



Role of social support in the social well-being of elderly

Vijayalakshmi K K ¹ and Dr. G Rajeev ²

¹ Research Scholar, MD College, Pazhanji, Thrissur, University of Calicut, Kerala

² Associate Professor (Retd.) MD College, Pazhanji, Thrissur, University of Calicut, Kerala

Email - lakshmivinod1984@gmail.com ¹rggg33@gmail.com ²

Abstract: Population ageing is the most widely debated global issues of the modern era. Ageing is the process of becoming older. The effects of ageing are applicable to both developed and developing nation. Old age is considered as a curse because this time is accompanied with deterioration of all physical and psychological factors. Isolation from society, disintegration of social support system, lack of economic resources worsens the condition of elderly. If the society provided a space of respect to the elderly, they would serve as the sole authorities, repositories and transmitters of wisdom and knowledge. Social support plays a key role in the overall wellbeing of elderly individuals, contributing significantly to their physical, emotional, and mental health. Social support can take various forms, including emotional, instrumental, informational, and companionship support, each of which helps to address specific aspects of an elderly person's needs. Social support networks can enhance physical, emotional, and psychological health, improve coping mechanisms, and contribute to a higher quality of life. With the increasing number of elderly individuals globally, it is important for societies, families, and communities to invest in fostering strong social support systems that can help the elderly age in a healthy, dignified, and fulfilling manner. Social support not only improves the wellbeing of the elderly but also strengthens the social fabric of communities by promoting intergenerational solidarity and mutual care. This paper examines the mediating role of social support in the wellbeing of elderly individuals. With the addition of social support with family bonding enhances the wellbeing of elderly. Economic condition influences social wellbeing indirectly through its effects on social support. Better health condition with social support improves the wellbeing of elderly individuals. Social support plays an important role in the life of elderly individuals as it enhances the physical mental and overall quality of life of elderly people.

Key Words: elderly, social support, well-being, economic stability, family bonding, health condition, living condition.

1. INTRODUCTION :

Ageing population is one of the most deliberated global phenomena in the present century. Aging is becoming a noticeable issue in both developed and developing countries. Countries with large population such as India now have a large number of people aged 60 years or older. India's population above the age of 60 has tripled in the last 50 years and will persistently increase in the near future. Elderly people are expected to be among the most prominent global demographic trends of the 21st century. The rate and pace of the proportion of elderly people is increasing steadily (Soghra et al, 2006). Consequently, the number of elderly people living alone has also increased (Ryuichi et al, 2005).

The UN estimates that the proportion of the World population aged 65 or above will be more than double, from 7.6 percent today to 16 per cent in 2050 (World Population Ageing Highlights 2019). India and China being the two most populous countries in Asia, with a population more than one billion each, will thus have a significant proportion of elderly in future. India, being the second most populated country in the world, is home to about 1.32 billion people. About 8.6% (60 million) of the population constitutes people above the age of 60. (UN DESA Policy Brief No. 153, nd). It is estimated that the current elderly population of 60 million is projected to exceed 227 million by 2050. In Kerala, the life expectancy at birth is 75 years, the highest among the Indian States and higher than the national average of 70 years (Kerala Economic Review, 2023). According to Census Report 2011, the population in the age group of 60 years and above to the total population was 12.6 percent in Kerala against the national average of 8.6 percent. Aging affects nearly every part of the economy and is happening quickly. The trend reveals that the global phenomenon of rapid ageing population affects India also and it will become a major social challenge in the future.

The demographic changes are a consequence of socioeconomic changes that have led to a declining mortality and fertility rates over the last few decades. Advanced medical care, the spread of modern medicine and hence falling



mortality rate will lead to a rapid increase in elderly population in the coming years. Social well-being of elderly is associated with life satisfaction, optimism, self-esteem, a feeling of social inclusion, having a purpose and a sense of belonging and support. Older people often experience depression, loneliness and low levels of satisfaction and wellbeing. Every person's ability to perform daily activities declines to some extent with age. Older people have more disorders and disabilities than younger people. But the changes that accompany aging are more than just changes in health. Social issues such as living arrangements, economic dependence, family factors and type of daily activities influence the older person's risk and disease experience.

