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USING SOCIALISING GROUP WORK TO DEVELOP COMMUNICATION AND PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS OF INSTITUTIONAL STAFF WORKING WITH THE OLDER PERSON

Yaşlılarla Çalışan Kurum Personelinin İletişim ve Sorun Çözme Becerilerinin Geliştirilmesinde
Sosyalleştirme Grup Çalışması Kullanılması

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ABSTRACT

Ageing is a complex process that affects the physical, mental and social aspects of individuals. In this process, the decline in cognitive functions can negatively affect the social interactions and communication skills of older people. Sensory and cognitive changes make it difficult to communicate effectively with older people. Therefore, health and care professionals need to have the necessary skills to understand and address the needs of older people. Improving the communication and problem-solving skills of institutional staff working with older people is critical to the quality of health services provided. In this context, social group activities contribute to effective communication in patient care by improving participants' self-expression, listening and empathy skills. Various training programmes and socialization group activities improve the communication skills of health professionals and care staff, thereby increasing patient satisfaction. Socialization group work improves individuals' social problem-solving skills and allows participants to solve problems together through group interaction. Social group activities are an important tool for improving the communication and problem-solving skills of institutional staff working with older people. These studies both improve the social skills of individuals and have a positive impact on the quality of health and care services.

Keywords: Elder care services, socialization group work, communication skills, problem-solving skills

Öz

Yaşlanma süreci, bireylerin fiziksel, zihinsel ve sosyal yönlerini etkileyen karmaşık bir süreçtir. Bu süreçte, bilişsel işlevlerdeki gerileme, yaşlı bireylerin sosyal etkileşimlerini ve iletişim becerilerini olumsuz yönde etkileyebilir. Duyusal ve bilişsel değişiklikler, yaşlı bireylerle etkili iletişim kurma sürecinde zorluklara neden olmaktadır. Bu nedenle, sağlık profesyonellerinin ve bakım personelinin, yaşlı bireylerin ihtiyaçlarını anlamak ve onlara uygun bir şekilde yaklaşmak için gerekli becerilere sahip olmaları gerekmektedir. Yaşlı bireylerle çalışan kurum personelinin iletişim ve sorun çözme becerilerinin geliştirilmesi, verilen sağlık hizmetlerinin kalitesi açısından kritik bir öneme sahiptir. Bu bağlamda, sosyalleştirme grup çalışmaları,

katılımcıların kendilerini ifade etme, dinleme ve empati kurma becerilerini artırarak, hasta bakımında etkili iletişimin sağlanmasına katkıda bulunmaktadır. Çeşitli eğitim programları ve sosyalleştirme grup çalışmaları, sağlık profesyonellerinin ve bakım personelinin iletişim becerilerini geliştirmekte ve bu sayede hasta memnuniyetini artırmaktadır. Sosyalleşme grup çalışmaları, bireylerin sosyal problem çözme becerilerini geliştirmekte ve grup etkileşimleri sayesinde katılımcıların karşılaştıkları sorunları birlikte çözmelerine olanak tanımaktadır. Yaşlı bireylerle çalışan kurum personelinin iletişim ve sorun çözme becerilerini geliştirmek için sosyalleşme grup çalışmaları önemli bir araçtır. Bu çalışmalar, hem bireylerin sosyal becerilerini artırmakta hem de sağlık hizmetlerinin kalitesini olumlu yönde etkilemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yaşlı bakım hizmetleri, sosyalleştirme grup çalışmaları, iletişim becerileri, sorun çözme becerileri

INTRODUCTION

Improving the communication and problem-solving skills of the staff of organizations' working with the older people both increases the professional competences of the staff and improves the quality of care for the older individuals. While communication skills form the basis of effective interaction with older persons, problem-solving skills play a critical role in overcoming the difficulties encountered.

Communication skills of the staff working with the older adults also include social skills such as empathy and listening. In Öztemiz's study, it is stated that human capital is directly related to effective communication and problem-solving skills (Öztemiz, 2024). This situation reveals the importance of developing communication and problem-solving skills of the personnel who will interact with older adults. Besides, a study conducted in the field of nursing shows that there is a strong relationship between nurses' communication skills and their professional competences (Koyun et al., 2022). The development of communication and problem-solving skills enables a better response to the needs of older people.

Problem-solving skills directly affect the quality of care of older adults by increasing the ability of health personnel to overcome the difficulties they face. In Akgül and Mutlu's study, the effect of communication skills on problem-solving processes was examined and it was found that improving these skills increased the decision-making abilities (Akgül and Mutlu, 2021). In addition, the ability of health personnel to solve the problems they encounter in their interactions with older adults allows them to play a more effective role in the treatment processes of patients (Kaya et al., 2018). Therefore, a special emphasis on problem-solving skills in the training programmes of health personnel is necessary to improve the quality of care for older people.

