Abstract

Positive ageing is a process of feeling good and maintaining a positive attitude, keeping healthy and being fully involved in life, rather than considering ageing as frailty or functional decline. Older adults add value to the family and contribute to society in various ways, some of which are sharing of wisdom, gratitude, spirituality, resilience, optimism, hope and confidence (PsyCap). These are the mental resources that they have developed through their life experiences when things went well and which they could fall back on when faced with challenges. This study aimed to understand the process of development of psychological capital in positive ageing. The participants were chosen purposively who were older adults of 70-80 years, men and women, retired, had completed their tenth standard, from middle socio-economic status, whose spouses have expired at least a year ago and were living with family in Bangalore city. They were interviewed using a semi structured interview schedule developed by the researcher and validated by experts. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to analyze how they make sense of their experiences as older adults. Three super-ordinate themes emerged from the data namely, ‘Factors that promote the development of PsyCap varies’, ‘Personal trauma and inadequacies as learning opportunities’ and ‘Spiritual and philosophical ways of adaptation’. These themes were further divided into emergent themes and sub themes. All themes were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis proposed by philosopher Edmund Husserl. This was substantiated by verbatim extracts from the original texts of the participant interviews. The themes were also analyzed by making connections with existing theories and literature. The results of the study indicated that support from family and friends and the internal strengths of the participants helped them face adversity and aided in the development of optimism, hope, gratitude, confidence and self-belief. Challenging and traumatic experiences such as death of a spouse or a parent, caring for an ailing parent, lack of adequate resources and
retirement were seen as opportunities for learning as they facilitated the growth of PsyCap and led to realistic future choices. Participants were grateful for effectual social support in time of grief. Their resilient attitude kept them positive and committed and also helped to prioritize goals effectively. While religion and spirituality provided solace and meaning to their lives, reflection led to the evolving of a philosophy that left them feeling fulfilled as they reached out to those in need. The study has implications for promoting a positive and healthy attitude towards older adults in order to help them move forward with hope and courage. It will be useful in sensitising the family, caregivers and policy makers as they plan strategies integrated into caregiving, at home and in institutions; to improve the quality of the lives of older adults and in enhancing a smooth transition as they move into their twilight years.

Key words: positive ageing, psychological capital, older adults, challenges