Objective:

- To examine the mediating role of social support in the social well-being elderly individuals.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Social support and well-being

This section deals with studies on social support and well-being of elderly persons. The elderly receive social support from society as well as family. The opportunities to participate in a social engagement leads to the positive outcome in the life of elderly.

Aneesh and Sia (2023) analyse that there is a relation between social support and psychological and mental health of elderly. The elderly who live alone lack social support which affects the overall well-being in their life. Lack of social support and social engagement is related with depression, isolation, low levels of physical and psychological health and psychosocial well-being.

Saadeh (2020) intended to analyse the association between psychological and social well-being and the rate of decline in physical function over time in older adults. Psychological and social well-being are considered as major determinants in protecting physical as well as mental health in old age. The study remarked that higher psychological and social well-being is directly related with physical function. Elderly with a positive psychological profile resist the decline in physical function.

Kovalenko and Spinak (2018) analysed the social factors behind psychological well-being of elderly. Psychological well-being of elderly is attributed to personal, emotional and social factors.

The older adults who do not feel lonely and have enough chances to interact with other people and society have higher level of psychological well-being. The elderly who have social interaction also have a high level of psychological well-being. Psychological well-being of an elderly is attributed to personal factors, cognitive factors, emotional factors and social factors.

Portero (2007) observed that psychological well-being and health of elderly increased as they feel happier. Social support is a key factor behind the psychological well-being of elderly. Psychological well-being is directly related with their health profile.

2.2 Social well-being and economic stability

This section deals with studies related with social well-being and economic stability of elderly persons. A sufficient level of economic resources is a significant factor in the well-being of elderly. Old age is associated with no income and employment and this may adversely affect the quality of life of elderly.

Mohanty et.al (2023) examined the economic well-being of middle-aged elderly people in India. Economic well-being affects the overall well-being of elderly. The elderly rely on others for financial support. This financial dependency affects their independent life and creates problems in their life. The economic condition of the elderly households to be poorer than the non-elderly households. Economic independence is key for the elderly living independently, but the poor elderly have no choice except to live with their children for their survival.

Livingston et.al (2022) found connection between well-being and economic factors of an elderly. Factors like income, education, physical and mental health, employment and government policies affect the well-being of an elderly. The discrimination in the life of elderly inversely affects the wellbeing. Advancement in social and economic factors give better opportunities in the life of elderly.

Mohammed et.al (2021) conducted a study to understand the relationship between socioeconomic status and mental well-being of elderly. Financial independence has a direct impact on the quality of life of elderly. Elderly people without financial resources and those who depend on their children for their daily needs, are often neglected in family matters. This neglect negatively impacts the well-being of elderly. There is a need for social security measures. The female elderly suffer more stress than their male counterparts.

There have been many studies regarding the social well-being of elderly. Some studies concentrated on the health profile and well-being of elderly. Old age worsens the emotional and mental well-being of the elderly. They also lost



their role in society and family. Lack of economic stability and income sources do not match with the increased demand for health expenditure of the elderly people. Changes in family conditions and decreased functional independence affect the well-being of elderly. Decreased social network and absence of social security systems affect the social well-being of elderly. Social well-being is important in the life of elderly as it has relation with overall quality of life and physical health. Social wellbeing is related to the social support mechanism. This paper incorporates the factors that influencing social well-being and the role of social support in their life. Through this paper we try to analyse the social well-being of elderly. This study intended to explore how social well-being and social support related with each other. The study on the social well-being of elderly includes family relationship, economic stability, health and care and living condition and also analyse social support as a mediating variable.

3. THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL SUPPORT ON SOCIAL WELL-BEING OF THE ELDERLY

The social well-being of older adults contributes to their emotional, physical, and psychological health and thereby their overall quality of life. The factors such as health profile, social participation and financial stability affect the social well-being of the elderly. The influence of social support mediates the relationship between those affective factors and social well-being.

Social support serves as a shield against the negative effects of stress, loneliness, and social isolation, which are common challenges faced by the elderly. This study seeks to explore the relationships among various determinants of social well-being in the elderly, with a particular focus on the mediating role of social support.

