



## Article

# Discourse of Folk Literature on Healthy Ageing: A Case Study in Sindh, Pakistan during the Pandemic Crisis

Maya Khemlani David <sup>1,\*</sup> and Ameer Ali <sup>2</sup> <sup>1</sup> Asia-Europe Institute, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur 50603, Malaysia<sup>2</sup> Institute of English Language and Literature, University of Sindh, Jamshoro 76060, Pakistan; ameer7037@gmail.com

\* Correspondence: mayadavid@yahoo.com

**Abstract:** Due to COVID-19 and the repeated imposition of lockdowns in Pakistan's Sindh province, the life of senior citizens has become challenging. Given the scarcity of health care policies targeted at Sindh's aged persons, the use of folk literature as therapy has increased to support against isolation, depression, and distress caused by COVID-19 and lockdowns. Although research on healthy ageing from medical and health care perspectives has been increasingly conducted in different contexts, there is a need to explore how folk literature can contribute to psychological, spiritual, and social wellbeing. Therefore, this research, conducted by collecting data from 15 aged participants through interviews and conversations, seeks to explore how senior Sindhis have used folk literature such as poetry, proverbs, and tales as therapy for their healing. Findings show that the participants' use of Sindhi folk literature contributes to their psychological (eudemonic, evaluative, and hedonic) wellbeing, spiritual healing, and social satisfaction.



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**Keywords:** ageing; health; folk literature; proverbs; Sindhis

## 1. Introduction

The world's population is ageing. In Pakistan alone, 15 million people are aged over 60, which is 7% of its total population ([HelpAge International 2019](#)). Of the total elderly population, 19.59% are living in Pakistan's Sindh province ([Pakistan Census Report 1998](#)). Ageing also presents "social, economic, and cultural challenges" ([United Nations Population Fund 2012](#), p. 3), and active and healthy ageing is put high on the agenda of developing countries. In the wake of COVID-19, some people have become much more vulnerable to depression and immunological depletion ([Rajkumar 2020](#)).

Due to the pandemic and lockdowns, many people lost sources of income, and the elderly were especially vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic ([Rajkumar 2020](#)). Similarly, older Sindhis in Pakistan have been vulnerable to effects of the pandemic and the lockdowns.

Sindh is one of the four provinces (alongside Baluchistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the Punjab) of Pakistan that has its own distinct identity, culture, language, traditions, arts, and literature ([Shahriar and Bughio 2014](#)). Throughout its long history, Sindh has maintained its distinct language and culture, in contrast to the languages and cultures of its surrounding regions ([Shahriar and Bughio 2014](#)). Peace, hospitality, and humanity are the cultural components that make Sindhis more welcoming and tolerant of different faiths and identities ([Junejo 2018](#)). Moreover, Sindh has rich, distinguishing traditions of folklore that have shaped its distinct identity ([Doctor 1985](#)).

Older members of the Sindhi community have accumulated knowledge of folk literature and traditions through the process of socialisation. The selection of Sindh for this research was made based upon the fact that the province has its own distinguishing and rich traditions of folklore ([Doctor 1985](#); [The Express Tribune 2018](#)). Folk literature usually has no written form, and is transmitted from one generation to another through spoken

language. Elderly Sindhis' cognition of Sindhi poetry, folktales, and proverbs has enriched their thoughts and expressions, which they use to convince others of their views and to improve their own standing in society. This reality is reflected in a Sindhi proverb that states "*iha zuban os mn wihary, iha ziban shawnwa mn wihary*" (People's way of speaking determines if they are to receive respect or not). Such proverbs have made inroads in the discourse of many elderly Sindhis in the wake of COVID-19-induced lockdowns in Sindh.

During the lockdowns that have been repeatedly imposed in Sindh, due to different waves of the pandemic, the elderly have demonstrated their wisdom, gained from folk stories, proverbs, and poetry in their conversations with family members and other relatives. According to [Ali and David \(2021\)](#), the members of the Sindhi community employ linguistic security in the form of spoken discourse as a defensive tool against the depressive isolation inflicted upon them during the lockdowns.

