

What About Elders Who Have No Informal or Formal Support?

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ABSTRACT

Telephone interview data from a representative sample of 2,034 rural elders showed that 26.3% had limitations in abilities to perform daily activities (cooking, walking, cleaning, driving, etc.). Of these, many received informal assistance from family and friends or formal help from community agencies. However, 64 persons who had needs received no routine assistance from anyone. What are the effects of lack of support on their well-being? What coping strategies do they use in relation to their needs for assistance with everyday tasks? These elders did not differ from the others on demographic characteristics or psychological well-being. They demonstrated both resilience in current coping strategies and potential vulnerability in terms of risk to their physical health and psychological well-being in the future. Community service providers must address unexpressed needs in order to prevent exacerbation of problems and must educate elders and their families about the availability of services.

SAMPLE & METHODS

- Representative sample from rural Southwest Virginia, $N = 2,034$
- 1,499 (74%) had no limitations
- 471 (23%) had limitations and received assistance from informal and/or formal helpers
- 64 (3% overall, 12% of those with needs) had limitations and received no help
- Telephone interviews by Center for Survey Research

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Age	Range = 65 - 89, $M = 75.23$
Gender	56 Female, 8 Male
Race	58 White, 2 Black, 4 missing
Education	53% < high school, 47% ≥ high school diploma
Income	39% < poverty level, 41% > poverty level, 20% dk/r

HEALTH

Self-rated health	Excellent/good	25%
	Fair/poor	75%
# health problems	1-2	19%
	3-5	56%
	6-9	25%
Most frequent health problems	Hypertension	77%
	Arthritis	75%
	Chronic lung	41%
	Heart	39%
	Depression	36%

ACTIVITY LIMITATIONS

IADLs:	0	50%
	1	41%
	2	8%
	3	2%
ADLs:	0	44%
	1	48%
	2	8%

DAILY ACTIVITY ABILITIES AND LIMITATIONS

	Can Perform (%)		Have Limitation (%)*
Eating	100	Walking (1 block)	45
Bathing and appearance	100	Heavy housework	27
Dressing	100	Household repairs	22
Toileting	100	Climbing stairs	20
In/out of bed and chairs	100	Driving	11
Walk across room	100	Walking (in home)	2
Taking medications	100	Yard work	2
Using telephone	100	Cooking	2
Light housework	100	Laundry	2
Shopping for groceries	100		
Paying bills	100		

*100% have no help with these limitations

MANAGING WITHOUT HELP (N)

	Not Done	Wait	Other*
Walking (1 block)	24	1	1
Heavy housework	12	2	3
Household repairs	5	2	2
Climbing stairs	9		4
Driving	3		3
Walking (in home)			1
Yard work	1		
Cooking			1
Laundry			1

*use assistive device, substitute method, not an issue

ANY AVAILABLE SUPPORT?

Do you have someone who checks on you regularly?	73%	yes
Do you have someone you can trust and confide in?	89%	yes
<u>% receiving support from:</u>		
Spouse/partner	4	12
Son/daughter	28	37
Friend/Neighbor	15	15
Agency	1	
Other	12	10

WHY NO HELP? (% of all reasons)

		Range	M*
No need	53	Prefer community services	2- 8 5.0
Ineligible, depend on self	15	Family supports service use	4- 9 6.6
Don't know/refused	9	Service trust	4- 8 6.1
Family unable/unwilling to help	4	Service convenience	5-15 10.3
Other reasons (≤ 3% ea)*	19	Know about/motivated to find community services	4-10 6.3

*can't find, don't trust, too expensive, unreliable, prefer privacy, dislike gov't services, uncomfortable, family far away

*The higher the mean, the more favorable the attitude

ATTITUDES ABOUT COMMUNITY SERVICES

LIKELY SOURCES OF FUTURE HELP

Who	N*	Most Likely Types of Help	Agency Services	%*
Family	21- 47	bills, meds, transfer, walk, dress	Home nursing	55
Friends	2- 7	shop, phone, cook, drive, laundry	Short-term LTC	55
Agency	3-11	cook, bathe, clean, eat, walk	Counseling	52
			Long-term LTC	48
DK/R	4-13	bathe, phone, eat, toilet, cook, meds, dress, transfer, stairs	Housekeeping	48
			Personal care	44
			Transportation	42
			Meal services	41

*N choosing source for particular tasks

*very or somewhat likely to use

CONCLUSIONS

- Current needs are generally not crucial for daily functioning, but activity limitations are likely to escalate in the future.
- Current limitations are not perceived as requiring outside assistance. But for the future, many do not know how they will get help for bathing, toileting, cooking, and eating if required.
- Majority are not isolated from family and friends; they expect future help to come from relatives.
- Display both resilience and latent vulnerability.
- Communities must recognize and address unexpressed needs.

*The higher the mean, the better the psych. well-being