

Original Paper

The Current Status of Successful Aging of Men in their Mature Stage Living in Three Districts in Japan

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(Accepted Jun. 18, 2007)

Key words: successful aging, mature stage, men

Abstract

With a view to identifying the current status of Successful Aging of men in their middle stage of life and clarifying their actual situation, the author conducted a free form-based questionnaire survey consisting of sixty male subjects aged from 30 to 59 and living in three districts in the country.

As a result of analyzing the respondents' written answers by using a cause-and-effect based qualitative method, the following seven categories were extracted as key aspects representing the current status of Successful Aging in the case of middle-aged men: '*Participation*', '*Health*', '*Imbalance*', '*Preparation*', '*Attachment*', '*Self-awareness*', and '*Renovation*'.

Furthermore, the following two key characteristics of mature-aged men's Successful Aging status were identified for further consideration: (1) '*Imbalance*' between their public and private activities is observed, and it was inferable that they are not necessarily happy with their current daily life. (2) They take their death as destined, and live with mental '*Attachment*' to their present life giving highest priority to realities.

Introduction

"Successful Aging" means how to lead a positive, healthy and happy life worth living toward our advanced age.

Today, having entered an aging society, it is said that many of the issues and concerns we have about our life when we become old are mostly attributable to and determined by the way we lead our lives up to our middle and mature ages [1]. Therefore, Successful Aging has come to be a significant theme not only for people at the advanced age of life, but also those at the middle and mature ages. Recently more and more studies and research have been conducted with regard to preparatory activities for Successful Aging with a focus on middle and advanced-aged people [2-3]. The mainstream of such studies and research regarding Successful Aging [4] is presently occupied by American scholars such as Palmore [5] and Rowe [6-7]. Despite the fact that some reports [8] have been found which clarify the significance of Successful Aging in Japan and focus on people at advanced age by means of applying a qualitative analysis of the contents of interviews with them, no studies or research have been found that apply a "cause and effect-based" qualitative search and analysis method for clarification and focus on people at the middle and mature ages halfway through

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their entire life span, and so it can be argued that the actual status of Successful Aging in Japan has not yet been fully identified.

Now that a super-aging society, where the lifetime of an average person is extended to the age of 80, will be realized very soon, the author believes that our country's own approach to Successful Aging from the middle/ mature age and thenceforward must be established giving consideration to its unique social and cultural backgrounds in order to enable aged people living in Japan to lead a positive, happy, and healthy life worthy of living.

For this purpose, the author and her study group have been conducting studies and surveys over the past year and a half in order to clarify and identify the current status of Successful Aging with a main focus on people at their mature age halfway through their lifespan by application of a "cause and effect-based" qualitative search and analysis method. Following our previous survey which reported the current status of Successful Aging of women at their mature stage [9], the author now reports the results of her study conducted about the same theme in the case of men at their mature life stage.

Purpose

To clarify the current status of Successful Aging of men in their mature life stage and to identify the related issues and concerns.

Method

1. Study Design

This study was designed and developed according to a qualitative and inductive research method, using descriptive content written as free form answers from the respondents as source data for analysis. Analysis of the source data was conducted by applying B. Berelson's [10-11] content analysis methodology.

2. Definition of Terminology

'Successful Aging' means the process in which a human being adjusts himself/herself well enough to be adaptive to changes caused by aging and to live a happy and positive life worth living.

3. Data Collection

The questionnaire form in which respondents were able to write their answers and comments freely with regard to their present status of Successful Aging, was designed and developed by referring to the reports of K. Matsumoto and others [12], and the form was distributed to 350 adult people living in Districts A, B, and C with the help of local resident volunteers, and then collected from the respondents by mail. (The data collection duration was from November 4, 2004 through February 28, 2005.) The questionnaire entries included such questions as what sorts of subjects and issues the respondents have in their mind about their present daily life: what matters they care about most: what matters they feel delighted and consoled with in their life: what is their spiritual support: what makes their life worthy of living and what they appreciate now at their current age in retrospect of the past.