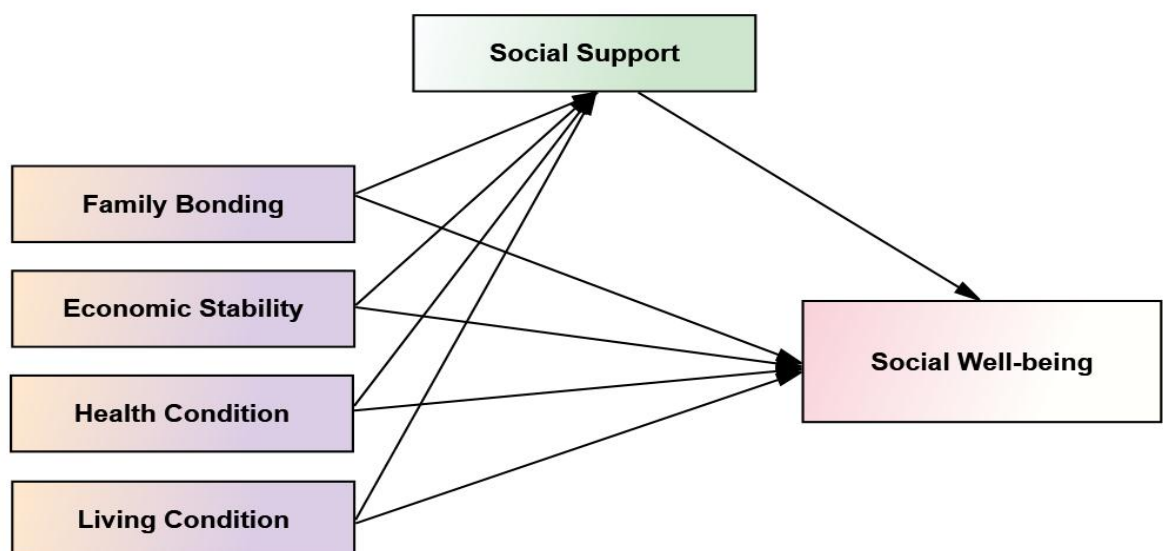


Figure 1
The mediating role of social support on social well - being

Figure 1. Illustrates the psychometric properties of the factors involved in this model. The model shows the mediating role of social support in social well-being of the elderly. The social well-being of elderly depends upon the following factors:

- Family bonding
- Economic stability
- Health and healthcare
- Living condition

Also, the social support from society and peer groups and other external environments act as a mediating variable between the social well-being and other factors.

3.1 Family Bonding

Aging is an inevitable process in everyone's life. Family plays a crucial role in the life of elderly people. The care given by the family through its emotional support leads to the well-being of elderly. The elderly suffer many problems in the family like the change in the decision-making power, loss of dignity, disrepute etc. Some families considered elderly a burden. Change in the family structure from joint family into nuclear family also affects the well-being of elderly.



3.2 Economic stability

Economic dependence by the elderly degrades their condition. Majority have no financial protection like pension and social security. Widow, poor and disabled elderly are more disadvantaged groups among elderly population. Older days are characterized by loss of income and employment and it led to decrease in purchasing power and economic insecurity.

3.3 Health and healthcare

Old age is accompanied by a lot of physical and health issues. Increasing longevity and prevalence of multiple diseases make the elderly more vulnerable. The cost for medicines and treatments are unaffordable to many elderly persons. Majority of elderly are not covered under any health insurance.

3.4 Living condition

Living conditions of elderly influence their health and mental status and thereby the overall quality of life. The elderly living alone may suffer more psychological disorders than their counterparts living in families. Living with family provides safety and more security to the life of elderly. Majority of the elderly prefer family living arrangements as they need physical care and support from family. Children are not willing to take care, abuse and neglect by family, strained relation with children and in-laws were other problems affect the life of elderly.

