

## Psychoeducational Workshops: An Experience of Working With Elderly People

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**Abstract:** This research arises from the psychoeducational interventions made inside non-formal educational environments by psychology degree students attending their sixth semester at IPN in Mexico City.

This paper exposes the experience carried out with elderly population in day centers for the aged, retirement houses and community centers. In the first stage, a diagnostic was made by means of the Socio-Educational Intervention Needs Analysis model (ANISE in its Spanish acronym), and the objectives for the intervention program were established. Subsequently, in the intervention stage, psychoeducational workshops were designed and implemented with thematic areas such as cognitive skills, communication, socialization, motor skills, self-esteem, creativity, and self-care.

As a result, it has been confirmed that the work of educational psychologists not only impacts in formal educational environments but also in non-formal environments such as day centers for the aged, retirement houses and community centers where cognitive and affective areas are strengthened through playful and creative activities. Therefore, there is evidence of improvements in both elderly people quality of life and their ability to relate with others.

**Key words:** education, psychoeducational intervention, elderly people

### 1. Introduction

The problem posed in this research arises from the concern to determine if it is possible to improve elderly people quality of life by means of the implementation of psychoeducational workshops known as homes for older adults which are part of the non-formal education and offer a variety of activities in order to be an educational option for elderly people to attend to this center. According to data (Inmujeres, 2015), is predicted that for 2050 elderly people in Mexico will reach the 42.8% of the total population. Therefore, it is essential to focus on this development stage, and above all, generate more opportunities for elderly people since an increase in the mortality rate has also been noted.

In recent years, working with elderly people has had some changes, and currently different professionals are

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involved in this field. Accordingly, there is a set of psychopedagogical functions presented in elderly people which must be strengthened. Nowadays, there is a new vision about elderly people in which a new model of aging is presented, and it is characterized by a far perspective from the traditional stereotypes which considered elderly people as senile persons, physically and psychologically damaged, not connected with the world, without any possibility to learn and continue with their fully development as an individual. In 1982, this stage of development was addressed for the first time in the First Worldwide Assembly about Aging that was carried out in Vienna. As a result, the concern for developing scientific research in developed countries arose. The next event was held in Madrid in 2002 looking for the commitment of developing countries governments with the aim to generate benefits for elderly people (Montes de Oca, 2003).

Currently, new trends distinguish elderly people as individuals with more free time due to the retirement, interested in spending that time doing enjoyable activities, with a better quality of life and health. Therefore, elderly people are increasingly conceived as individuals with a set of maturity factors that influence in their life, being able to plan and act in their own project of life through a proactively and positive way. According to Sánchez (2015), in recent years more attention has been focused in the environment and its relation with active and healthy aging. Consequently, the author proposes to focus attention on the socio-spatial characteristics in which elderly people are developing in order to generate, from this point, the appropriated options for their needs or specific features.

On the other hand, prior studies talk about the educational gerontology that indicates to go beyond about the purely compensatory aspects and focus on the study of the educational possibilities and needs of elderly people in a wider sense. Geriatrics National Institute (2016) states that the new concept of healthy aging involves a holistic approach that must take into consideration determinant factors of health influenced by the society and its policies, as well as the functional and intrinsic ability of individuals, and their development environment. In this sense, healthy aging not only involves physical and mental conditions of the population, but also considers another crucial factors of the well-being, such as the subjective well-being, life satisfaction and self-realization.

Hence, population aging represents a global phenomenon and demographic trends indicates that it follows a road with no-return. In 1950, there was 8% of people aged over sixty worldwide; by 2000 year the number increased to 10%, and estimations for the year 2050 will rise to 22 percent. Moreover, worldwide projections, indicates that the number of elderly people will surpass for first time the number of children in 2045 (United Nations, 2010). Regarding Mexico projections, Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO) estimates that in 2017 there were nearly 13 million people aged over sixty years old living in Mexico. Likewise, during the first quarter of 2017, the economic participation rate of elderly people was 34%, while economically non-active population represented 66%, and from this percentage, more than the middle of elderly people (54%) were dedicated to house chores (INEGI, 2017).

