Perceptions of Friendship in the Third Age: Retirees in Kolkata

Ananya Chatterjee[1]* and Sudeshna Basu Mukherjee [2]

1 Asst. Prof. Vidysagar College for Women & Guest Lecturer & Ph. D Scholar, Dept., of Sociology, University of Calcutta.

2 Asso. Prof., Dept. Of Sociology, University of Calcutta,India

*Corresponding author: Ananya Chatterjee

Abstract

Having close friends in the third age as in any other period of life consistently corresponds with happiness and satisfaction. Friends provide support, companionship, and acceptance, which are crucial to older adults' sense of self-esteem. Having close friends positively affects the psychological well-being of older adults. Friends are named as the people with whom older adults enjoy spending time, engage in leisure activities, and have daily or frequent contact and who have the most positive and significant impact on well-being. Research suggests that adults' views of social relationships are likely to vary with age. As friendship patterns are affected by age, perceptions of friendship also get affected with it. Gender is the other important factor affecting the perceptions of friendship. This paper seeks to understand the elements involved in older adults' perception of friendship relationships by analysing the definitions of. Friendship provided by the participants. The research also explored the problems affecting the friendship relationships of the elderly and the factors causing such problems.

Keywords: perception, friendship, Retirees, Kolkata

Introduction

Friendships represent highly strong social bonds in contemporary society. The younger as well as the older adults report being happier when they are with friends than when they are alone or with family members (Larson and Bradney 1988). Research suggests that the presence of friendship ties is also associated with a variety of positive health outcomes, such as lower mortality rates and a relatively long life (e.g., Sabin 1993). The role of informal, close ties is bound to expand in salience in our increasingly fragmented and individualized society (Adams and Allen1998).

Having close friends in the third age (or, the old age, as we conventionally call it), as in any other period of life, consistently corresponds with happiness and satisfaction. Friends provide support, companionship, and acceptance, which are crucial to older adults' sense of self-esteem. They provide opportunities to trust, confide, and share mutually contented and discontented activities. They also seem to protect against stress, physical and mental problems, and premature death. Later life is apt to be a time during which friendships are particularly relevant.

Traits of Third Age Friendship

With age people who are employed both men and women are likely to retire from prolonged involvement in careers and jobs. Due to this reduction in ties to the workplace, a number of older adults are apt to have more time,

opportunity, and need for connection with others outside of the home (Allen 1989). As individuals grow older, they lose their spouses, particularly women, and this also creates a greater call for close ties with friendship and acquaintances (Ferraro, Mutran, and Barresi 1984; Lopata 1988). Nevertheless, aging may bring with it constraints that make the development and preservation of close bonds challenging.

Having close friends positively affects the psychological well-being of older adults. Friends are named as the people with whom older adults enjoy spending time, engage in leisure activities, and have daily or frequent contact and who have the most positive and significant impact on well-being (Antonucci and Akiyama 1995). Friends are also more important than kin in maintaining the morale of older adults' (Wood and Robertson 1978). Similar characteristics of friendship, such as shared values and interests, trustworthiness, displays of affection, and expressions of support, are appealing across all senior cohorts (Blieszner and Adams 1992). Older adults place a high value on the following characteristics of friendship: self-disclosure, sociability, day-to-day assistance, shared activities, loyalty, trust, and similar interests (Adams, Blieszner, and De Vries 2000). Friendship has numerous health benefits too, for individuals in later life. For example, close ties with friends, as well as the presence of a spouse, are linked to increased survival rates of the aged (Rasulo, Christensen, and Tomassini 2005). Extended social networks and higher levels of social engagement are correlated positively with cognitive functioning, and with a lower rate of cognitive decline, among older people all over the world (Barnes et al. 2004).