3.5 Social support

Social support plays a crucial role in the well-being of elderly persons. It can contribute to their emotional, mental and physical health. Support from family, friends and other external environments like community can help to reduce feelings like loneliness and depression to elderly. Elderly people have more experience than the younger generation. Regular communications and relationships make the elderly more comfortable. The elderly with strong social ties tended to experience better health and longer life expectancy. Community programs, social clubs, picnics, religious programmes and volunteer activities designed for seniors also create opportunities for social interaction. Social support from partner and friends lightened loneliness. Social support had a stronger effect on well-being than did social strain, and support from one's spouse/partner was the most important source for improved well-being, followed by support from children, and then support from friends. (Chen& Feeley,2014)

Before validating the model, the factors in this model have to be tested with validity conditions. The convergent and construct validity of each factor in this model has been tested by using confirmatory factor analysis and the results are illustrated in the given tables.

Table 1 Independent Variables - Psychometric Properties

Nature of the Variable	Factors	Average Variance Extracted	Composite Reliability Coefficient
Independent Variables	Family Bonding	0.528	0.847
	Economic Stability	0.615	0.903
	Health Condition	0.527	0.814
	Living Condition	0.543	0.777

The independent variables in the study include family bonding, economic stability, health condition, and living condition. Each of these variables has achieved Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value exceeding 0.50, indicating that the variance captured by each factor is greater than the variance due to measurement error. Additionally, all variables have met the Composite Reliability (CR) edge of 0.70, confirming the internal consistency of the measures used in the model. It directs that the model possesses construct and convergent validity, supporting the reliability and validity of the chosen variables in capturing the key aspects of family bonding, economic stability, health condition, and living condition.

Table 2 Mediating Variable - Psychometric Properties

Nature of the Variable	Factor	Average Variance Extracted	Composite Reliability Coefficient
Mediating Variable	Social Support	0.589	0.876

Table 2 shows that social support is used as a mediating variable in this model. Since the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is above 0.50 and the Composite Reliability (CR) exceeds 0.70, this variable meets the required limits. These results confirm that the model fulfils both construct and convergent validity for social support as a mediating factor.



Table 3 Dependent Variable - Psychometric Properties

Nature of the Variable	Factor	Average Variance Extracted	Composite Reliability Coefficient
Dependent Variable	Social Well-being	0.564	0.865

The above table presents the psychometric properties of the dependent variable, social well-being. For social well-being, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is above 0.50, and the Composite Reliability (CR) is greater than 0.70. These values indicate that social well-being meets the necessary reliability and validity standards. Therefore, the model achieves both construct and convergent validity for the social well-being variable.

4. Factors influencing social well-being of elderly people with the social support as mediating variable: validating the model.

This section intended to test the impact of various factors on the social well-being of elderly with social well-being of older adults. It analyses the relationship between independent and dependent variables used for the study.

Figure 2 illustrates the structural equation model used in the study. This model highlights the role of social support as a mediating variable. It shows how social support influences the social well-being of elderly individuals.

Figure 2 Factors influencing social well-being of elderly people with the social support as mediating variable