As the above figures indicate, there will be increasingly elderly people who will demand for more educational options whether formal or informal with aspects that have to be taken into consideration such as their prior experience, current occupations, motivations, even their possible limitations. Then, we are talking about an educational goal that seeks to focus on a continuum of development with the aim to evolve from a traditional assistance-oriented approach to an active educational approach, to be more specific, we must talk about the psychoeducational intervention within the discipline of psychology. Boom in education as a continuum has impacted in elderly people, hence, examples of actions carried out in European countries have to be taken into account, which consider physical, cognitive and emotional activation. Currently, UNESCO states that learning

occurs throughout the life of an individual, at any age, which means that a formative action is valid at any moment of the life cycle of a person, and consequently, the improvement in knowledge, skills, abilities, competences and qualifications at any personal, social or professional area, being an individual and comprehensive education which will enable elderly people to improve their competences and have more opportunities to use and optimize them (Morón, 2014).

Then, the idea is to generate intervention proposals using the educational psychology so that by means of psychoeducation various actions are designed and implemented in order to allow the elderly to be recognized as individuals able to enhance their competences which it may influence in their well-being and quality of life. In other words, with the help of psychoeducation it is possible to work with the cognitive impairment, depression, interpersonal relationships, among others. Such aspects hold a close connection with the level of impairment that can be presented in the elderly as Geriatrics National Institute states.

## **2. Objective**

Strengthen cognitive, affective and social processes of elderly people by means of psychoeducational workshops with the aim to improve their quality of life.

## **3. Method**

This is a qualitative research. Methodology was carried out in two stages. Firstly, the Socio-Educational Intervention Needs Analysis model was applied (Pérez-Campanero, 1994, pp. 17–33), and in the second stage, the psychoeducational intervention mentioned above was implemented.

In the first stage, it was applied the Socio-Educational Intervention Needs Analysis model (Pérez-Campanero, 1994, pp. 17–33) to a community which requires of a continuous review of its needs in order to adjust them to a specific reality. It is started with the necessity to specify a series of actions in order to carry out the needed modifications for the improvement of the community. This model is composed of three phases. At the first phase of recognition, the possible problems or needs of the visited centers were searched and analyzed when identifying their objective, history, situation of the community and their educational resources. The second diagnostic phase began with the application of observing records, interviews to coordinators, and twenty questionnaires to the users of each center. Also, both current and desirable situation were identified as well as an analysis of the potential of available spaces for the intervention with the elderly people. At the third phase, which consists of decision-making, were prioritized the topics to be developed in the implementation of the psychoeducational workshops.

In the second stage, an intervention program was designed and implemented by means of psychoeducational workshops. According to the decision-making of the first stage, the addressed topics were specific in accordance with the needs detected in each of the centers.

A total of 210 elderly people were involved in the educational workshops. The work was done between 2016 and 2017 in ten homes for older adults and two community centers. The non-formal environments in which the psychoeducational intervention was carried out are as follows: “Tlatilco”, Bosques del Valle “Siempre Agradecidos”, “San José”, “Casa Betti”, “Vicente García Torres”, “Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe A.C.”, “Mitla”, “Guadalupe Proletaria”, “Estrella José Martí” and “Alhambra”; “Lagunilla” community center and “Frida Kahlo” community center.

Data analysis was carried out from the interviews, questionnaires, and observations applied to the coordinators,

employees and users of the centers regarding to categories such as number of users, educational needs identified by coordinators and users, user-satisfaction and the needs posed by themselves. Subsequently, in the intervention stage achievements of each of the workshops and the activities performed were analyzed, as well as the impact in the cognitive, social and affective areas of elderly people who attended and were engaged in a direct way in each of the workshops. Also, caregivers and/or coordinators records of the visited centers were taken into consideration.

#### **4. Ethical Considerations**

Fundamental ethical aspects were considered in order to develop the psychoeducational intervention with the elderly population which are listed below:

- 1) Authorization and agreement from each of the elderly people to conduct the recorded interviews, or questionnaires to know their needs and concerns about what it could be learned or done in a workshop.
- 2) Confidential management of the information inside the workshops, as well as of its user's identity.
- 3) Comply with the commitment to design and implement the psychoeducational workshops. All the working teams obtained their diagnosis of needs, and from the results, the corresponding intervention was designed in accordance with the characteristics of each of the non-formal environments.

It is highly relevant to mention that, ethically, working with elderly people requires to be respectful with them in every moment. It is important to highlight that it is a population with a great potential and possibilities to perform valuable interventions which benefit themselves, their families and the society itself.

#### **5. Results**

The obtained data in each phase of the Socio-Educational Intervention Needs Analysis model (ANISE in its Spanish acronym) are shown below, and subsequently a summary of the given workshops and the impact achieved in the non-formal environments mentioned before.