Researchers working exclusively on older adults' friendship, examined the definitions of friendship and analyzing data from transcriptions of guided conversations with older adults, Matthews (1983) identified two friendship orientations— friends as particular individuals and friends as relationships. Adams (1986), whose research was based in suburban Chicago, asked elderly women to describe what a friendship is, and the participants tended to define it social psychologically, referring to affective characteristics. Roberto and Kimboko (1989) constructed three categories of friends from the definitions given by older adults living in a western U.S. city—the likeable, the confiders, and the trustable. De Vries, Dustan, and Wiebe (1994) asked men and women each from four age groups (20 to 34, 35 to 49, 50 to 64, and 65 and older) to define friendship and when coded the definitions listed the following categories i. self-disclosure, ii. affection or appreciation, iii. assistance, iv. empathetic understanding, v. ego reinforcement, vi. shared activities, vii. shared interests or values, viii. acceptance, trust, ix. structural features (e.g., time known, frequency of contact), x. loyalty or commitment, and compatibility (Parker and de Vries 1993).

Gender and Age Effects

Researchers while examining gender differences in definitions of friendship located that the older men and women did not differ significantly in their orientations toward friendship as reported by Matthews, (1983); and Roberto and Kimboko (19890. Using Matthews' conceptual distinction, de Vries and colleagues (1994) confirmed this null finding and also reported that, in their sample, the oldest participants were more likely to include individual references in their definitions. They also reported that with age, men increased their use of affection or appreciation and women decreased theirs and the opposite pattern emerged for loyalty. Women mentioned self-disclosure more frequently, whereas men mentioned trust more often. Identification of assistance or support decreased with age for men, but not for women.

While studying Gender as the other important factor affecting the perceptions of friendship, Wright (1982) described women's friendships as face-to-face and men's friendship as side-by-side, capturing the tendency of women to share emotional experiences and men to share activities. This could be because women have more opportunities to establish and maintain emotionally close friendships than men do. It is equally plausible that due to differential socialization or inherent psychological predispositions, women are more inclined to establish emotionally close relationships than men are. The differing social structural locations and dispositions of men and women together may account for a wide range of differences in their friendship patterns and thus in their perceptions of friendship (Wright, 1982).

Research suggests that older adults' views of social relationships are likely to vary with age (Adams and Blieszner 1994; Blieszner and Adams 1992). Research suggests that patterns and perceptions of friendship are affected by age just as in terms of social structure, the older people are more likely to be retired and, to have empty nests. Moreover their retirement piloting to no job compulsions and grown up children, directs them to participate in a different set of daily routines and activities than those who are working or have children living at home. This in turn affects their opportunities to make, keep and socialize with friends. Other conditions such as health, living arrangements, and finances are likely to affect the impact of retirement and the departure of children from the home on friendship (Allan and Adams 1989). For example, chances to make new friends might be increased or reduced, thus expanding the range of diversity within the friendship circle or compressing it (Adams 1987). Furthermore the availability of more time perhaps provides opportunities to develop greater closeness with friends or the presence of poor health might constrain interaction and thus lead to reduced closeness (Johnson and Troll 1994).

With the aforementioned conditions of friendship this study tried to delve into the interactive processes of friendship among retired older adults in urban Kolkata with following objectives.

Objectives of the Study

- To understand how the older adults perceived friendship relationships.
- To understand the nature and causes of problems in elderly friendship relationships.

Method

Variables: Interactive friendship processes are the dynamic aspects of the relationships between friends. These processes include the covert cognitive and affective responses and the overt behavioural events that occur when people socialize (Blieszner, 1995). Interactive processes reflect what we think, feel and do as friends. The initial list of friendship definition elements within the **five** broad categories: **behavioural, cognitive, affective, structural and proxy measures** following Blieszner and Adams's typology (Blieszner & Adams, 1992)**.**

Behavioural processes are the action components of friendship, that is, they are the behaviours involved in acting as friends. The disclosure of one's thoughts and feelings is an important behavioural process. Displays of affection, social support, resource exchange, co-operation, accommodation to a friend's desires, coordination, sharing activities and interests are behaviours associated with satisfying friendships (Blieszner & Adams, 1992)**.**

Cognitive processes reflect the internal thoughts that each individual has about himself or herself, the friend and the friendship. These thoughts concern the stability of the friendship, events that occur in the friendship and

understanding the friend's intentions or needs. In addition, cognitive processes include evaluations of another's attractiveness, character, similarity to self and other important qualities (Blieszner & Adams, 1992)**.**