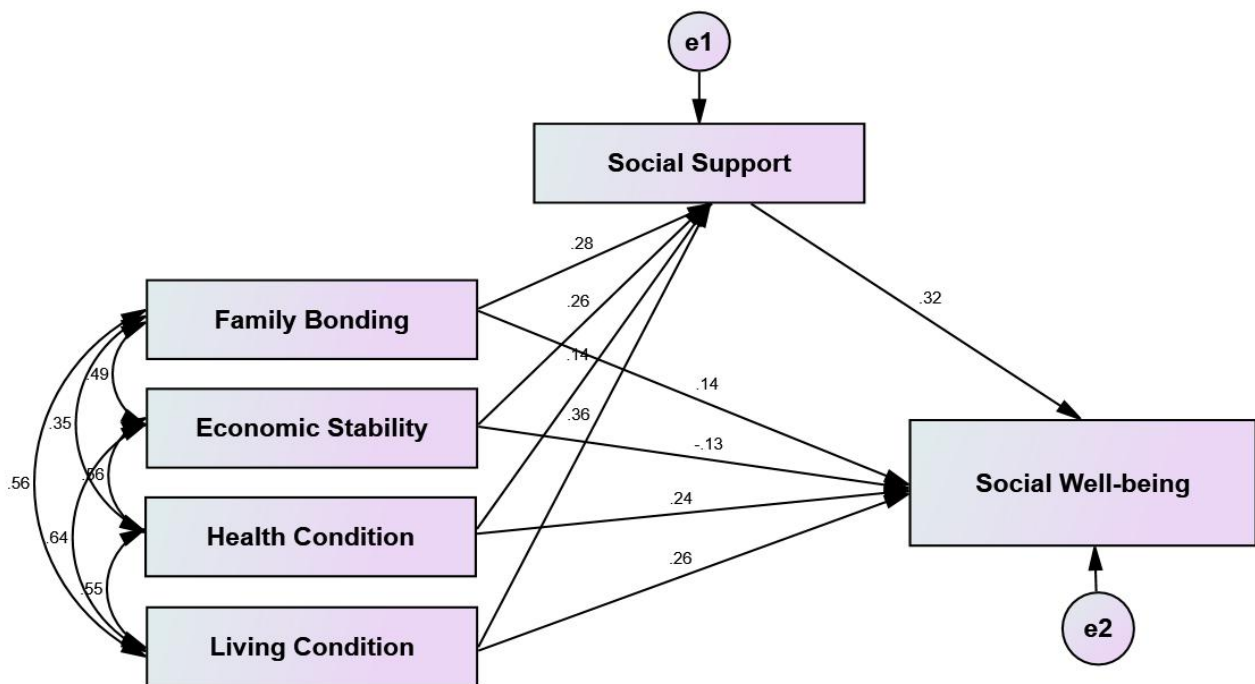


Table 3 Impact of social well-being of elderly with social support as Mediating Variable - Model Fit Indices

Indices	Value	Fit Criteria
Chi Square	1.279	< 5 (Hair et al., 1998)
GFI (Goodness of Fit Index)	0.988	> 0.90 (Hu & Bentler, 1999)
AGFI (Adjusted of Goodness of Fit Index)	0.913	> 0.90 (Hair et al., 2006)
NFI (Normal Fit index)	0.972	> 0.90 (Hu & Bentler, 1999)
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	0.976	> 0.90 (Hooper et al., 2008)
RMR (Root Mean Square Residual)	0.019	< 0.08 (Hair et al., 2006)
RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)	0.053	< 0.08 (Hair et al., 2006)



The table shows that the model examines factors influencing the social well-being of elderly people, with social support as a mediating variable. This model has achieved all necessary fit indices such as Goodness of Fit Index, Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index, and Normal Fit Index, Comparative Fit Index, Root Mean Square Residual, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation standards.

Table 4 Relationship between Family Bonding and Social Well-being of Old aged Individuals with Social Support as Mediating Variable - Total, Direct and Indirect Effects

Independent Variable	Mediating Variable		Dependent Variable		
Family Bonding	□	Social Support	□	Social Well-being	
H ₁ : Social Support significantly mediates the relationship between Family Bonding and Social Well-being of Old aged Individuals					
	Coefficient	P	Result	Hypothesis Status	Nature of Mediation
Total Effect	0.231	0.012*	Significant	H ₁ Supported	Partial Mediation
Direct Effect	0.140	0.039*	Significant		
Indirect Effect	0.091	0.048*	Significant		

*Significant at 5% level

Table 4 highlights the role of social support in between family bonding and social well-being of elderly people. The total effect between family bonding and social support is 0.231 which is statistically significant at 5%. It shows a strong and significant impact of family bonding on social well-being. When the mediating variable social support is introduced into the model the relationship between independent and mediating variable is still significant. The indirect effect is also significant which shows without, mediating variable family bonding contributes to social well-being of elderly. This suggests that social support partially mediates the relationship between family bonding and social well-being. Social support is important for the social well - being of elderly people but it is not the only factor. Even without social support as a mediating variable family bonding still contributes to their social well-being. social support enhances the effect of family bonding on elderly social well-being but does not replace it entirely. Hypothesis H₁ is supported, indicating that social support partially mediates the relationship between family bonding and social well-being for older adults.