##### **5.1 Recognition**

Eight out of the twelve non-formal environments in which the psychoeducational intervention was carried out are considered as Day Centers for the Aged to whom elderly people attend regularly, voluntarily, at a specific schedule, and by their own (without any companion). The other four centers are considered as retirement houses where some of the elderly people arrive there by their own and others by request of their family (usually their children).

Most outstanding aspects of day centers for the aged are that elderly people live in their houses with their children and partner, they are alone most of the day, they help with house chores, they aged between 50–90 years, and they are middle socioeconomic level. Day centers for the aged depend on Instituto Nacional de las Personas Adultas Mayores (INAPAM) and users must be affiliated to it in order to be able to attend. The professionals that use to work in day centers for the aged are: social worker, doctor, psychologist, teachers (the number of professionals working there and the kind of activities and/or workshops depend on the infrastructure of the non-formal environments).

Regarding retirement houses, some of the users decided to join by their own due to health reasons as well as for being alone in their homes; in other cases, even when they refused to join, their family members took the decision to send them (occasionally some of them receive visits from their family and others do not). According to

their physical and cognitive situation, some of them are totally independent, even they can go in and out during the day, others suffer from health issues such as diabetes mellitus, hypertension, dental problems, arthritis or motor impairments that require additional help such as walkers, crutches, wheelchairs, and therapy. There is a third group of elderly people who are located in a restricted area due to their complex health situation and they require from nursing and doctor assistance 24 hours a day, hence, the group of professionals working inside retirement houses is made up by doctors, nurses, physical therapists, psychologists, social workers, caregivers, nutritionists, among others, who are in charge of nutrition, hygiene, physical activities, recreational activities, religious mass, and so forth, activities which are designed for the whole day. Users are between 60–101 years old and they are middle socioeconomic level. Retirement houses belong to Private Assistance Institution (IAP), Civil Association (AC) or Integral Family Development System (DIF).

### **5.2 Diagnosis**

In day centers for the aged, politeness, respect and friendship are part of the coexistence dynamics. Elderly people state that it is a place where they are able to interact with others. Also, they express phrases such as “we can talk”, “we develop many activities”, “we are not alone”, “we feel physically and mentally active”, “we learn new things”; in this last aspect they emphasized that they would like to learn how to use a computer. They point out that throughout their stay they feel happy and active by socializing with their classmates. Their favorite activities are talking, dancing, doing exercise, and feeling self-sufficient. Mostly of elderly people claim that they are well treated by the group of professionals working there, which motivates them to continue attending to the centers.

On the contrary, inside retirement houses there is scarce coexistence, in the best of the cases they just coexist with their roommates; even their interactions are aggressive, whether with verbal language or in silent way, and some of their claims are: “I prefer to be alone, I do not want to be with them”. In spite of having trained personnel and several activities designed for them, elderly people in retirement houses prefer to stay in their room or just to be alone in areas such as the garden or the yard, they hardly attend or participate in activities since they refuse coexisting with others. Their feelings are from sadness, state of abandonment, helplessness and hopelessness due to the physical condition they present or due to the lack of visits of their family members. It was identified the lack of motivation for recreation, emotional health, desire to participate in occupational activities both educational or cultural since their specific situation does not allow them to get out from the institution in comparison with some of their partners whose perspective is different and agrees more with what is stated in day centers for the aged.

### **5.3 Decision Making Process**

Once the information was collected, each team could work with an identified need which had to be coherent with the number of sessions allowed for the implementation of the psychoeducational workshops (three to five working sessions depending on the availability and support of the non-formal environment).

In day centers for the aged the designed and implemented workshops were about the following topics: promoting a healthy lifestyle; physical, handmade and intellectual activities; origami, dancing, human rights, brain gymnastics, attention and concentration, laughter therapy, communication, fine and gross motor skills, self-care and self-concept.

In the retirement houses, the workshops involved activities such as health promotion, proper nutrition, self-care, assertive communication, collective reading and creative expression, healthy coexistence and active

aging; psychological, motor, social and emotional development, use of free time, and from their experiences, the creation of a historical memory.

It is observed that both day centers for the aged and retirement houses agree with the necessity to carry out workshops with the aim to work and strengthen the physical, motor, cognitive and social areas since as we know a decline appears in this development stage. Nevertheless, the emotional factor makes a big difference between one population and the other, that is, in day centers for the aged users attend by themselves and live in their own homes coexisting with their families, their willing and mood is totally quite different from those who live in the retirement houses where there is discouragement and sadness due to their physical situation and lack of interaction with their families. Hence, it is required to carry out a psychological preparation with the aim to decrease this behavior of sedentarism, isolation, silent and lack of human interaction.