Affective processes encompass emotional reactions to friends and friendship (Blieszner & Adams, 1992). These processes include positive feelings and emotional reactions, such as closeness, empathy, trust, commitment and contentment. They also may involve negative feelings such as anger, indifference or jealousy (Blieszner & Adams, 1992)**.**

Structural characteristics refer to the critical role of social context for social relationship formation. Social context is a precondition for social relations, as it provides the milieu for social interaction and assigns individuals to different physical or social segments so that they encounter different candidates for relationships. The structural aspects of friendship relationships include the form of the ties linking an individual's friends such as the hierarchy and solidarity among them, the similarity of their social positions, the number of friends and the pattern of connections among them (Blieszner & Adams, 1992)**.**

Proxy indicators or proxy measures are called so because they reveal only that interaction takes place but not the nature of the interactions involved. These include measures of different processes such as how often these friends were mentioned, frequency of contact, length of acquaintance, and duration of etc (Blieszner & Adams, 1992)**.**

The aforedefined framework resulting from the coding is presented in **Table1,** along with the frequencies with which the participants mentioned the broad and specific elements of friendship as part of their definitions.

Area: Sample was drawn from older adults residing in households within the jurisdiction of KMC Kolkata Municipal Corporation that is included within Kolkata Metropolitan Area. Kolkata Metropolitan Area (KMA), the largest urban agglomeration in eastern India, extends over 1851.41 sq. km. and envelopes 3 Municipal Corporations including Kolkata Municipal Corporation, 38 Municipalities and 24 Panchayat Samitis. KMA holds a population of 14,112,536, according to 2011 Census, as against the total urban population of West Bengal of 91.35 million. (Source: http://www.kmdaonline.org/; accessed 31.05.14)
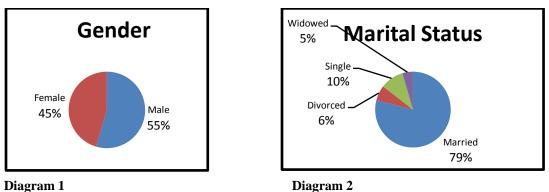
Sample: For the purposes of the exploratory research reported here, a sample of 110 individuals were selected through purposive snow-ball sampling. Participation in the research was voluntary.

Data Collection: Data were collected through face-to-face, in-depth interviews. In order to incorporate greater varieties of relationships, no formal definition of friendship was provided by the researcher. Instead, the participants were asked open-ended questions regarding their definition of friendship and probing questions were used to obtain further details.

In order to understand the problems associated with friendship relationships of these people they were asked to classify their friends in the following four categories: **too close, difficult, fading, and ended.** After they have identified problematic relationships, the participants were asked to clarify why they consider these relationships to be problematic. Causes were coded as **problems relating to internal structure, external factors, lives no longer intersecting and interactive processes** following Blieszner and Adams's typology (Blieszner & Adams, 1998).

Analysis and Interpretations

The voluntary nature of friendship distinguishes it conceptually from other types of social relationships. An individual's friends are not determined by blood ties, as relatives are, or by residence, as neighbours are. Aging is often characterized by the loss of choice. Age-related changes, such as decreased health and financial resources, often leave older people dependent upon agencies and family members not of their own choosing. This factor makes friendship, which is theoretically voluntary, a potentially important activity for older people, who may lack freedom in other areas of their lives. Although this research has provided an important foundation for understanding friendship, it has not addressed the variety of definitions and types of friendship that exist in the world.(Adams, 1986).

DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE SAMPLE
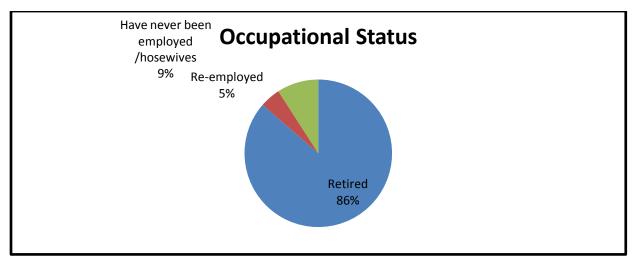

Diagram 1

Diagram 2

Diagram 3

Data in **Diagram 1, 2 & 3** revealed the socio-demographic character of the sample. The participants were aged between 60 to 83 years with an **average age of 72 years.** Majority of the participants were male (55%), nearly three-fourth of the participants were retired (76.3%) and (9.1%) have never been employed; approximately 80 per cent (79%) were married and approximately 10 per cent (9.4%) widowed.

Elements of Friendship Definitions

Friendship patterns consist of the structure, processes and phases which influence one another. Power hierarchy, status hierarchy, solidarity and homogeneity have been identified by researchers as three major structural aspects of dyadic relationships. Friendship processes reflects the interactive aspects of friendship patterns. These processes are overt behavioural events and covert cognitive and affective responses that take place when friends interact.

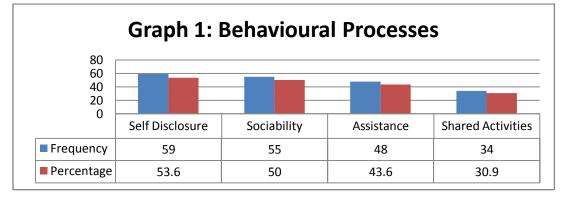### Table 1: Elements of Friendship Definitions (N=110)

Element of Definition	Frequency	Percent*
Behavioural Processes	**88**	**80**
Self-Disclosure	59	53.6
Sociability	55	50
Assistance	48	43.6
Shared Activities	34	30.9
Cognitive Processes	**80**	**72.7**
Trust	75	68.1
Empathy	63	57.2
Loyalty/Commitment	59	53.6
Acceptance	44	40
Shared Interests/Values	39	35.4
Appreciation/Respect	22	20
Affective Processes	**67**	**60.9**
Compatibility	39	35.4
Care	37	33.6
Structural Characteristics	**49**	**44.5**
Solidarity	42	38.2
Homogeneity	10	9.09
Proxy Measures of Process	**23**	**21**
Frequency of Contact	22	20
Length of Acquaintance	15	13.6
Duration of Contacts	5	4.5

*Figures don't add up to 100 as more than one element was mentioned by a single participant.

Data in **Table 1** highlights that, in order of decreasing frequency, (88%) participants' defined friendship in terms of at least one behavioural process, (80%) cognitive process, (67%) affective process, (49%) structural characteristic, and (23%) proxy process. The 110 participants named over four specific characteristics of friendship on average (M

= 4.2, SD = 1.3), with (7 %) of them naming only one and (10.5 %) naming six or seven elements of friendship definitions.

In the following narratives the researcher highlighted specific characteristics of friendship / Elements of Friendship Definitions listed in **Table 1**.
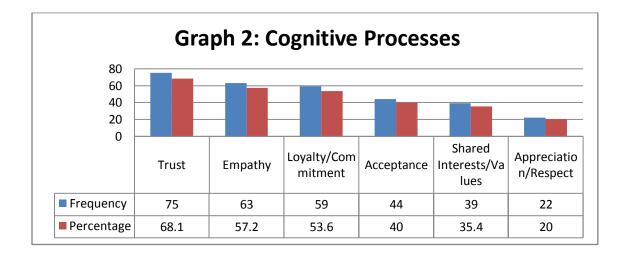
Graph 1: Behavioural Processes

	Self Disclosure	Sociability	Assistance	Shared Activities
Frequency	59	55	48	34
Percentage	53.6	50	43.6	30.9

The behavioural processes mentioned were, in order of decreasing frequency, self- disclosure, sociability, assistance, and shared activities **(Graph 1)**. Most participants identified two or three behavioural processes (M = 2.6, SD = 0.8). Sociability was often used as a criterion to define friends, to distinguish friends form acquaintances.

