

Active Aging Education: An Effective Tool for Empowering Health Volunteers in Relation to the Elderly

Aging is one of the most significant demographic and welfare changes and challenges faced by many countries around the world in the first half of the 21st century (1). In 2019, for the first time globally, the number of elderly individuals surpassed that of children under five years of age. It is also expected that by 2050, the number of individuals aged 60 and older will double, while those aged 80 and older will triple worldwide (2). In Iran, although currently less than 10% of the population comprises individuals aged 60 and older, this ratio is expected to increase rapidly, especially after 2030, potentially reaching about one-third of Iran's population by 2050 (3). In the 21st century, particularly in its second decade, a paradigmatic shift occurred in how aging is conceptualized and experienced, marking a time to seize life opportunities and ensure quality of life. In this context, concepts such as healthy aging, successful aging, productive aging, and active aging have emerged (4).

Without a strategic solution, population aging can pose a significant threat, particularly for developing societies. To address this challenge, various strategies have been considered in different communities to manage and mitigate the negative consequences of population aging, especially its impacts on the labor market, welfare, and quality of life of individuals. One such strategy is the "active aging" approach (5). The World Health Organization defined active aging in 2002 as "a process that enables individuals to attain the maximum opportunities for health, participation, and security in order to enhance their quality of life" (6). To educate the elderly about active aging and its physical, social, and psychological dimensions, there are numerous potentials within the health system. One of these potentials is health volunteers. In Iran, health volunteers are women living in various geographical areas served by a health center or health house, who are interested in helping people improve their health status. As they are familiar with the culture and customs of the local population, they serve as effective liaisons between the health system and the community (7).

Effects of Empowering Health Volunteers Regarding Active Aging

Numerous studies on the effective activities of health volunteers have shown that ongoing participation leads to increased knowledge and improved attitudes among health volunteers, while also addressing various needs of the elderly, such as establishing communication and support networks (8, 9). The enhancement of knowledge and attitudes among health volunteers,

given their important role in the community, can significantly aid in planning and promoting the health of the elderly.

Promoting Active Aging

Education on various aspects of active aging enhances the knowledge and improves the attitudes of volunteers regarding active aging. Valorakop and colleagues implemented an educational intervention on basic supportive knowledge of life for health volunteers, which demonstrated a significant increase in their knowledge (10). Shahri and colleagues conducted a cross-sectional study on the impact of a national diabetes prevention program on the knowledge of the elderly, ultimately leading to improved knowledge in this area (11). Additionally, Zohari and colleagues carried out an educational intervention study on the knowledge of caregivers in nursing homes, which showed that storytelling sessions had a significantly positive impact on caregivers' understanding of aging and elder care (12).

In a study by Wong and colleagues, it was reported that an educational intervention on oral health knowledge was effective for healthcare providers, resulting in a significant increase (13). Liana and colleagues conducted a quasi-experimental study aimed at “the impact of implementing self-empowerment educational packages on the knowledge, health, and oral hygiene status of the elderly in Indonesia,” which demonstrated a significant increase in the average knowledge score after the educational intervention (14). Other studies, including those by Wong et al. (2024) (2), Abbasi et al. (1400) (15), Olutona et al. (2012) (16), Morira et al. (2018) (17), Goel et al. (2017) (18), Pakpour et al. (1398) (19), Masoudi et al. (1403) (20), and Jalveh et al. (1401) (21), have also emphasized the positive impact of education on the attitudes of the elderly and various groups of their caregivers.

Based on the findings of these studies, incorporating active aging educational content into health volunteer programs can be a meaningful step toward leveraging the educational potential of volunteers and enhancing the health of the elderly. Health volunteers can play a significant role in community development; therefore, they should be carefully selected and appropriately trained. Consequently, providing proper training for health volunteers is of paramount importance.

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