4. Data Analysis

The answers to the questionnaire underwent qualitative analysis as shown below. Each sentence or paragraph written as answers to the questionnaire that was considered to be similar in meaning was regarded as a single data item to be used for analysis. After this initial process, all the data items were sorted at the Detail Code level based on the similarity or diversity of their expression and meaning, the data items were then grouped at the Summarized Code level, and then grouped into sub-categories. Finally, those sub-categorized groups were further sorted and combined into categories based on the properties of

the contents. The above entire sorting, grouping and coding process was repeated till the opinions of all the members of the study team came to an agreement. Also, during the process of categorization, the author periodically received review and supervision by certain specialists [13] in the field of nursing and qualitative research. Furthermore, the results of the data analysis were presented to them for evaluation so as to ensure the trustworthiness of the study through peer debriefing among those specialists.

5. Ethical Considerations

The author made her utmost efforts to give ethical consideration to the respondents by convincing them in writing of the study's objectives. Respondents participated at their own discretion; only those participants who agreed to the survey were requested to submit their answers. Participant anonymity was safeguarded by keeping the strict control of the collected data and strictly observing each respondent's privacy.

Results

The response collection rate was 60.3 %. (In total 211 persons responded to the questionnaire.) Among those respondents, the number of male persons who were in the mature life stage at ages between 30 and 59 was 60. Their average age was 46.0 (Refer to Table 1).

The total number of data items extracted from the answers written by those 60 mature-aged male persons on the questionnaire amounted to 609. The average number of data items collected per relevant respondent is 10.2. This data was qualitatively and recursively analyzed and sorted into 19 sub-categories, from which the following 7 categories were finally extracted as characteristics of the current status of the Successful Aging of men in their mature stage of life: '**Participation**', '**Health**', '**Imbalance**', '**Preparation**', '**Attachment**', '**Self-awareness**', and '**Renovation**' (Refer to Table 2). In the following chapters, a category name, a subcategory name, and a respondent's descriptions/comments will be expressed in '**bold italics**', '*italic*', and "non-italic" respectively. Raw data being quoted is included in double quotations.

In the category '**Participation**', a '*positive sense of participation in social activities*' is expressed in terms of participation in social contribution through performing a respondent's own job such as "I feel that I have been able to contribute to others in society through my job." and through his participation in local activities such as "I am serving as a voluntary coach for a local boys baseball team." Also, '*communication with others*' is expressed in such comments as "I use utmost care to keep my words with others both on business and in private situations" and "I make it a rule not to bring my job back home." In addition, their

Table 1 Attributes of respondents

Item	Classification	No. of people	%
Age Bracket	30-39	15	25.0
	40-49	18	30.0
	50-59	27	45.0
	Average	46.0	
Type of job/ occupation	Co. employee	38	63.3
	Public servant	19	31.7
	Agriculture	2	3.3
	Self-employed	1	1.7

60 men in their mature stage of life at ages of 30 through 59 living in districts A, B and C

Table 2 Current status of successful aging in the case of men in their mature stage of life

Category	Sub-category
Participation	Positive sense of participation in social activities
	Communication with others
	Appreciation of cooperativeness and co-existence
	Care for bringing up their family's next generation
Health	Effort to keep both physical and mental health in their public and private life
	Appreciation of their good health
Imbalance	Imbalance in their activities
	Preference for contentment over happiness
	Success in and pride on their job
Preparation	Preparations for aging
	Self-awareness of mortality
	Desire on how to pass away
Attachment	Strong desire for life
	Postponement of thinking of their death
	Anxiety about continuity and self-preservation
Self-awareness	Self-confidence
	Retrospection of their life in the past
Renovation	Specific challenges
	Ideal images of their future life

'*appreciation of cooperativeness and co-existence*' with their family is expressed in the description, "I can feel a sense of solidarity with my wife through exchanging conversations with her and handling jobs with her cooperation." as well as through their experience of being present at their parents' deathbed such as "I feel happy because I could look after my parents up to their last moment." '*Care for bringing up their family's next generation*', which is considered to be a unique characteristic of people in their mature stage of life, is described in the following comments. "I expect my child will get married and have a baby." and "My child is going on to a high school this spring. I am pleased and encouraged by watching him grow up."

