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Social Support and Quality of Life of Institutionalized and Non-institutionalized Older

People: A Comparative Cross-sectional Study

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Background: Social support enhances Quality of Life (QoL) of older people. Understanding of the variations of social support (SS) available for and perceived by institutionalized and non-institutionalized older people in Sri Lanka is important in promoting the health of older Sri Lankans.

Objective: To describe and compare relationships of QoL and SS between institutionalized and non-institutionalized older adults in Galle, Sri Lanka.

Methods: A comparative cross-sectional study was conducted using a conveniently selected sample of 70 institutionalized and 70 non-institutionalized older people in Galle. Validated scales of WHOQOL-BREF and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) were used to assess QoL and SS respectively. Higher scores in MSPSS indicated higher SS. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethical Review Committee, Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, University of Ruhuna.

Results: The mean value of the total QoL scores was higher in non-institutionalized older people compared to others (66.4±21.3 vs 59.3±14.4, $p<0.05$). The mean value of the total MSPSS score was also higher in non-institutionalized compared to institutionalized older people (5.3±0.9 vs 3.9±1.1, $p<0.05$). The mean scores of family support (23.1±3.8 vs 12.8±7.3, $p<0.05$), support from friends (19.1±5.1 vs 18.4±4.3, $p<0.05$), and support from significant others (22.2±4.7 vs 4.0±1.8, $p<0.05$) were higher in non-institutionalized compared to that of others. There was a positive correlation between MSPSS scores and total QoL scores in the non-institutionalized older people ($r=0.34$, $p<0.01$), but no such correlation was found between MSPSS scores and total QoL scores in the institutionalized older people ($r=0.054$, $p=0.655$).

Conclusions: The QoL of non-institutionalized older people is better than that of institutionalized older people. One possible reason for this observation is that the social support perceived by non-institutionalized older people is higher than that of institutionalized older people. Social support systems available for institutionalised older people should be strengthened to improve their QoL.

Keywords: Institutionalised older people, Non-institutionalized older people, Quality of Life, Social Support, Sri Lanka

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