A **72-years-old man …**described friendship in a style reflecting the self-disclosure aspect of friendship relationships:

*"W*ith friends you can share you*r problems…personal, familial…you can share intimate details with your close friends. It gives you a kind of mental peace."*

A **65-years-old widowed woman**, who has also retired from her career, stressed on the assistance that friends receive from each other at the hours of the need and also on the shared activities between friends.

*"Whenever I need some help I call upon my close friends without any hesitation. As they say, 'friends in need, fr*iends indeed.' And it's so true. True friends are always there for you. I have learnt that from experience. And it's also fun doing things together."*

Graph 2: Cognitive Processes

	Trust	Empathy	Loyalty/Commitment	Acceptance	Shared Interests/Values	Appreciation/Respect
Frequency	75	63	59	44	39	22
Percentage	68.1	57.2	53.6	40	35.4	20

The participants named six cognitive processes **(Graph 2)**. In order of decreasing frequency, the participants mentioned, trust, empathy, loyalty or commitment, acceptance, shared interests or values, and appreciation or respect. They delineated an average of approximately one cognitive process (M = 1.1, SD = 1.0).
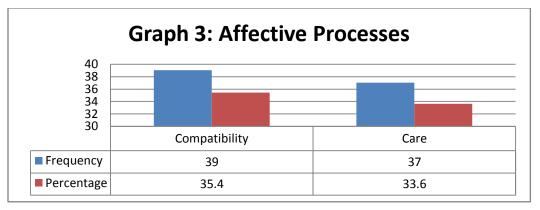
An **80-years-old woman from Ultadanga described friends as trustworthy**:

"If someone is your real friend you can really trust her. She is never going to spill the beans. You can share your innermost feelings and thoughts with her."

A focus on empathic understanding is evident in the following excerpt from what **a 76-years-old man said:**

"A friend will not leave you abruptly. Even if you misbehave or if you are rude to him, he will try and understand. He won't just abandon you…"
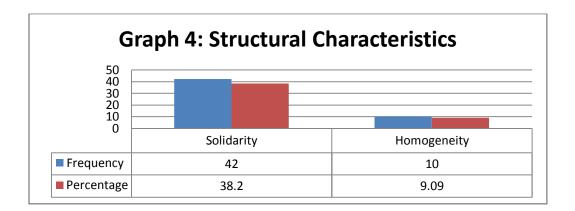
Loyalty or commitment, acceptance, shared interests or values, and appreciation or respect were also mentioned by the participants as important features of friendship.

Graph 3: Affective Processes

	Compatibility	Care
■ Frequency	39	37
■ Percentage	35.4	33.6

Compatibility and care were the two affective processes **(Graph 3)** that participants mentioned. Most male participants did not name an affective process; the percentage being as low as 9%. For the women participants care was more important than compatibility.
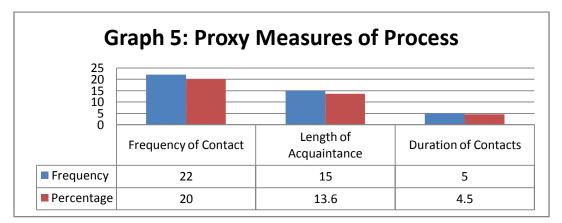
A **62-years-old man** incorporated care as follows:

"Someone who feels for you as much as you feel for him or her." A 75-years-old woman, who is a housewife, *reiterated, "Real friends always take care of you. Little gestures will let you know that they are always* there for you, *caring for you…* wishing you on your birthdays, makin*g you comfortable at a gathering…"*

Graph 4: Structural Characteristics

	Solidarity	Homogeneity
■ Frequency	42	10
■ Percentage	38.2	9.09

Solidarity and homogeneity were the two structural characteristics **(Graph 4)** named as part of the participants' definitions of friendship. Solidarity is the degree of intimacy or closeness between friends. Homogeneity is the similarity of the participants in terms of social positions external to the relationship such as gender, race, occupational status, ethnicity or age. About half of the participants (49%) named a structural characteristic of friendship, and only few named two structural features. Solidarity was thought to be central to the definition of friendship relationship by most of the participants. Homogeneity applied to a variety of domains such as belonging to the same religion or working in the same occupation or having same marital status.