Ageing Process and the Role of Effective Communication in Institutional Care

The aging process is a complex process that affects physical, mental and social aspects of an individual's life and brings with it various challenges. The five main problem areas defined in the literature on ageing can be summarised as follows: A) Ageing leads to a decline in muscle strength, walking speed, coordination, aerobic capacity and endurance, which can significantly affect life expectancy and quality of life (Kaushik and Kaushik, 2018). Physical functioning declines more rapidly in older age groups, especially in those over 77 years of age (Kaushik and Kaushik, 2018). B) Cognitive functions such as

memory, the speed of cognitive comprehension and neuro-visual ability decrease with age. This decrease is often associated with changes in neural connections and brain structure (Williamson and Shaffer, 2014; Navakkode and Kennedy, 2024). Cognitive decline may precede or follow physical decline, indicating a complex interaction between these two functions (Williamson and Shaffer, 2014). C) Ageing is associated with increased susceptibility to mental disorders, including depression, which can have a negative impact on physical decline (Kaushik and Kaushik, 2018; Okealy and Deary, 2020). Low cognitive levels and symptoms of depression may be associated with reduced physical capacity (Kaushik and Kaushik, 2018). D) Older individuals often experience social isolation and loss of close relationships, which can negatively affect their well-being. Adapting to these changes and coping with losses are important psychosocial challenges (Okealy and Deary, 2020). E) Engaging in physical activity and maintaining a healthy lifestyle can moderate some of the negative effects of ageing. Exercise has been shown to improve both physical and cognitive functions, thus supporting the preservation of cognitive memory and brain function (Allmer, 2005; Shanmugam et al., 2017).

The needs of older individuals living in care homes may differ depending on all or some of the problem areas mentioned above. In order to overcome these difficulties experienced by older individuals, professional staff and care staff have important duties. To effectively meet the needs of older people in care homes, health professionals and care staff must demonstrate strong physical and mental performance that allows them to diversify their services and individualised care techniques (Gordon, et al., 2022; Davies and Goodman, 2008).

The Importance of Effective Communication Skills When Working with Older Persons

Nursing home residents depend heavily on the staff in the institution for their communication needs; more than 75% of the communication activities of older individuals in daily life take place with staff (Conway and Chenery, 2016). Communication skills training for care staff has been shown to have positive effects on both non-verbal and verbal communication outcomes in patients with dementia (Heinemann-Knoch et al., 2005; Savundranayagam et al., 2007). However, there are also some important barriers to communication efforts with older individuals; first of all, older person-related barriers; sensory and cognitive changes and some physical weaknesses (such as hearing difficulties) can cause difficulties in the process of effective communication (Savundranayagam & Moore-Nielsen, 2015). Secondly, barriers related to care staff; limited opportunities for communication with older people due to the high number of care tasks of the staff (Falzarano et al., 2023). It is affected by the staff's use of an 'elderspeak' (Williams et al., 2005) due to their lack of awareness and skills in effective communication, the lack of external stakeholders outside the organisation from which staff can receive support during caregiver burden, dissatisfaction with the lack of links between care institutions, and the standardisation of basic care activities and the lack of individualized care (Bennett et al., 2016).

According to the researches reported in the literature, communication problems between caregivers and the elderly are quite common, which indicates that special communication strategies and skills are needed by care staff to prevent fatigue and burnout stemming from caregiving (Khodabandeh-Shahraki et al., 2019).

Problems due to a lack of effective communication skills can lead to a decrease and lack of effectiveness in the care provided, ignoring the older adults, and care staff neglecting their own care (Bagheri et al., 2019). Communication failures between care staff and health professionals have been associated with numerous errors that create psychological pressures on older people, such as unnecessary hospitalisations for simple health problems that can be safely managed in the institutional care environment (Williams and Warren, 2009).

Increased communication between institutional care staff and health professionals is associated with lower depressive symptoms and positive affect in older people (Sharkiya, 2023) and positively affects patient-centred outcomes such as patient satisfaction, quality of care, quality of life, and physical and mental health.

Improved and effective communication between care staff and all members of the primary care team, including family members of older people under institutional care and health professionals, is highly important for improving the mental health of older people and is associated with more positive mental health outcomes in both family members and care staff (Sharkiya, 2023).