This study takes place against the backdrop of increasing research on healthy and active ageing, in which researchers show how different means and ways can be used to activate healthy ageing ([Raeesi Dehkordi et al. 2020](#); [Tajudeen et al. 2021](#); [Mace et al. 2021](#); [Ali and David 2021](#)). Deploying gerotranscendence as a theoretical lens, [Raeesi Dehkordi et al. \(2020\)](#) state that healthy/active ageing is a subjective concept that varies according to an individual's experience. Healthy or active ageing is understood as a process through which people maintain and develop their physical and mental wellbeing, and this ensures their mental and physical wellbeing remain in old age.

On fairly similar theoretical lines, this research examines psychological, spiritual, and social aspects of healthy/active ageing among the elderly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in one of the provinces (Sindh) of Pakistan, where the elderly are converting their lockdown into conversational relief by interacting with their family members, relatives and friends. The study deploys 'healthy and active ageing' as a conceptual framework for the analysis of data. Many scholars have recently used this conceptual lens in different contexts to analyse the process of healthy and active ageing with respect to the elderly population ([Bacsu et al. 2013](#); [Dev et al. 2020](#); [Young et al. 2021](#); [Pachana and Wahl 2021](#)).

Some researchers have associated lockdowns with negative effects on the physical health and mental wellbeing of older people ([Muro et al. 2021](#); [Carlos et al. 2021](#); [Kyaw et al. 2021](#)). In sharp contrast, a number of researchers have discussed how COVID-19-induced lockdowns are contributing positively to the lives of different people around the world, such as them gaining knowledge, environmental healing and learning new skills, etc. ([Krajewski et al. 2020](#); [Hansen et al. 2021](#); [Acim 2021](#)). In this research, we investigate how lockdowns have enabled a number of older Sindhis to share with community members their wisdom gained from traditional folktales, poetry, and proverbs and help others including themselves obtain resilience.

Healthy ageing has also been described as a process that helps to improve older people's quality of life. Within this conceptual lens, this research seeks to address how the elderly's folk stories, poetry, and proverbs resulted in their enhanced cognitive processes, conversational relief, and active and healthy ageing. In the context of this research, the elderly's proverbs, reciting poetry, and story narrating are conceptualised as processes of successful psychological, spiritual, and social ageing against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Previous research on the role of folk literature in maintaining good health is now discussed.

### 1.1. Folk Literature and Healthy Ageing

Many researchers have already identified the role of folklore in developing healthy ageing ([Joseph 2019](#); [Hufford 1998](#); [Newton 2019](#); [Puglisi et al. 2017](#)). [Joseph's \(2019\)](#) hermeneutic, phenomenological, and qualitative study showed how the Afro-Caribbean people use folklore practices as a health patterning modality. According to [Hufford \(1998\)](#), the role of folklore is vital in facilitating and understanding links between cultural dynamics and biological processes, thus helping to solve problems posed by viral diseases.

Folklore can also guide a healthy check-up of basic concepts of life, especially those which are related to health, illness, and care (Newton 2019). In this regard, Puglisi et al. (2017) used a semi-folklore story to create a framework that helped them understand cannibalism conceptualised as a type of mental health disorder. Lukoff and Lukoff (2011) argued that folk tales can heal spiritual health issues and can enhance wisdom.

Marcoen (2010) discussed how poetry is used as therapy, and that it is a part of the therapeutic arsenal of health care practitioners in many countries. According to Deshpande (2012), reading or writing stories can improve a person's mental health. The expressive and therapeutic role of literature, such as poetry and storytelling, has various health-related benefits that have been explored in clinical contexts (McCardle and Byrt 2001). Since reading and writing poetry is beneficial for psychological healing, these activities should be used more extensively in both clinical and educational settings (Raingruber 2004; Davies 2018). According to Al-Krenawi (2000), proverbs can be used as therapy to help patients express their distress indirectly and concisely, and can help them in getting rid of depression.