In the category '*Health*', care used for prevention of accidents and diseases that may be incurred in relation to their job is stated in their comments such as. "I often have to drive a car on business, so take good care not to cause accidents or violate traffic rules and always try to drive carefully." and "As I must often carry heavy packages on business, I keep it in mind not to injure my waist." Also, that they attend to physical health in their daily life by focusing on healthy eating habits can be seen in comments such as "I use due care not to eat and drink too much so that I may not get too fat." as can their care for mental health in comments such as, "I pay due attention to my mental health, so I try not to have any accumulated stress." and "Although I sometimes experience difficulties with my job, I make it a rule to consider matters in a forward-looking manner." Furthermore, their endeavor to keep their health in good condition is observed in the following description. "I receive a complete medical check, an endoscopy, and a teeth inspection by a doctor once every year." which reflects their '*effort to keep both physical and mental health in their public and private life.*' In addition, '*appreciation of their good health*' is stated in comments: "I am now in a better physical and mental condition than in my youth" and "I express my gratitude for the fact that I am living a healthy life."

In the category '*Imbalance*', '*success in and pride on their job*', which makes them feel quite satisfied with their production activities at their workplace is observed in descriptions such as, "I am proud of my job which I have improved during these 26 years of service and feel quite satisfied now." and "My happiness totally rests on success or failure in the results of my job. I feel happy and rewarded when my job has been successfully completed." On the other hand, the feeling of their physical and mental fatigue due to overwork is expressed such as "I feel unhappy now because of difficulty with my job" and "I suffer lack of sleep and am physically exhausted." and "I am so busy doing my job that I feel unhappy with it. Every day passes away merely like a flow of water. I am living through sheer inertia." This is coupled with negative sentiments associated with a poor use of leisure time in comments such as "I have no idea how to spend time on holidays" and "I am not really interested in playing golf. I play it only to fill social obligations." Thus, an '*imbalance in their activities*' between public and private occasions is observed. Also, a feeling of '*preference for contentment over happiness*' can be seen in comments such as "There is nothing special that pleases or interests me, but I don't think I am unhappy." and "To live a mediocre life may be the best for me. I am happy although I don't have anything special that make me feel pleasant."

In the category '*Preparation*', the respondents, who have lived just halfway of their entire life span, think about how to spend their daily life after retirement and about a desirable way of aging as is expressed in comments such as "I am thinking of how to spend my daily retirement life." and "I want to spend my remaining years in which I will never disturb my family or children." Thus, they are beginning to make '*preparations for aging*'. That they accept the finiteness of their life as destined can be seen in comments such as "All lives including human beings are destined to die." and "I am ready to die as destined." Additionally, their '*self-awareness of mortality*' and '*desire on how to pass away*' as living creatures is observed in comments such as. "I wish to pass away before my wife" and "I will reject any life-support device or special medical treatment and wish to drop dead suddenly when I am over 70 years of age."

In the category '*Attachment*', a '*strong desire for life*' is seen in comments such as. "I am still strongly attached to being alive." and "Although I know man is not immortal, I wish to defer that moment as long as possible." There seems to be a marked '*postponement of thinking of their death.*' thereby putting off being conscious about this topic at this time as can be seen in comments such as "I have had no idea of death. Death visits us in destined sequence, so I worry about it little." and "Not so old enough to get conscious of death (I am only 55 years old). I don't know how death is pressing on me in the future." Furthermore, an '*anxiety about continuity and self-preservation*' is expressed, though indirectly, half-mixed with the sentiment for longer life in such comments as "When I reach an advanced age, I am not sure I will be able to maintain our 'house and family' as well as my parents do now. Even though the times have changed, I feel a responsibility to my family to succeed, because I am the eldest son." and "As I have a handicapped child, I am anxious about the possibility of a trying situation occurring to my family, in case any unhappy accident happens to me."