One **76 years old woman from Chandanagar** spoke of having children as a factor in friendship: *"there are some women who are childless…I know a few of them…they are mere acquaintances…you know, some of them are very* sensitive about their childlessness…*so we cannot discuss about our children and grandchildren in front of them…actually, we do not feel free with them…what else is there to discuss at this age apart from family?"*

Graph 5: Proxy Measures of Process

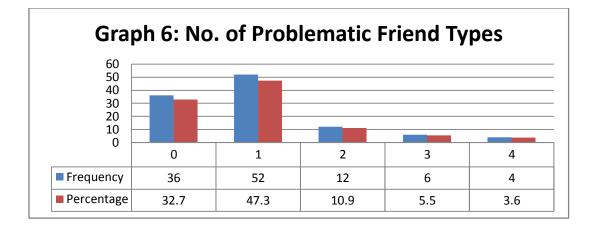|	Frequency of Contact	Length of Acquaintance	Duration of Contacts
■ Frequency	22	15	5
■ Percentage	20	13.6	4.5

Proxy indicators of relational interaction or quality include, **(Graph 5)** in decreasing order of frequency of contact, length of acquaintance, duration of contacts, and how often they were mentioned.

One **80-years-old man from Barasat**, mentioned both frequency of contact and length of acquaintance in his definition of friendship:
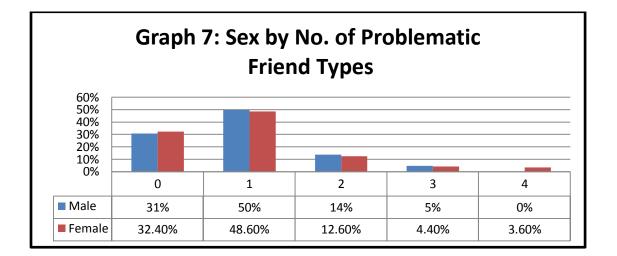
"You have to devote time to your friends. The longer you know a person, the closer you get to him. You meet him time and again; *in different situations…that gives you a deeper understanding of the person."*

Problematics of Friendship

Friendship relationships, like any other relationships, needs to be nurtured. It is an ongoing process. It's not enough to make friends, but one needs to devote considerable amount of time and energy for the maintenance of a particular friendship relationship. Declining health, retirement and consequent decreased income, loss of marital partners considerably affect the social relationships of the aged. These changes often have detrimental effects on the friendships of both men and women. Apart from these structural or situational constraints, friendship, like any other social relationships, is fraught with difficulties. Thus participants were also asked about the problems they have with their friendship relationships.

Graph 6: No. of Problematic Friend Types

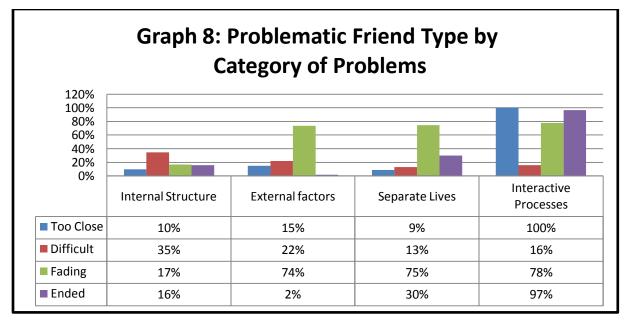|	0	1	2	3	4
■ Frequency	36	52	12	6	4
■ Percentage	32.7	47.3	10.9	5.5	3.6

Almost half (47.3%) of the participants were able to identify at least one friendship relationship which is problematic. Women were more open to discuss the problematic aspects of their relationships. As shown in **Graph 6**, most participants had only one or two problematic friendship types and relatively few claimed partners in three or all four problem categories.

