement of brain's functions. It has been known that contact with nature increases concentration, kills mental fatigue and positively affects mood of temperament. [37]

So, the presence in the environment can help human health both physically and psychologically.

Previous studies have shown that there is a relationship between the perception of environment and human health, so knowledge in the field of a way that visual landscapes and nature affect health and welfare of the people, can help reduce stress and increase recovery and reconstruction and finally, the quality of life. [30] Thus, the people's trips in this beautiful natural area could be examined as one important cause of rising human health both physically and mentally, and ultimately enhancing the quality of life and life orientation.

2.1. Research method

This quasi-experimental research was conducted in 2013 with pretest-posttest design and with control group. The statistical population, include all the retired elderly of retirement center of Shiraz offices by whom Antonovsky life orientation questionnaire and sf-36 life quality questionnaire were completed and 32 people among whom received a low score on these two variables were selected randomly. Then they were assigned to experimental and control 16-people groups by randomly alternative approach. This was performed holding this list of seniors and using the table of random numbers. The experimental group was the one who paid to ecotourism and the control group for whom ecotourism was not taken.

In this study, the elderly over 55 years, members of retirement center of Shiraz offices were selected. It should of course be noted that taking moral considerations into account, the individuals participation in this study was consciously and voluntarily in which they participated in this study filling out a consent form to participate. The other condition for the presence in the study was getting a low score in the variables of the study. Exclusion criteria to leave the study was the loss of someone close, a contagious and dangerous disease or other emergency situation.

The experimental group experienced an ecotourism program from natural areas with beautiful landscapes including a one-day entertainment program for 16 sessions. In this program, in addition to special consideration to the elderly, they were to be given more independence. The researchers and experts selected the intended tour places and foods with regard to the specific circumstances of the elderly and provided them as a list for the experimental group members from which they did their choice; location and food were selected and were shared with them before the programs started according to the majority opinion. If members intended to add food or a place to the list, they noted them down in the corresponding space in the list, then the researchers and experts examined it and announced the result to the person.

Data collection tools in this study were Antonovsky life orientation and sf-36 life quality questionnaires.

Sf-36¹ life quality questionnaire is a tool for measuring health that can measure quality of life very well. This questionnaire has 36 questions and eight scales each comes from the combination of 2 to 10 questions and measures health in eight areas of physical functioning, physical limitations, bodily pain, general health, vitality, social functioning, spiritual problems, and mental health. A score range of zero to hundred is given to the total score of eight health dimensions in that, zero reports the worst and hundred reports the best items on the scale. Persian version of the short form questionnaire was approved as a standard questionnaire by the Research Institute of Health Sciences of University Jihad. In this Institute, the convergence validity test is used to determine the validity of which all correlation coefficients obtained more than the recommended (0.4) dose (range coefficients 0/58 to 0/95). Internal consistency reliability was used to assess reliability, through which the Cronbach alpha coefficient was obtained between 0/77 to 0/90. [38]

¹The short Form Health Surevy (SF-36)

Antonovsky Life Orientation questionnaire, consisting of 29 questions was considered to measure the three dimensions of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. In the 124 studies conducted using this scale, Cronbach alpha coefficient was obtained between 0/7 to 0/95. Retest coefficient also confirms acceptable stability of the questionnaire over time. [39]

Using this scale, Eriksson and colleagues began to check the analytical and descriptive studies in order to assess the validity and reliability of this scale. In addition to confirming the reliability of the findings mentioned in the previous paragraph, they found that in most studies, formal and content validity of the scale was acceptable. Surveying operating structure scale in various studies has yielded different results. However, the two single-factor and three-factor models have been more common than the other. In addition to this, they began to survey the criterion validity of the scale in studies and found the evidence convincing in this regard. [40]

2-2. Research findings

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the pre-test for the quality scores of life in both experimental and control groups

Statistical Indicators	group	The number	average	standard deviation	The least	The most
life quality pre-testing	control	16	122.50	11.00	108	153
	experimental	16	122.69	7.23	111	142

As inferred from the above table, the average of pre-test scores of life quality are not so much different from each other in both experimental and control groups.