A total of 210 elderly people attended to the psychoeducational workshops developed by working teams of psychology degree students in sixth semester at IPN as shows in Table 1.

**Table 1 Day Centers for the Aged, Retirement Houses, Community Centers, and Number of Participants in Each Workshop**

Name of the Center	Number of Participants
“Tlatilco” day center for the aged	15
“Mitla” day center for the aged	15
“Guadalupe Proletaria” day center for the aged	20
“Lagunilla” community center	25
“Frida Kahlo” community development center	15
“Estrella José Martí” cultural center (day center)	25
”Alhambra” cultural center (day center)	20
“San José” retirement house	23
“Casa Betti” private assistance institution	15
“Vicente García Torres” retirement house	10
“Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe A. C.” retirement house	12
Bosques del Valle “Siempre agradecidos” retirement house	15

## **6. Psychoeducational intervention**

In “Tlatilco” day center for the aged the aim was to foster fine and gross motor skills and socialization, for that purpose, activities such as dancing, origami and social interactions were applied. As a result, both fine and gross motor skills and physical activation were stimulated. Likewise, interaction among older adults was increased when proposing moments to talk each other about different topics.

Within “Mitla” day center for the aged the target was to stimulate cognitive, communication and coexistence skills through ludic activities to promote a healthy interaction between users. The activities included imitation of poses and gestures, collaborative work and collage, creation of words in group chain, word games, origami activities, and lastly, board games. In this way, there was an increase in the coexistence as well as in their cognitive and motor skills.

The objective in “Guadalupe Proletaria” day center for the aged was to strengthen active listening competences, and motor and cognitive skills. In order to reach the goal, activities were carried out through storytelling, in which it was generated the understanding, attention, memory, narrative and debates among peers.

On the other hand, elderly people were asked to elaborate a diary in which their daily events were registered, also manual activities were applied such as cut and paste images. By doing this, the level of attention, memory, understanding and active listening between participants was improved.

It was proposed to raise awareness in users of “Lagunilla” community center about the importance of dialogue, fostering closer relations and mutual understanding. The activities performed in the workshop were about reflection, dialogues from experiences, and problem-solving by means of assertiveness. The effect was the strengthening of assertive communication skills for problem-solving. By doing this, interpersonal conflicts in daily coexistence were reduced.

Inside “Frida Kahlo” community development center the goal was to stimulate memory, follow-up of instructions and creativity in order to improve the quality of life by means of ludic exercises. The tasks assigned to this center were memory exercises through the recalling of personal and familiar pictures, gross motor practices, and follow-up of instructions. As a result, memory, attention, and the follow-up of instructions were strengthened, and group creativity was favored.

The proposal in “Estrella José Martí” cultural center (day center) was to enhance emotions and self-esteem with the aim to strengthen coexistence among elderly population. The activities performed in this center were expression of strengths and weaknesses; review of high and low self-esteem concepts through examples; body expression activities (dancing and gestures); dramatization; assertive, passive and aggressive communication examples. With the applied techniques, emotional skills and abilities were stimulated; also, their self-esteem was strengthened recognizing their own potentialities. Lastly, with those elements, interaction among older adults was favored.

Moreover, in “Alhambra” cultural center (day center), the goal was to stimulate cognitive capacities in order to improve elderly people quality of life through cognitive rehabilitation activities. The performed activities in this workshop were evocation of proverbs, word search, seeking news and comments on it, handicrafts such as the elaboration of musical instruments using recycled materials, reflecting about their free time, and attention exercises on paper as recognition of differences in patterns. The effect was that participants were engaged and focused on the activities; evocation of proverbs and what they do in their daily routine were the activities which caused more participation. Attention exercises on paper as recognition of differences in patterns generated higher complexity, however they were able to solve them. So it was obtained an increase in the perception of the well-being, competence, positive emotions and the strengthening of cognitive processes such as attention, perception, and memory.

Reading was strengthened inside “San José” retirement house as well as ideas and feelings expression and the cognitive processes by means of activities such as group reading and expression of ideas and feelings. Participants worked collaboratively to solve tasks. The result was the strengthening of basic competences for the expression of ideas and feelings.

Active contributions in the promotion of self-care and proper nutrition were made at “Casa Betti” private assistance institution with the aim to benefit elderly people providing them information about quality of life and nutritional aspects. In order to reach the goals, flyers were elaborated, and the institution web page was spread; self-care exercises and reflections were conducted, and users were provided from self-care and proper nutrition strategies. In this way, they strengthened their strategies for self-care inside their rooms, bathrooms and intake.