Graph 7: Sex by No. of Problematic Friend Types

	0	1	2	3	4
■ Male	31%	50%	14%	5%	0%
■ Female	32.40%	48.60%	12.60%	4.40%	3.60%

Graph 7 indicates that those reporting no problematic friendships were about evenly divided between men and women but women were more likely than men to mention friends in more than two problematic friend categories. Only 2% of women participants mentioned having friends in all the four problematic categories

Sources and Types of Problems

Graph 8: Problematic Friend Type by Category of Problems

	Internal Structure	External factors	Separate Lives	Interactive Processes
■ Too Close	10%	15%	9%	100%
■ Difficult	35%	22%	13%	16%
■ Fading	17%	74%	75%	78%
■ Ended	16%	2%	30%	97%

* Figures don't add up to 100 as more than one type of problem could occur in within a particular friendship

Graph 8 presents a preview of the nature of the problems associated with the various focal friends as revealed by analysis of the qualitative data. Internal structural features of dyads (solidarity, power or status, and homogeneity issues) influenced obstacles in the difficult, fading, and ended friendship categories. Conditions and situations external to the dyad, which are generally beyond the control of the friend partners, accounted for negative aspects of difficult and fading friend types. Differential life circumstances which prevented the friends from interacting regularly, affected all categories of friendships and is also responsible for 30% ended friendships. Interactive processes (related to cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects of transactions) were involved in the preponderance of friendship problems, being reported in all of the too close and ended friendships and most of the difficult and fading ones.

Each category of friendship problem included multiple dimensions. In the following sections specific aspects of each source of problems are illustrated with quotations from the participants.

Internal Structure

Although the majority of the problems participants reported having with their problematic friends were matters of process, in 15 relationships, the problems resulted at least in part from internal structural issues. The most common structural problem was low solidarity—the respondent did not feel close to his or her friend.

Another common structural problem was a relative difference in the power and status of the friends. Because friendship is usually assumed to be an egalitarian relationship, when one participant tries to exert disproportionate influence or is haughty, difficulties can arise.

A 61-years-old female reported a power struggle with a long-term friend: *"She was very bossy. She was always right and expected others to do as she wished. This can't go on forever. After all, friends should be equal."*

Similarly, one friend acting as if he or she has more worth than the other also causes problems. This was exemplified by the following quote by a **63-years-old man form Lake Gardens, Kolkata:** *"He would not leave* any chance to elaborate his contribution to maintain the relationship. How has he sacrificed his own happiness on this *or that occasion to please me…this is not done… I have also helped him in many ways…but I don't beat drums about that."*

Problems related to dyadic homogeneity can occur when partners have discrepant social characteristics. For example, differences in religion, income level and in some cases educational qualification and marital status were included within this category.

Factors External to the Friendship

Although together the internal processes and structure of relationships accounted for most of the problems participants reported, in 17 relationships, factors external to friendships affected them. One or both of the friends find themselves in circumstances that have a negative impact on their relationship. In this sample of older adults, the most common external problem was declining health.

In other cases, spouses and children interfered with friendships. For example, one 70-year-old woman described her problem with a friend: "Few years back her daughter gave birth to a baby boy. Since her daughter is a working mother, my friend has to look after her grandson. Thus, she has very little spare time and can very rarely come to see me."

In still other cases, problems arose because one of the friends had a busy work schedule. A final example concerns friends who had previously depended on third parties to keep them in touch and the third parties had ceased doing so. Death of Spouse

Lives no Longer Intersecting

Not all problematic friendships resulted from internal process or structure issues or from issues external to the relationship. In 26 relationships, the problem was that the friends did not cross paths frequently anymore. This usually occurred because the two friends lived far apart, because their routines did not bring them into contact with one another, or for both reasons.

One 60-years-old woman said her friend lived in another town. As was typical of other friends separated in this way, she only managed to see her friend occasionally. A 62-years-old man attributed his problems with a friendship to distance and retirement: "He was very close to me. But he has shifted to Bangalore with his son. I used to call him often. But now that we have retired, our interests do not match always. "

Interactive Processes

Cognitive, affective, and behavioural interactive processes played a major role in the problems participants had with their friends. The number of problematic relationships in which one or more interactive processes figured was 68, with behavioural processes most prevalent, followed by problems associated with cognitive and affective processes.