In the category '*Self-awareness*', subjects seem to convince themselves of their ability to make decisions and do things of their own free will, as expressed in comments such as. "I am able to precisely decide on and do things, whenever I intend to do so." and "I have come to be able to make adequate decisions owing to my long experience in life." '*Self-confidence*' that has been established through other persons' high evaluation of their capability is noticed in statements such as "The public people recognize me as capable." In the sub-category '*Retrospection of their life in the past*', on the one hand positive descriptions of their life are found in statements such as "Owing to the great efforts I made during my youth, I am now able to live a pleasant life in my middle 40s, doing whatever I like." and "I have been able to devote myself to work day after day." while on the other hand, repentance for their life in the past is noticed in statements such as "I have already come to be 42 years old before I knew it." and "I repent of not having

done my best so far.”

In the category ‘*Renovation*’, ‘*specific challenges*’ stating certain goals such as successes in a qualification test and in a specific task can be observed in responses such as “For my life-long education, I am studying in preparation for passing the required examination to be qualified as an official social insurance specialist.” and “My goal is to succeed in my business and build my own house.” Also, that ‘*ideal images of their future life*’ are drawn in their mind can be seen in comments such as “I wish to have a lot of free time apart from my job.” and “I want to lead an ideal life by taking advantage of my hobby and to develop some products from it.” and “My wish is to travel with my wife after retirement from the company. Making a long journey in a slow and easy-going manner is my dream.”

Discussion

1. Current Status of Successful Aging of Men at their Mature Stage of Life

Male people in their mature stage of life spend a majority of their time in performing production activities mainly as employees of organizations because of the extended scope of their job roles as well as their increased social responsibilities. On one hand, they feel a sense of fulfillment, when they are successful in their business or jobs, which are public activities, but on the other hand, they are self-conscious of being so busy with their work they have little private time and so physically and mentally tired that they cannot enjoy private activities even when they get the chance. Also, in their descriptions in response to the questionnaire *imbalance* between their public and private activities is indicated as well as an ambivalent feeling of happiness in spite of there being nothing pleasant from the mental point of view. In addition, it is important to highlight that an ideal image of their future private life is drawn as a dream to be realized after retirement from their public job, apart and disconnected from the base of their current private life. Judging from the above analysis, it cannot be said that mature-aged male people are rather happy with their current life in terms of Successful Aging [5]. When their current conditions are viewed in light of a life cycle, our results suggest that further studies and research including those about their mental development may have to be conducted to realize their Successful Aging in its true sense, as a serious question is raised as to whether those men at their mature stage of life whose total attention and energy are inclined to their work and business matters, have really acquired a mature identity [14].

Furthermore, our analysis of their responses indicates that they make efforts to keep their physical and mental *health* in good condition in order to duly perform both public and private activities, and make *preparations* for their aging by developing plans for their life after retirement on one hand, but on the other hand, they lead a life with *attachment* to their current life with emphasis on realities, making no preparation for their future death in the belief that life-spans of all living creatures are destined and thus try to be unaware of death. Also, the respondents’ descriptions grouped into the sub-category ‘*Anxiety about continuity and self-preservation*’ imply that the concept of patriarchy under which individuals are subject to the control of their large family still exists in the minds of mature-aged men today, even though Japanese families have been subdivided into smaller individual units of so-called nuclear families through the country’s high economic growth and the times have changed significantly since the revision of the Civil Law after World War II. This fact is thought to be an important factor that will influence the course taken by human beings as individuals toward Successful Aging, so a further in-depth study and analysis of this sub-category should be conducted from a vertical viewpoint.