The above reviews show how folk literature can contribute to understanding health problems, and how folk literature can help solve such problems. We now focus on the psychological, spiritual, and social dimensions of healthy/active ageing among the elderly.

### 1.2. Healthy/Active Ageing: Psychological, Spiritual, and Social Dimensions

Previous studies focused on what constitutes healthy/active ageing (Stephens et al. 2014). According to Stephens et al. (2014), there are six components of healthy ageing and these include: physical comfort, social integration, contribution, security, autonomy, and enjoyment. McKee and Schüz (2015) say that there is no consensual definition of healthy ageing. Other researchers have suggested how policies that encourage self-learning and participation in diversified social activities can be devised to ensure healthy ageing among the elderly (Hung and Lu 2013; Zeng 2013). Some researchers have emphasised that counselling can positively contribute to psychological health during the lockdown (Kumari and Singh 2020; Budimir et al. 2021). Healthy, psychological ageing consists of three aspects: evaluative wellbeing (life satisfaction), hedonic wellbeing (feelings of happiness, etc.), and eudemonic wellbeing (having purpose/meaning in life) (Steptoe et al. 2015). These researchers claim that psychological wellbeing can play a protective role in maintaining good health. Employing activity theory and a wellbeing model, Mehta and Ee (2008) demonstrated that psychological wellbeing can be enhanced through social participation. Apart from social participation, psychological health, according to Deshpande (2012), is also improved by reading or writing literature.

Spirituality in positively impacting a person's health is related to psychological wellbeing because it seeks to moderate "positive relationships with various measures of life satisfaction, psychosocial wellbeing . . . and is helpful in the quest for meaning and purpose in life" (Lavretsky 2010). Spiritually active people meditate and perform religious services, and tend to live a longer and healthier life (Zimmer et al. 2016). Using a thematic analysis, Lukoff and Lukoff (2011) state that traditional folktales and myths can be used as "sources of spiritual wisdom and healing" (p. 208).

In social terms, physical comfort, social integration, contribution, security, autonomy, and enjoyment are seen as components of healthy ageing (see Stephens et al. 2014). Ten years earlier, Mehta and Vasoo (2004) explained that wellbeing can be ensured by following the value of care and concern. Using qualitative data collected from the elderly, Thang (2015) discussed that the wellbeing of older adults relies on social networks, such as family, friends and neighbours. According to Wee et al. (2017), the social wellbeing of older adults is indicated by family relationships, being socially active, and maintaining a positive mindset. Therefore, in this research, healthy ageing is conceptualised as psychological and spiritual relief and social wellbeing.

Employing these three aspects of active/healthy ageing as a theoretical lens, this research seeks to study how older members of the Sindhi community used the lockdowns as an opportunity to share the wisdom obtained from poetry, traditional folktales, and

proverbs with their relatives and family members, and how such interactions led to their healthy psychological, spiritual, and social ageing.

This research will address the following questions:

1. How does folk poetry bring about healthy ageing in elderly Sindhis?
2. How do folktales contribute to the healthy ageing of elderly Sindhis?
3. How do proverbs lead to the healthy ageing of elderly Sindhis?

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study was designed to investigate the elderly Sindhis' use of poetry, folktales, and proverbs in their conversations, and how their conversations in turn led to their healthy/active ageing. The research sites were rural areas in Pakistan's Sindh province. Sindh is divided into rural and urban areas, and this research was focused on rural areas because folklore has been maintained and practiced more in these areas. In Sindh, many senior persons often make use of folklore when they meet or visit ordinary Sindhis who are mostly unaware of folk literature in rural settings.

The research was conducted in June, July, and August 2021. The study employed a semi-structured interview protocol as a tool for collecting data. There were 4 close-ended and 8 open-ended questions in the interview protocol. Close-ended questions were about background information of the participants, while open-ended questions were about the participants' opinions of healthy/active ageing. Three open ended questions asked of the participants dealt with the role of folktales, poetry, and proverbs and their different effects. In total, there were 15 research participants. The average age of the participants was 64.53 years. Four interviews were conducted face-to-face, following standard operating procedures, and two interviews were conducted through mobile calls. Ten men and five women participated in this research. The average length of each interview was about 15 min.