Table 5 Relationship between Economic Stability and Social Well-being of Old aged Individuals with Social Support as Mediating Variable - Total, Direct and Indirect Effects

Independent Variable	Mediating Variable		Dependent Variable		
Economic Stability	□	Social Support	□	Social Well-being	
H ₂ : Social Support significantly mediates the relationship between Economic Stability and Social Well-being of Old aged Individuals					
	Coefficient	P	Result	Hypothesis Status	Nature of Mediation
Total Effect	0.045	0.815	Insignificant	H ₂ Supported	Full Mediation
Direct Effect	-0.131	0.491	Insignificant		
Indirect Effect	0.086	0.046*	Significant		

*Significant at 5% level

Table 5 shows how social support acts as a mediator between economic stability and the social well-being of elderly individuals. The total effect of economic stability on social well-being is 0.045, showing insignificant impact. The direct effect reflects there is no relationship between economic stability and social well-being. The direct effect of 0.13, which is not statistically significant, shows that economic stability alone doesn't have a strong impact on social well-being without the mediation of social support. Additionally, the indirect effect through social support is 0.08, which is



statistically significant. This means social support plays a role in mediating the connection between economic stability and social well-being. It suggests that economic stability influences social well-being indirectly through its effect on social support.

Table 6 Relationship between Health Condition and Social Well-being of Old aged Individuals with Social Support as Mediating Variable - Total, Direct and Indirect Effects

Independent Variable	Mediating Variable		Dependent Variable		
Health Condition	Social Support		Social Well-being		
H ₃ : Social Support significantly mediates the relationship between Health Condition and Social Well-being of Old aged Individuals					
	Coefficient	P	Result	Hypothesis Status	Nature of Mediation
Total Effect	0.288	0.016*	Significant	H ₃ Supported	Partial Mediation
Direct Effect	0.243	0.022*	Significant		
Indirect Effect	0.045	0.046*	Significant		

* Significant at 5% level

The above table demonstrates the role of health condition in the social well-being of elderly people. There is a significant total effect (0.288, $p = 0.016$) of health condition on social well-being, meaning that good health profile positively associated with social well-being among older adults. The direct effect of health condition on social well-being (0.243, $p = 0.022$) is significant, showing that health condition has a positive impact on social well-being on its own, without considering the effect of social support. The indirect effect (0.045, $p = 0.046$) is also significant, indicating that social support partially mediates the relationship between health condition and social well-being. This means that part of the influence of health condition on social well-being is due to the social support it provides. Since both the direct and indirect effects are significant, this is considered partial mediation. So, health condition positively influences social well-being both directly and indirectly through social support. Hypothesis H₃ is supported, showing that social support partially mediates the relationship between health condition and social well-being. Thus, a better health condition directly enhances social well-being while also increasing social support, which further boosts well-being.

Table 7 Relationship between Living Condition and Social Well-being of Old aged Individuals with Social Support as Mediating Variable - Total, Direct and Indirect Effects

Independent Variable	Mediating Variable		Dependent Variable		
Living Condition	Social Support		Social Well-being		
H ₄ : Social Support significantly mediates the relationship between Living condition and Social Well-being of Old aged Individuals					
	Coefficient	P	Result	Hypothesis Status	Nature of Mediation
Total Effect	0.379	<0.001**	Significant	H ₄ Supported	Partial Mediation
Direct Effect	0.262	0.019*	Significant		
Indirect Effect	0.117	0.037*	Significant		

* Significant at 5% level

Table 7 shows how social support acts as a mediating factor between living condition and the social well-being of elderly people. The total effect of living condition on social well-being (0.379, $p < 0.001$) is significant, meaning that better living conditions are positively associated with social well-being among older adults. The direct effect (0.262, $p = 0.019$) of living condition on social well-being is significant, showing that living conditions have a positive impact on social well-being on their own, without contributes for social support. The indirect effect (0.117, $p = 0.037$) is also significant, indicating that social support partially mediates the relationship between living condition and social well-being. This means that part of the effect of living condition on social well-being works through the social support it provides. Since both direct and indirect effects are significant, this shows partial mediation. Thus, living conditions advance social well-



being directly and also indirectly by increasing social support. Hypothesis H₄ is supported, representing that social support partially mediates the relationship between living condition and social well-being. This means that better living conditions directly boost social well-being and also back by advancing social support, which further improves well-being.