The most common cognitive processes evident in the data were attributions and person perception. These were most likely to occur with respect to the difficult type of target friend, when participants located the cause of the problem they were having in the friend's personality. For example, a 60-year-old woman described this difficult friend: "I am member of a renowned club in Kolkata. She's our cultural secretary. She asks for suggestions but when you give a

suggestion she will not take them ... She's thinks she knows everything; you can't tell her anything …that's her personality, bossy."

Although affective processes include both positive and pleasurable emotions and negative or unpleasant ones, negative emotions predominated in the discussions of problematic friendships. For example, hurt feelings and anger characterized difficult and ended friendships.

Other participants expressed sadness and regret about friendships that were fading or had ended. The most common emotional reactions to friendships that were fading away, though, were resignation and indifference. It is important to note, too, that some participants were satisfied with the outcome of negative friendships. A 76-years-old woman discussed ending a friendship with a person who turned out to be shallow and condescending. She felt she did the right thing, and thereby preserved her self-respect.

Effects of Gender on Problems

Although men and women did not differ on likelihood of claiming troublesome friends in their networks, looking at transcript data across all the problem friend categories and types of problems revealed patterns related to participants' gender. For example, it was found that geographic distance was a problem-related factor mentioned by both men and women, especially with respect to fading communications. Similarly, situations such as a change in work status and other causes of non-intersection of lives were reported by both men and women. Both men and women indicated that they ended friendships in response to a specific incident such as a serious insult or betrayal.

The work environment seemed to figure more prominently in the discussion of problem friendships for men than for women. Many of the men's friendships originated from common career paths, and sometimes business-related issues resulted in friendship problems. Two men, but no women, attributed friendship problems to the friends' excessive alcohol consumption. Also, men were more likely than women to report that another relationship, such as with a family member, mediated the relationship between the two friends in a way detrimental to the friendship. In contrast, women were more likely than men to take a stance based on character issues when mentioning problems with friends. They cited the following personal attributes when describing friend-related problems: bossy, self-centred, pushy, nosy, gossipy, moody, jealous, belligerent, competitive, overly demanding, and scatterbrained.

Conclusions

The results indicate that behavioural aspects of friendship are key determinants of the relationship. People value concrete evidence of friendship as manifested in self-disclosure, sociability, day-to-day assistance, and shared activities. A high proportion of elders also incorporate cognitive processes into the definition of friendship. Appraising a person as loyal, trustworthy, and having the same interests contributes to counting the person as a friend. In contrast, affective processes, structural characteristics, and proxy indicators of interaction were mentioned less frequently when participants defined friendship.

Looking at subgroups within the sample showed that women and men focused on distinct aspects of friendship. As expected given the literature on the differences in the friendship patterns of women and men, the former highlighted emotional qualities and the latter were more likely to endorse indirect, proxy indicators of friendship such as frequency of contact or length of acquaintance.

Older adults freely admit to the negative side of friendship if given an opportunity to do so. Having problems with friends does not necessarily signal the end of the friendship, although sometimes it does. Participants in this study, at least, retained friendships that included various difficulties, although perhaps at a reduced level of emotional closeness.

Problems with friends originate in characteristics of the individuals involved, such as the way one friend perceives the other's personality traits. They arise from the internal structural features of the relationship, such as the degree of closeness, the extent of dyadic homogeneity on age or class, or the unequal distribution of power and status in the relationship. They are caused by factors external to the relationship over which the friends have little control and by changes in life patterns. They result from day-to-day interactions, such as hurt feelings, betrayals and disappointments, and revelation of a friend's undesirable features. Problems with friends sometimes cause anger or distress and other times yield only indifference.

Problems with friends varied somewhat according to gender among these elderly adults. These findings reveal that some of men's friendship problems have different originations than women's. The findings demonstrate that individuals experience friendship problems differentially just as they experience friendship benefits differentially and that friendships are as diverse in their more unpleasant sides as they are in their gratifying aspects. Thus the results contribute depth to the knowledge about older adult friendship. The findings further demonstrate that friendship troubles are not related only to cognitive, affective, and behavioural interaction processes, but also to friendship structure and context.

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