Afterwards, the researchers sent a formal letter to the 15 participants who had already been interviewed; however, only 9 consented to participate in informal conversations. Out of these nine, two were females, while seven were males. Their ages ranged between 60 and 72. Eight conversations of nine participants were observed in home domains and guest houses, and notes were taken. Four such conversations were held in the second author's guest house, while four conversations were observed in the houses of the participants. The average length of each conversation was 3 h. Additionally, the participants were invited for a focus group interview, but only 4 participants agreed to participate in this. The focus group took place in one of the participants' guest houses. All of the conversations took place in the Sindhi language, and later relevant sections taken from the conversation notes were manually translated and verified. These nine participants, including the four who were later involved in a focus group, had taken part in many folk literature seminars and cultural events.

The participants who were interviewed and observed were well-versed in folk literature and/or experts in modern Sindhi literature. Their experience and familiarity with Sindhi folk literature was used as criteria to purposively select the research participants.

The interviews of the participants, the focus group discussion, and the conversations (8) that were observed took place in the Sindhi language. The conversations and data from the focus group interview and the individual interviews were all in the Sindhi language, and translations in English are provided for the analysis. Data were processed further to generate general themes and patterns through a coding process. Sections taken from the data were qualitatively analysed using 'healthy/active ageing' as a theoretical lens.

We also ensured the following ethical protocols while collecting data from the participants. For instance, the participants' consent to use their data was sought and they were guaranteed that their details would be kept confidential. This confidentiality was ensured by not mentioning the participants' names, and numbers were used to identify them. For further details of the participants see Table 1.

**Table 1.** Participants' background information.

Participant No.	Gender	Residence District	Qualification	Age
Participant 1	Male	Larkana	Bachelor	56
Participant 2	Male	Larkana	Bachelor	64
Participant 3	Male	Sukkur	Masters	67
Participant 4	Female	Larkana	Masters	77
Participant 5	Female	Larkana	Masters	57
Participant 6	Male	Larkana	Bachelor	66
Participant 7	Male	Qambar-Shahdadkot	Masters	60
Participant 8	Male	Sukkur	Bachelor	76
Participant 9	Female	Ghotki	Bachelor	71
Participant 10	Male	Larkana	Masters	62
Participant 11	Male	Badin	Masters	60
Participant 12	Male	Umarkot	Masters	60
Participant 13	Female	Larkana	Masters	59
Participant 14	Female	Sanghar	Masters	61
Participant 15	Male	Larkana	–	72

### 3. Research Findings

In this section, the research findings have been presented and analysed under the themes: Healthy/active ageing through Sindhi poetry; Healthy/active ageing through Sindhi folktales; Healthy/active ageing through Sindhi proverbs.

#### 3.1. Healthy/Active Ageing through Sindhi Poetry

According to [Acim \(2021\)](#), poetry can have a soothing effect on a reader/reciter. Similarly, the participants employed Sindhi poetry as a tool to neutralise the effects of the pandemic and lockdown. They recited and used poetry in their conversations with their family members. The verses that were discussed in interviews and observations are presented in [Table 2](#).

**Table 2.** Poetry recited by the participants in their conversations/interviews.

	Verses Recited in Sindhi	English Translation	Participant No
1.	Sain hany na kehn San hath Milayo, Sangat khy na seenay layo, Monh dhaky paya poi galhayo, Das dino aa, iho dahy, Krona virus pae aa Kahy.	Sir, don't shake hands with anyone, avoid embracing your friends, put on a mask because the wise people have told us Corona virus has broken out.	i
2.	Chngai jay kanden, ta chango tunjo thendo, Burai ka pary paso tunjo thendo, Palnhar be tusan razi poe thendo.	Those who do good will be rewarded with good. They will be guarded against all evils, and God will love such persons	ii
3.	Takbar khe tary, khudi khy Khao, Nato niwrat waro Nirmal tun nibhai, Tadh n razi thendae Allah, Jaden ghat sadain Gul Hassan Chae.	Overcome your ignorance and self, Live a humble life, Because, according to Gul Hassan, God loves humble persons.	iii
4.	Andar panjay mn jadhn pat lio, Bari payo ishq tuhne jo dio. Saj n tunjo saneeho kal photo Asa wat.	I fell in love with you (God) when I meditated on my own being. My Beloved I have recently discovered your message.	iv