In addition, two characteristics were not identified in our previous study, “The Current Status of Successful Aging in the Case of Women at their Middle Age” [9]: *imbalance* between public and private activities and *attachment* to current life with an emphasis on realities. The present condition of mature-aged men

is different in this respect from that of middle-aged women who are characterized by ‘happiness realized from their public and private activities and satisfaction obtained with daily life through their effective time management’ as well as by ‘creative preparation for their future life based on the image of their current life’. The categories ‘*Imbalance*’ and ‘*Attachment*’ are considered to be distinctive characteristics affecting mature-aged men’s Successful Aging.

2. Suggestions toward Attainment of Successful Aging among Middle-aged People in Japan

When the categories extracted from the analysis results in this study are observed from the viewpoint of Successful Aging and in comparison with other studies previously conducted in this country, for example, with H. Sagaza’s report [15], in which he defines four requirements for Successful Aging the category ‘*Participation*’ corresponds to the category ‘Activity’, and the category ‘*Health*’ corresponds to ‘Health/Longevity’ respectively, and of the categories ‘*Preparation*’, ‘*Self-awareness*’, and ‘*Renovation*’ all correspond to ‘Satisfaction’.

Also, the contents of the categories ‘*Participation*’, ‘*Self-awareness*’, and ‘*Renovation*’ have contextual factors implying future-oriented positive attitudes toward aging. If these factors are viewed in light of those of the aged people as pointed out by Matsumoto [12] and other students, it is expected that they will lead to such ideas as self-preservation of mind and a challenging spirit.

However, from our further considerations about the lack of balance between public and private activities indicated in the category ‘*Imbalance*’ and about the ‘*preference for contentment over happiness*’, which is a feeling quite opposite to ‘*success and pride in their job*’, it is inferred that not only the mature-aged male people’s concern about the unforeseeable future of their companies but also the job-driven stress [16] imposed on them in respect of the volume and quality of their work required in the prime of life may have something to do with such imbalance and contradiction underlying these mature-aged men’s mental status. Also, judging from our country’s social background, it is undeniable that social health problems such as mature-aged men’s labor-related suicides and sudden deaths from overwork imply that mental health at workplaces, as insisted by Agari [17] is a very important factor for Successful Aging toward senescence especially in the case of men in their mature stage of life.

3. Limitations of this Study and Future Problems

From the results of this study, the author was able to get some significant suggestions and hints for identifying the current status of Successful Aging in the case of mature-aged men, but the study results are based only on the survey was limited to only three districts in the country, so it cannot be definitely said that the actual status could be identified and clarified in its complete shape.

Hereinafter, the author intends to expand the data collection area and collect an increasing number of examples for use in her more advanced and in-depth study of the subject and focus on two factors namely *imbalance* and *attachment* which have been identified by this study as unique characteristics of mature-aged men who place foremost priority on their businesses and jobs. Furthermore the author intends to accumulate more data items with addition of job type information for identification and clarification of actual status.

Conclusion

1. As major aspects representing the current status of mature-aged Men’s Successful Aging, the following seven categories have been extracted through a cause and effect-based qualitative search and analysis method:

‘*Participation*’, ‘*Health*’, ‘*Imbalance*’, ‘*Preparation*’, ‘*Attachment*’, ‘*Self-awareness*’, and ‘*Renovation*’.

2. The following two key characteristics of mature-aged men's Successful Aging status have been identified for special consideration:

- (1) *imbalance* between their public and private activities has been pointed out, and it is inferable that they are not necessarily happy with their current daily life.
- (2) they take their death as destined, and live with mental *attachment* to present life giving highest priority to realities.

Furthermore it was found that their public and private activities are quite unbalanced both in terms of quality and quantity of time, and that from the mental viewpoint, an ambivalent feeling is latent in them. It is inferable that such mental disproportion and contradiction could have some relationship to the occupational stress diseases a reasonable number of mature-aged men suffer from during the prime of their life.

Finally, the author expresses her deepest gratitude to the residents in A, B, and C districts for their participation as respondents in the questionnaire survey. Also, she is deeply grateful to the local volunteers for their questionnaire form distribution.

Acknowledgements

This study was conducted as a project using a grant-in-aid from the 2006 Kawasaki University of Medical Welfare's expense budget for medical welfare study and research.

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