Table 2- descriptive statistics related to the Life Orientation pre-Test scores in both experimental and control groups

Statistical Indicators	group	The number	average	standard deviation	The least	The most
life quality pre-testing	control	16	94.13	8.50	79	109
	experimental	16	94.75	7.33	82	111

As inferred from the table 2, the average of pre-test scores of the Life Orientation are not so much different from each other in both experimental and control groups.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics related to post-test for life quality amount scores in both experimental and control groups

Statistical Indicators	group	The number	average	standard deviation	The least	The most
life quality pre-testing	control	16	128.50	12.06	106	151
	experimental	16	146.25	8.28	131	158

As inferred from the table 3, the average of post-test scores of life quality in experimental group is higher than that of the control group.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics related to post-test for life orientation scores in both experimental and control groups

Statistical Indicators	group	The number	average	standard deviation	The least	The most
life quality pre-testing	control	16	91.75	4.51	85	102
	experimental	16	104.19	4.49	96	112

As inferred from the table 4, the average of post-test scores of life orientation in experimental group is higher than that of the control group.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to assess the impact of ecotourism on life quality and life direction of the elderly was conducted the seniors aged over 55 years of pensioners office of Shiraz and after performing ecotourism meetings, it became clear that the score of life orientation as well as that of life quality of the experimental group significantly increased after the intervention. It also was determined that his increase had no significant difference in terms of gender. In this study, nature means lush and beautiful places and ecotourism means circulating in these areas.

According to Ulrich theory of recovery from stress, stress reduction is created due to emotional and aesthetic response to the environment and the natural landscapes in order to develop positive emotional responses and reduce stress. However, the constructional environment delays the improvement of stress. [32] This founding well determines the positive impact of nature on human.

And other findings as well have shown that there is a relationship between the perception of the environment and human health, so the knowledge available in the field of a way that visual landscapes and nature affects the health and welfare of people can help reduce stress and increase retreatment and ultimately enhance the quality of life. [31] As already stated, green space basically leads to mental comfort, higher work efficiency and superior life quality in addition to physical health. [30] These findings, gained nature's impact on life quality in addition to its impact on physical and mental health, as well.

Some knew life quality as the feeling that an individual has of social, the emotional and physical well-being. [26] According to Ulrich's view, natural situations expand positive emotional responses, too. [32] And it has also been found that meeting nature reduces heart rate, eliminates muscle tension, reduces blood pressure and increases the electrical conductivity of the skin and affects physical health as well. [41] Thus, according to the findings above, emotional and physical dimensions of life quality will face growth viewing the nature, therefore, seeing nature raises the quality of life and shows that the results of this study correspond with the findings of previous research.

As mentioned, the Life Orientation also includes 3 components of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness.

Comprehensibility refers to a person's perception that how much order, structure, and logic there is in the external and internal stimuli ahead. Manageability suggests the extent to which a person accesses the resources needed to deal with life challenges. Meaningfulness indicates to what extent a person feels life is emotionally meaningful.

Experiencing scenes of nature can help improve right brain activity and generally increase brain functions discipline and it also has been determined that connection with nature increases concentration. [42] This finding suggests that experiencing the landscapes influences comprehensibility, and can concentrate on internal and external stimuli by increasing the focus and understand rules, and thus, can also improve the ability of concentrating and regular functioning of the brain and more relaxation caused by the effect of nature's green color. [36] One can better understand his internal and external resources and be aware of their existence and use them. These findings also indicate that the nature affects manageability dimension.

And also, for the meaningfulness dimension, we can refer to the finding that according to Ulrich's view, natural situations expand positive emotional responses. [32] So, as the result of expanding positive emotional responses and the ability to higher focus, one sees internal and external stimuli emotionally meaningful. It is clear that the test result about life orientation variable corresponds with the findings of previous research as well.

This research can also be used on special diseases and handicapped and other less power segments of society. Because it seems that ecotourism can also affect their mood positivity and life quality and their life orientation.

The results of this research showed that ecotourism can be used as an appropriate way for improving the life quality and the life orientation of the elderly and finally their mental and physical health and it can be put in command for centers that are associated with the elderly and families with an elderly person.

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