The verses in [Table 2](#) were mentioned by the participants in conversations with family members in the home domain and with their relatives/friends in guest houses. All verses have been taken from Sindhi folk literature. The participants learnt many such poems throughout their lifetime and used these verses in their conversations during the lockdown period.

Including such poetical couplets/quatrains in conversations not only enhances communicative goals, but it can also activate the process of healthy psychological ageing, spiritual wellbeing, and social wellbeing. According to [Mcardle and Byrt \(2001\)](#), poetry can play an expressive, therapeutic role in overcoming distress and depression. Similarly, the participants in this research used folk poetry as a tool of psychological therapy. The first verse in [Table 2](#) was recited by a participant in the context of the lockdown. Verse 1 in [Table 2](#) contains a wise piece of advice given by the reciter to his friends and family that they should avoid physical contact, wear masks, and protect themselves against the pandemic. Wisdom in folk poetry can motivate many people to propagate such precautionary measures. When people express their wisdom through poetry, it can contribute to their psychological healing and therapy, and people feel more convinced to spread such awareness among the common people. Spreading awareness through folk poetry can be effective. The recitation of such a piece of verse can be related to social wellbeing, because it contains precautions to make everyone safe. Since the lockdown has plunged many people into a pit of depression and anxiety, we were informed by the participants that hearing of awareness campaigns rendered to the poor reassured them of the existence of good human values, such as care and concern.

One participant said that meeting with friends and sharing interesting verses stopped him from feeling isolated. This shows how reciting poetry helps in maintaining social networking which, according to [Thang \(2015\)](#), plays a vital role in the social wellbeing of the elderly.

Helping others and making some form of contribution to others creates some sense of satisfaction, and this satisfaction is related to healthy, psychological ageing. A participant who was well-versed in Sindhi folk literature demonstrated eudemonic wellbeing while advising his friends and children of doing good without any delay during the lockdown.

Example 2 in [Table 2](#) relates to security, which is an important component of healthy, social wellbeing. The piece of verse was recited by a participant as a thankful act in response to charity he received from anonymous persons. The example/verse was read during their focus group discussion. It shows how some people's passion for social service, care, and concern has created a sense of security among the poor. Moreover, the participants believed that their Creator would send some help for them through good citizens. Such beliefs demonstrated their spiritual wellbeing, because they were not disappointed in difficult times. This sense of being secure and cared for is a crucial component of psychological, spiritual, and social health.

Example 3 in [Table 2](#) demonstrates how the participant advises through this example that avoidance of arrogance and selfishness should be the purpose of life, and there should be no excuse and delay in such avoidance. Teaching someone to be humble and do good encourages social participation which is, in the words of [Mehta and Ee \(2008\)](#), important for older adults' psychological wellbeing. Later, the participant revealed how he and his children obtained rations for some pandemic-affected individuals.

Moreover, hedonic wellbeing (happiness) is an integral part of healthy/active psychological ageing. Another participant who knew much about folk Sindhi literature recited this verse (4) to show how happy and intellectually satisfied he and his close friends were. He meant to imply that during the period of lockdown they spent much of their time meditating, and thereby they managed to control their malice; according to [Lavretsky \(2010\)](#), meditation is good for spiritual health and wellbeing. Such spiritual practices, the participants claimed, helped them seek nearness with their Creator. It was their belief, as he mentioned in his conversation, that being near to one's Creator was one of the most enjoyable feelings one can only have when one has gone through some specific hurdles and paths. Thus, their happiness and satisfaction was demonstrated through poetry and fulfilled through spiritual practices, contributing to their healthy, spiritual ageing.

