Letters to the Editor

A study on physical, social and mental problems of the elderly in district 13 of Tehran

SIR—Sociologists and gerontologists are paying increasing attention to diversity and heterogeneity in the aged population with respect to gender, race, ethnicity and so on [1]. Between 1986 and 1996, the number of people over age 65 in Iran increased from 1.5 million to 2.59 million [2]. In 1986, only 3% of the population were over the age 65, but in 1996, the population had grown to 4.3% [2]. In 1986, the ageing coefficient in the population of Iran was 6.68%, and it increased to 10.93 in 1996 [3].

Findings of empirical studies document the existence of substantial unmet medical and social needs among rural and urban elderly in Iran [4]. Previous studies indicate that elderly Iranians tend to underutilize services that could enhance their health status and quality of life [5, 6]. The physical quality of life for elderly persons in Iran is poor, and this poverty of physical well-being is related directly to the quality of health care received by this segment of Iran’s population [7].

There is a recognized need for more research focusing on health status, health care needs, and health service utilization among elderly Iranian persons [7, 8].

This research was conducted to distinguish the physical, social and mental problems of the elderly in Tehran. Three hundred elderly persons aged 60 years and older who resided at district 13 in Tehran composed the entire study sample. They were randomly selected from the elderly cultural centre. Face-to-face interviews were subsequently conducted in the elderly centre of all consenting subjects at designated appointment times. The data were collected between August and September 2003.

According to this research, from 300 people, aged 60 and over (52% women), 32.3% of the sample were illiterate, and 3% were single. Fifty-five percent of the respondents had economic problems, 25.6% had difficulties in current living conditions of daily life, 21% expressed dissatisfaction with their current living conditions, 27.3% did not have medical insurance. Twenty-four percent of the respondents had morale and emotional problems, such as depression, anxiety, boredom and need for counselling.

In summary, the elderly people in Tehran, particularly women, are faced with multiple problems, regarding economic, physical, social, mental and emotional issues. These problems influence the quality of life of the elderly people. This study shows that a more accurate social welfare program for the elderly is essential to provide a better and fulfilling life.

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