5. DISCUSSION

This paper offers important conclusions about the social well-being of elderly and its relationship with variables like economic stability, health condition and living condition with social support acting as mediating variable. Social well-being of elderly is an important aspect as they are the most vulnerable section in the society. social well-being of elderly depends upon internal and external factors around their environment. Without social support family bonding can contribute to the well-being of elderly and social support enhances the effect of family bonding on the well-being. Social support has an important connection in between economic stability and social well-being of elderly. Economic stability influences social well-being in directly through its effect on social support. Health and healthcare conditions have both direct and indirect up on the social well-being of elderly. Better health care and social support jointly contribute to the enhancement in the well- being of elderly. There is direct relation between living condition and well-being of elderly. The working of social support with good living condition increases the well -being. It is the duty of the society to provide more care and support to elderly persons.

REFERENCES:

1. Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., & Anderson, R. E. (1998). *Multivariate Data Analysis with Readings*. Englewood Cliffs.
2. Hu, L., & Bentler, P. M. (1999). Cutoff criteria for fit indexes in covariance structure analysis: Conventional criteria versus new alternatives. *Structural Equation Modeling: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 6(1), 1–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705519909540118>
3. Hair, J. F., Black, B., Babin, B., Anderson, R. E., & Tatham, R. L. (2006). *Multivariate Data Analysis* (6th ed.). Pearson Prentice Hall.
4. Hooper, D., Coughlan, J., & Mullen, M. (2008). Structural Equation Modelling: Guidelines for Determining Model Fit. *Electronic Journal on Business Research Methods*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.21427/D7CF7R>
5. Bakshi, S., & Pathak, P. (2016). Aging and the socioeconomic life of older adults in India: An empirical exposition. *SAGE Open*, 6(1), 1–17.
6. Anil, D. K. H. (2018). Perceptions on service quality: A study of old age homes in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. *MATEC Web of Conferences*, 172, 1–7. France: EDP Sciences.
7. Ugargol, A. P., & Bailey, A. (2018). Family caregiving for older adults: Gendered roles and caregiver burden in emigrant households of Kerala. *Asian Population Studies*, 14(2), 194–210.
8. Kovalenko, O. H., & Spivak, L. M. (2018). Psychological well-being of elderly people: The social factors. *Social Welfare: Interdisciplinary Approach*, 8(1), 163–176. <https://doi.org/10.21277/sw.v1i8.323>
9. Portero, C. F., & Oliva, A. (2007). Social support, psychological well-being, and health among the elderly. *Educational Gerontology*, 33(12), 1053–1068. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03601270701700458>
10. Aneesh, A., & Kumar, S. (2023). Role of social support on psychological well-being of the elderly: A review. *Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine*, 7, 57–65.
11. Kim, E. S., Tkatch, R., Martin, D., MacLeod, S., Sandy, L., & Yeh, C. (2021). Resilient aging: Psychological well-being and social well-being as targets for the promotion of healthy aging. *Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine*, 7, 23337214211002951. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23337214211002951>
12. Akhter, A., & Kamraju, M. (2023). The economic consequences of population aging: Challenges and policy implications. *ASEAN Journal of Economic and Economic Education*, 2(2), 145–150.
13. Chen, C. (Y.), & Feeley, T. (2014). Social support, social strain, loneliness, and well-being among older adults: An analysis of the Health and Retirement Study. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 31, 141–161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407513488728>
14. Ryuichi, K., Osamu, Y., Yuichiro, O., & Akihiro, K. (2005). Influence of living alone on emotional well-being in community-dwelling elderly persons. *Geriatrics and Gerontology International*, 5, 152–158.
15. Saadeh, M., Welmer, A.-K., Dekhtyar, S., Fratiglioni, L., & Calderón-Larrañaga, A. (2020). The role of psychological and social well-being on physical function trajectories in older adults. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series A: Biological Sciences and Medical Sciences*, 75(8), 1579–1585. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gerona/glaa114>
16. Mohanty, S. K., Arokiasamy, P., Nayak, I., et al. (2023). Economic well-being of middle-aged and elderly adults in India: Variations by household composition. *Journal of Social and Economic Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40847-023-00238-z>
17. Livingston, V., Jackson-Nevels, B., & Reddy, V. V. (2022). Social, cultural, and economic determinants of well-being. *Encyclopedia*, 2(3), 1183–1199. <https://doi.org/10.3390/encyclopedia2030079>