All the above analyses and discussions show how reciting/listening to poetry can become a tool of psychological, spiritual, and social health and wellbeing by enabling the

participants to talk about their favourite topics and ideas. Now, we move on to analysing how sharing folk tales can contribute to the healthy/active ageing of the participants.

### 3.2. Healthy/Active Ageing through Sindhi Folktales

Much like poetry, prose such as Sindhi folk tales can play an important role in healthy psychological, spiritual, and social ageing. Therefore, in this section, we discuss how telling tales from folk literature became a source of healing for the participants during the lockdown, and how it contributed to their psychological, spiritual, and social wellbeing. The folk tales that were shared by the participants are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** The participants' folk tales.

Participant No.	Summary of Tales	Positive Effects
Participant 3	Sassi-Punhun: It is a love story from Sindhi folk literature. It is also known as a tragic romance that appears in Shah Jo Risalo (a book of Sindhi poetry by Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai). In the story, a faithful wife forbears many hardships while looking for her husband who was separated from her by her brothers-in-law.	Eudemonic wellbeing; courage against the pandemic and lockdown hardships; sense of security due to courage.
Participant 7	Momal Rano: It is also a Sindhi folk story that relates to love, beauty, and magic. Rano, unlike many other suitors of Momal, manages to find the whereabouts of Momal and marries her.	Purpose of life: Tackle the pandemic situation with patience, bravery, and wisdom; positive mindset.
Participant 11	Umar Marvi: This is a Sindhi folk tale about a village girl named Marvi who prefers a simple life to becoming a queen and living a dignified life.	Evaluative wellbeing (life satisfaction): Being thankful with a little ration during the pandemic.
Participant 12	Moriro Meharbar: It is a Sindhi folk story about a man who braves the fear of oceans and crocodiles and saves his brothers.	Eudemonic wellbeing: Courageously serve vulnerable communities during the pandemic, and create a sense of security among the weak.

These folk stories were told by the participants in conversations with younger Sindhis who were either their relatives, family members, or friends. Sometimes, these stories were shared with other elderly Sindhis who were not well-versed in Sindhi folk literature. Sharing such folk stories not only leads to catharsis, but also brings about spiritual healing (see [Lukoff and Lukoff 2011](#)). Such an important activity also adds to the participants' psychological and social wellbeing. According to some participants, the activity of sharing folktales preserves the cultural heritage and literature of their nation. Preserving social capital, such as culture and literature, results in the manifestation of evaluative wellbeing (life satisfaction) that participants achieve from the activity of telling folktales.

Participant 3, as revealed in an interview, shared the folktale of Sassi-Punhun in his family gathering. As he clarified later, the purpose of telling such a story was to teach his family members to be persistent and resilient in the face of lockdown and isolation. Living and teaching such qualities can be related to eudemonic wellbeing, which is, according to [Steptoe et al. \(2015\)](#), a significant component of psychological health. He also demonstrated how the lockdown provided him an opportunity to connect with his children by sharing folk wisdom, which otherwise would have been impossible. The participants also stressed in the interview that such stories should be mainstreamed by including them in the school curriculum so that children can learn about their culture, traditions, and literature. In this way, according to him, children can learn how courage lies in overcoming one's fears, and how the quality of fighting fears is a prerequisite of social service and social participation during the pandemic.

The same ideas of fighting and facing challenges echo in a participant's (12) folktale of Moriro Meharbar. However, it focuses on helping the vulnerable communities, since they

have been doubly marginalised during the pandemic. It also shows the spirit of taking on the responsibility of the poor, and defending those who cannot defend themselves. People like to live longer if they feel they are useful to others, especially the younger generation. The telling of stories to their children in order to teach resilience is an important step taken towards social care and concern. Like Moriro Meharbar, who braved the depth and fear of the ocean and tricked the crocodile while saving his vulnerable brothers, doctors and rich communities can also protect the elderly against the pandemic. This can create two components of healthy social wellbeing: a sense of social contribution, and a sense of security.