The Importance of Effective Communication Skills in Health Service Delivery

The importance of effective communication skills in healthcare service delivery plays a critical role in increasing patient satisfaction, improving treatment processes and ensuring the effectiveness of healthcare services. Communication is necessary to build trust between healthcare professionals and patients and to ensure effective interaction at every stage of the treatment process (Güneşer, 2022). Research shows that communication skills training can lead to improved healthcare outcomes, increased patient satisfaction and improved team dynamics, and ultimately provide a more collaborative environment for problem solving. It is emphasised that communication skills are a competency with high priority, especially for healthcare professionals who provide human-centred services (Şen et al., 2020). Banerjee et al. found that communication skills training for oncology nurses improved interactions with patients and their families and led to better patient-related outcomes such as treatment rates and quality of life (Banerjee et al., 2017). These findings emphasise the critical role of effective communication in improving the overall healthcare experience.

Shyamala et al. emphasise that healthcare professionals involved in cancer care need adequate training in communication skills to improve both their well-being and patient satisfaction (Shyamala et al., 2022). A similar view is echoed by Bylund et al. who reported significant gains in self-efficacy among participants in an advanced communication training programme (Bylund et al., 2011).

The integration of communication skills training into health education is also supported by Mahmoud's research, which states that effective communication promotes teamwork and co-operation among health professionals, thus reducing misunderstandings and conflicts (Mahmoud, 2023). This is crucial in high-risk settings where timely and accurate information sharing is essential for effective problem solving. In addition, the study conducted by Kim and Sim shows that strong communication skills are directly linked to improved problem solving skills among clinical nurses and emphasises that problem solving and effective communication skills are interrelated (Kim and Sim, 2020).

The implementation of standardised communication techniques and role-playing/psychodrama-based trainings are recommended to improve interprofessional communication skills (Ifrim et al., 2022). Such approaches and interventions not only improve individual competences, but also enable health professionals to work more harmoniously to meet complex patient needs. The fact that healthcare institutions organise training programmes to improve communication skills increases the job satisfaction of nurses and other healthcare professionals and thus positively affects patient satisfaction (Temel & Şişman, 2017).

Relationship between Effective Communication and Problem Solving Skills in Older Persons Care

The use of problem-solving skills and communication skills in combination with problem-solving skills in care for older adults is necessary for improving the quality of care and for a sustainable and healthy process for both service users and providers. According to the previous research, there is a positive relationship between communication skills and constructive problem-solving approaches. Better used communication skills are associated with more effective problem-solving strategies such as perseverant approach and higher self-confidence (Conway and Chenery, 2016; Ramaswamy et al., 2014). Caregivers who are in contact with older individuals at any time should use their communication skills effectively in order to develop problem-solving skills (Kocak et al., 2021; Egeci and Gençöz, 2006).

Training programmes that enhance communication skills improve problem-solving abilities among caregivers and health care providers. For example, structured training programmes for pharmacists and healthcare providers have shown improvements in both communication and problem-solving skills, which are essential for high-quality care for older individuals (Yusefi et al., 2022; Bennett et al., 2016). Effective communication skills are also linked to better mental health outcomes in older patients. Effective communication can help to understand and address the emotional and psychological needs of older people and thus improve their overall well-being (Korc-Grodzicki et al., 2020). A study on the effects of communication skills education on the lifestyle of the older individuals showed that an educational intervention based on communication skills training effectively improved the communication skills and lifestyles of the older individuals (Korc-Grodzicki et al., 2020). Lack of communication skills, on the other hand, worsens the behaviours of older individuals, which are considered

problematic in the care environment, and increases the stress levels and workload of care staff (Bagheri et al., 2021).

The relationship between problem solving and communication skills in care for older people is critical for providing quality care to older adults. Evidence suggests that integrating problem solving and communication skills training can lead to significant improvements in communication and ultimately improve the overall care of older adults. However, challenges remain in assessing the impact of these skills on the well-being of older people in care, highlighting the need for continued research and development in this area.

Using Socialisation Group Work to Improve Communication Skills in Personnel of Institutional Care for Older Persons

Socialisation groups stand out as dynamic structures that make significant contributions to the personal development of individuals. These groups help individuals to improve their social skills, increase their emotional intelligence and become more effective in their social relationships. In particular, methods such as psychodrama allow individuals to explore their inner world and strengthen their social interactions. Psychodrama enables individuals to share their emotional experiences and understand group dynamics (Kafalı et al., 2022). Socialisation group activities are also effective in improving individuals' social problem-solving skills. In Gökkaya et al.'s study, the effectiveness of methods such as cognitive-behavioural group therapy, psychodrama and art therapy were examined and it was found that these approaches increased the social skills of individuals (Gökkaya et al., 2020). Such group work allows participants to solve the problems together they face and reinforces the sense of cooperation and solidarity within the group.