Positive self-esteem was encouraged in “Vicente García Torres” retirement house, contributing to the improvement of the relationships between the residents through a psychoeducational workshop. They carried out a

list of personal qualities in present and past tense and a reflection about it; practices about likes and coincidences with each other; a practice of identification and remembrance of a classmate; construction of a historical documentary resulted from the users interviews. The strengthening of interpersonal relationships among the retirement house members was achieved because they kept their attendance to the workshop and showed interest in participating and sharing their experiences. Also, working memory was stimulated.

Dynamics and activities contributed to the group integration and interaction in “Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe A. C.” retirement house for a healthy coexistence. Activities such as listening to music, word challenge, five senses box, spider web group dynamics, the game of grimace and comic facial exercises, interactive theater, tell me about you, and laughter therapy were performed in the workshop. Coexistence and communication increased among female participants since they were increasingly talking each other and reduced their TV time.

Lastly, the target for Bosques Del Valle “Siempre agradecidos” retirement house was to improve their quality of life by means of ludic exercises for the stimulation in areas such as fine and gross motor coordination, memory, and oral expression. The activities included guided and commented group reading, brain gymnastics, guided questions about past events, simple motor coordination exercises, coordination and skills games, and board games. The result led to an increase in the interaction among elderly people and the stimulation of cognitive and motor processes.

Data presented above show that regarding the elderly cognitive processes such as memory and attention in seven of the centers was positive to work with their memories. Also, gross motor skill in elderly was stimulated in seven of the centers finding that although their movements were slow or difficult, they performed them according to their own abilities. Moreover, fine motor skill was stimulated in seven of the institutions. Self-esteem and assertiveness were developed in five of the environments which generated in adults the interest in knowing more each other and express their ideas and feelings. Lastly, ludic activities improved their mood and socialization.

Finally, outcomes by the implementation of the workshops reveal that there was 80% of elderly people attendance, and from this percentage, 85% participated actively inside them, which assessed their effectiveness, as well as reports of caregivers and coordinators were taken into consideration.

## **7. Conclusion**

The possible cognitive and affective impairment that occurs in elderly people is reduced when they are involved in activities with their peer group as in the case of the psychoeducational workshops which allow them to have a better coexistence and performance in their personal, familiar and social environment.

It is highlighted that participating in activities on a daily basis is quite relevant for elderly people quality of life. The psychoeducational workshops enable to carry out physical and cognitive stimulation activities, and the construction of social ties which reinforces emotional support and stimulates mental functions. Likewise, the continuous and regular exercise is quite relevant in order to improve the everyday living tasks of older adults, as it helps to maintain or improve motor skills in the elderly, and slowing down the possible psychomotor deterioration.

A difference in elderly willingness is observed between day centers for the aged and retirement houses which lies in the level of participation when the psychoeducational workshops are carried out, that is, in day centers for the aged they are more involved due to the motivation they feel since they still belong to a family and they perceive themselves as active individuals helpful for the society, situation that does not occur in the same way in

the retirement houses.

Therefore, it is essential to raise awareness among population since young adult stage in order to realize and be ready with respect to the physical, psychological and social changes that will happen during their aging stage. By doing this, they will have a better quality of life and they will be able to face the proper changes of this stage with a positive attitude; as well as the possibility to feel active by joining to a peer group which will take part of their everyday living, as in the case of day centers for the aged.

Nevertheless, psychoeducational work in retirement houses is possible only if adults are motivated and willing to participate. Otherwise, aspects such as absence or unwillingness can be against the proper development for the workshop activities.

In this sense, it is essential to increase the number of psychoeducational workshops in retirement houses with the aim to promote motivation, activation, communication, and lastly a fully satisfactory aging.

To conclude, the intervention by means of psychoeducational workshops with elderly people has huge benefits for both day centers for the aged and retirement houses. They are non-formal educational environments which have enormous potential since they strengthen, foster, resignify, and so forth, the performance and activities that older adults carry out, perceiving themselves as active and proactive individuals. Hence, it is essential to count with a multidisciplinary work team of professionals in psychology, pedagogy, social work, medicine, nursing, odontology, nutrition, among others.

Due to what has already been expressed above, the figure of the educational psychologist has been positioning and visualizing itself within someday centers for the aged and retirement houses. Is evident the importance of the educational psychologist role for the detection of needs, design and implementation of psychoeducational workshops according to the identified diagnosis. Undoubtedly, the incorporation of these professionals inside non-formal environments will improve internal dynamics and will provide enduring benefits.

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