The story of Momal Rano, told by participant 7 during a conversation with his friends, manifests psychological wellbeing and spiritual healing. It creates psychological, evaluative wellbeing because it informs the listener that every difficulty, including the pandemic, can be surmounted. Moreover, such folktales that focus on hope and belief can be, in the words of [Lukoff and Lukoff \(2011\)](#), sources of spiritual wisdom and healing. Such beliefs can pave the way for healthy psychological and spiritual ageing of the participants. Overall, the story teaches a lesson of tackling the pandemic situation with patience, bravery, and wisdom. Participant 7, in an answer to a question, said, “although the pandemic might be tricking and outwitting human beings with its variants, but with patience and wisdom every difficulty can be surmounted. This is what I have learnt from my experience and my knowledge of folk literature”. Thus, folk literature, especially folktales, is increasingly becoming a source of spiritual wisdom, social interaction, and lessons for the family, and such social interactions can help in healthy psychological ageing.

Conversations become a source of relief when interesting, wisdom-carrying folktales are embedded within them. Similarly, in a focus group, an elderly Sindhi started telling the folktale of Umar Marvi. As the plot progressed, the interest and focus of the narrator and listeners multiplied, and it appeared that the participants listened with full attention. As the story ended, one could easily witness a sense of satisfaction on their faces. The story not only intellectually satisfied (psychological wellbeing) but also socially connected the participants (social wellbeing). Such feelings of being satisfied and connected are beneficial for the health of the elderly, given the effects of the pandemic and the resulting isolation on their minds and bodies. Moreover, the story also carried the moral lesson of “being thankful with having a little ration” during the pandemic, according to a participant in the focus group.

We now move on to discussing the relation of Sindhi proverbs with healthy/active ageing.

### *3.3. Healthy/Active Ageing through Sindhi Proverbs*

Similar to folktales, Sindhi proverbs used in conversations can enhance the cognitive processes of elderly Sindhis during the lockdown period. The value of proverbs lies in their wisdom, which is verbally transmitted from one person to another, or one generation to another generation. If used tactfully, proverbs can be an intellectual therapy, and a source of social networking that is a key factor to psychological health and social wellbeing. Such positive use of proverbs was witnessed in the conversations of the participants. The proverbs that they used are given in [Table 4](#).

Autonomy is an important part of social and psychological ageing. It is the quality of being self-sufficient. If the elderly are self-sufficient, and they do not rely on others for income, they are autonomous. Such autonomy is also demonstrated by their ability to exercise their free will without overly worrying. In [Table 4](#), proverbs 1, 4, and 6 demonstrate the participants’ autonomy. The proverbs were reproduced by the elderly in their daily life interaction with their family and friends. Proverb 1 was used in the context of the lockdown, and therefore saving and avoiding overspending were emphasised by one participant to successfully deal with the effects of the lockdown. Proverb 4, used by another participant, rejects the idea of depending on others. Yet another participant used proverb 6 to show that he is “thankful” with having “a little ration”. Discovering the purpose and meaning



of life, such as being independent through the use of such proverbs, is psychologically satisfying. This positive mindset is, according to [Wee et al. \(2017\)](#), an indicator of social wellbeing and healthy ageing.

**Table 4.** Proverbs used by the participants in their conversation.

	Sindhi Proverbs	Translation	Components of Healthy/Active Ageing
1.	Uho ki kajy, jo menh wasanday kam achay.	Save something for a rainy day.	Purpose: Plan well and avoid overspending during the lockdown. (financial security; autonomy).
2.	Ihro soan ee ghoryo, jeko kan chinay.	There is no use of such gold as it hurts the ears.	Purpose: For minor gains, one should avoid taking the risk of contracting the virus; comfort.
3.	Iha ziban oss mn wihary, iha ziban shawnwa mn wihary.	One's way of speaking determines if he/she is to get respect or not.	Social integration.
4.	Bhali bukh bharam ji, shan na wanye shal.	It is good to face hardships rather than being dependent on someone.	Autonomy.
5.	Bakri khy saas ji kasai khy maas ji.	One is concerned about one's gains rather than others' hardships.	Enhances cognitive process; conversational relief.
6.	Thora kana thalhee mn ghana.	Having a little good is better than having so much that is bad.	Autonomy; thankfulness; enhanced cognition.
7.	Jeda utha teda loda.	More rich/responsible persons have more worries.	Being thankful with what one has; satisfaction; enjoyment.
8.	Jhona thya jahaz, satt na jhalen sarah ji.	Older persons cannot even forbear a little hardship.	Call for physical comfort, security, and care.