Socialisation group work to develop communication skills strengthens individuals' communication skills by increasing their social interactions and encourages learning within group dynamics. Such activities allow participants to improve their skills of self-expression, listening and empathizing. The importance of these skills, especially in the field of health, is directly related to the necessity of effective communication in patient care (Öztürk and Baykara, 2019).

Socialisation group studies facilitate participants' learning by interacting with their peers and colleagues. In Öztürk and Baykara's study, it is stated that peer education facilitates students to learn skills in clinical and laboratory environment, increases their self-confidence and improves their independent working, critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Öztürk and Baykara, 2019). This situation shows that socialisation groups are an effective method in developing individuals' communication skills. In addition, socialisation group activities also improve individuals' problem-solving skills. In the study of Akkuzu and colleagues, it is stated that group skills training increases the social skills of individuals and this situation has positive results in the provision of health services (Akkuzu et al., 2023).



The other important benefit of socialisation groups is that they reduce the stress and anxiety levels of the participants. Such groups provide support to individuals, strengthen their social ties and increase their emotional resilience. In a study on the effect of group skills training on reducing depression, anxiety and stress levels of individuals, especially during the pandemic period, it was observed that group interaction produced positive results (Akkuzu et al., 2023). In this context, socialisation group activities help individuals to improve their communication skills by supporting their psychological well-being.

The use of socialisation groups and creative drama activities on care staff working with the older people provide significant benefits in terms of improving their communication skills, increasing their ability to empathize and strengthening their ability to cope with stress. Such practices increase the quality of care by positively affecting the interactions of care staff with older individuals. In his study, Kesiçi (2023) states that creative drama techniques increase students' speaking skills and develop social skills such as listening and respecting different opinions. This situation can help care staff working with the older individuals to improve their communication skills in a similar way. Creative drama can enable care staff to communicate more effectively with older individuals, allowing them to better understand their needs. In addition, socialisation group and creative drama practices increase empathy skills. Uçar and Kaya (2023) stated that drama techniques improve individuals' ability to empathize. Creative drama can help care staff to establish a deeper bond with older individuals and to use empathy to better understand their emotional situations.

Among the outputs of communication training programmes conducted in institutional care environment and implemented within the socialisation group for care staff, it was observed that it significantly increased the knowledge and perceived skills of the staff in interacting with older individuals, especially with the ones who have problems in communicating for various reasons (Kline et al., 2023).

Socialisation workshops focusing on caregivers have been successful in reducing caregiver burnout and increasing empathy and effective communication strategies among caregivers (Van Houtyen et al., 2024).

A study on communication counseling for caregivers of Alzheimer's patients showed that caregivers' knowledge of communication issues increased, suggesting potential positive effects on staff well-being (Chung et al., 2020).

In conclusion, socialisation group studies conducted to improve communication skills increase individuals' social interactions, strengthen their problem-solving and communication skills, and provide psychological support. Such studies play a critical role in ensuring effective communication and quality patient care, especially in the field of health and care services. Therefore, the participation of health and care professionals in socialisation groups should be encouraged and such training programmes should be supported by health and care institutions.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study emphasises the importance of improving communication and problem-solving skills of institutional staff working with older individuals. Research shows that effective communication improves the mental health of older individuals, enhances the quality of care and positively affects patient satisfaction. Strengthening communication between institutional care staff and health professionals has been associated with lower depressive symptoms and more positive emotional states in older individuals. In this context, the implementation of training programmes that improve communication skills increases problem-solving abilities among caregivers and health care providers and leads to improvements in communication skills that are essential for high-quality care for older individuals.

Socialisation group work improves the social problem-solving skills of individuals and allows participants to solve the problems they face together through group interactions. Such studies, especially with the use of methods such as psychodrama, help individuals to explore their inner world and strengthen their social interactions. In addition, it is stated that group skills training increases the social skills of individuals, and this has positive results in the provision of health services. However, there are some obstacles in communication with older individuals. Sensory and cognitive changes can cause difficulties in the process of effective communication. Therefore, care staff and health professionals need to have the necessary skills to understand the needs of older people and appropriate approach. It is also emphasised that care staff need adequate training in communication skills. Integration of training programmes into health education shows that effective communication promotes teamwork and collaboration among health professionals.

In conclusion, socialisation group activities and structured training programmes are important tools to improve communication and problem-solving skills of institutional staff working with older individuals. These studies both increase the social skills of individuals and positively affect the quality of health and care services. Therefore, it is recommended that health and care institutions should organise training programmes to improve the communication skills of care staff and encourage socialisation group work. In addition, the implementation of standardised communication techniques and simulation-based training to improve interprofessional communication skills will allow health and care professionals to meet complex patient needs in a more coherent manner.



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