Proverbs can also enhance the elderly's psychological processes of thinking and problem facing and solving. Enhanced cognitive processes are essential to making ageing a successful process. Similarly, the participants used proverbs as they played mental exercises. Proverbs 5 and 6 were used by two participants during a focus group interview in which they invited other group members to interpret the proverbs. The other participants focused, thought over and over again, and presented their views. Both the proverbs were interpreted by the participants with respect to the lockdown, and ideas related to thankfulness were discussed. For instance, a participant said, "during the lockdown, it has become difficult but we need to learn how to live with the little that we have got". The attitude presented and the cognitive processes used to arrive at such a viewpoint are indicators of healthy, psychological ageing.

Proverb 8 suggests that healthy, social ageing is encouraged when one feels loved and cared for because these feelings create a sense of belonging and the sense of being connected within a person.

#### 4. A Critical Summation

As mentioned earlier, according to [Stephens et al. \(2014\)](#), healthy/active ageing is indicated by six factors which include physical comfort, social integration, contribution, security, autonomy, and enjoyment. This research has shown that the participants' use of poetry, folktales, and proverbs is deeply intertwined with the six factors of healthy/active ageing. Moreover, it is clear that folk literature can become a source of psychological health, spiritual healing, and social wellbeing. The tales and the responses shared by the participants in the context of the pandemic and the lockdown are interwoven with enhanced psychological processes and social participation.

As folk literature is the cultural heritage of a nation, it was clear that the participants preferred to preserve and transmit it to successive generations, because doing so could create feelings of national pride, satisfaction, and social service among the participants. Such feelings of satisfaction arising from being useful, being loved, and being cared for are essential for healthy/active ageing in the sense of emotional wellbeing. The participants in this research believed that using folk literature in their conversations gave them intellectual enjoyment, and spiritual wellbeing.

The elderly have a treasure house of resources in the form of poetry, proverbs, and folktales acquired over time, and such wisdom helps them feel useful in disseminating such input to the young. It also keeps them cognitively active, socially connected, and spiritually satisfied.

To sum up, this study shows that the participants resorted to folk literature that positively contributed to their psychological, spiritual, and social wellbeing. Using such folklore demonstrated the participants' evaluative, hedonic, and eudemonic wellbeing. Furthermore, folk literature led to their spiritual healing.

The social wellbeing of the participants was also demonstrated in the ways the participants used folk literature to talk about autonomy, social service, security, and thankfulness. It is suggested that folk literature that emphasises social integration should be mainstreamed, and elderly-friendly policies need to be devised.

This research also makes a theoretical contribution to existing literature on how folk literature can be used as therapy to ensure healthy ageing. Unlike other researchers' findings (Joseph 2019; Hufford 1998), our findings relate to the role of Sindhi folk literature in enhancing the psychological, social, and spiritual wellbeing of senior citizens in Pakistan's Sindh province. We suggest that the public health sector in Sindh should hire the services of such senior citizens and encourage such conversations in informal settings (guest houses, open air theatres) and formal settings (clinics, educational institutions) so that the spiritual, psychological, and social health of everyone can be improved.

We should mention that though this research was limited to a small sample of elderly Sindhis in Sindh, a much larger sample could perhaps provide a similar outcome. It is hoped that this research will guide researchers to expand research in a wide range of contexts where folk literature plays a health-friendly role for older members of a community.

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