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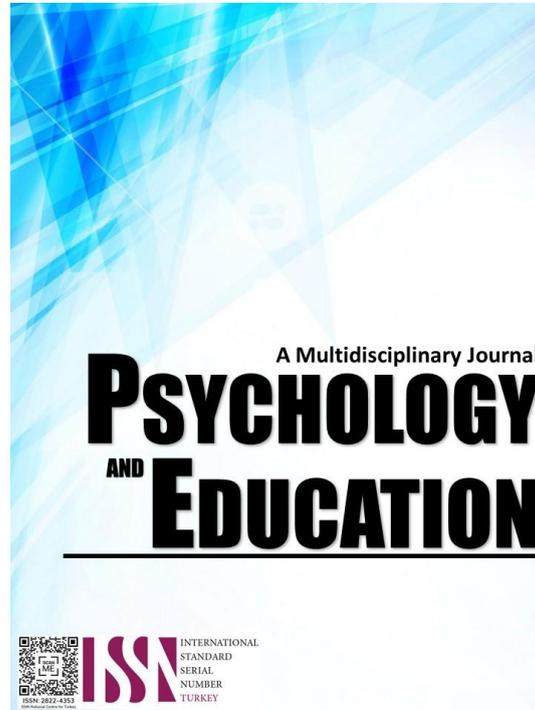
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SENIOR CITIZENS IN HOME FOR THE AGED**



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The Ones We Once Loved: A Qualitative Study on the Experiences of Abandoned Senior Citizens in Home for the Aged

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Abstract

Filipino's love for the elderly is undeniable. However, despite the respect they have for the elderly, an increasing amount of elderly abandonment is rising in the Philippines. The drastic increase in statistics of abandonment will still grow over the years because aging is inevitable. The primary goal of this study is to dig deeper into the experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of abandoned senior citizens inside of a home for the aged to spread awareness about this certain topic. By the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, the study come up with the following findings: (1) The abandoned senior citizens chose to be inside the facility because they don't want to be a burden in their original homes. (2) Faith and religious works affect their psychological well-being. (3) Physical appearance does not affect their self-esteem. (4) Social support boosts their psychological well-being as well. (5) One of the biggest reasons why abandoned senior citizens left their homes is being neglected to cause them to leave and stay in home for the aged (6) Lastly, people inside the facilities accepted the fact that death is drawing closer to them but they don't want to die yet.

Keywords: *challenges, lived experiences, senior citizens, abandoned, home for the aged*

Introduction

The Philippines is one of the richest in culture when it comes to showing and giving respect, and taking care of elderly people when they are old. Filial piety, or the value placed on taking care of aging family members, is a highly important aspect of Filipino culture, as it is in many other Asian cultures (Bandana & Anandel, 2018). The elderly people act as a link between the legacies of one generation and the next because they are respected and loved. Elderly people are highly respected for the life experiences they have gained over their lifetime, and are often seen as role models by younger generations within their family and society. The valuable knowledge and wisdom they have gained through their experiences is greatly appreciated.

Furthermore, people change at the same rate that the society does, showing symptoms of physical and psychological development known as the aging process as society continues to change into a more diverse place to live. Every person must deal with the natural phenomenon of aging at a certain point during the endless years of their lives. Others, however, view it as a process that generates fear because they are afraid of going through developmental changes. (Valdez, Angeles, Pareja-Corpuz, & Hernandez, 2013). Here in the Philippines, the population of the elderly is increasing. Statistics show that it reaches almost 9 million of elderly people as of the year 2020. As a result, the issue of old persons being abandoned

is growing and is likely to get worse in the near future. Elder abandonment refers to elderly parents who are neglected and disregarded by their children and family and receive no support from them (Thapa, 2017). Unfortunately, the country's culture and practices surrounding caring for elderly persons are gradually disappearing.

According to Roy (2021) the majority of senior citizens have little or no access to mental health care. Aging has a significant influence on mental health issues that people face. Sadness is a very real problem for older people who lack the resources to deal with it. Low self-esteem and dislike for their bodies are also common issues. Alienation as a result of an isolated lifestyle, as well as generation gaps, have a negative impact on their mental health. Fear of missing out and grief over the loss of older friends due to illnesses or other causes make them vulnerable to other mental health issues. The Philippines, like many other countries, will see an increase in the number of Filipinos who are 65 years old and older (Bandana & Anandel, 2018).

In one of the documentaries of Investigative Documentaries (2020) called "Kalagayan ng mga senior citizen sa loob ng home care", it was mentioned that all the needs of the elderlies such as food, clothing, medicine etc. are provided. But even though they are in a good place, they always long for someone to come and visit them; talk to them. There are literatures that focus on the value of the Filipinos for elderlies but are not focusing on the self-efficacy and



motivation of the senior citizens. It is said in Senate Bill No. 950 or the “Homes for Abandoned Seniors Act of 2022, nursing homes should be operated and maintained well by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) with the help of local government units (LGU). Given all this data, DSWD should have better understanding about the present circumstances of Home for the aged in the Philippines to have better resources to help them.

Panfilo Lacson, a former senator, proposes to penalize parents who mistreat or abandon their elderly parents is not a good concept, according to a senior citizen's rights advocate. The former senator claimed that caring for the elderly at places like GRACES was a joint responsibility between the state and the elderly people's offspring. By passing a law on filial responsibility, he is now attempting to get the offspring of the elderly to accept this burden. In the Philippines, Article XV, Sec. 4 of the 1987 Constitution states that, “The family has the duty to care for its elderly members but the State may also do so through just programs of social security.” Article 195 of the Family Code also mandates support for parents, including sustenance, dwelling, clothing and medical attendance. In Senate Bill (SB) No. 29, Lacson wants to increase filial piety by making abandoning of a child a criminal offense. elderly, ill, or disabled parent is a crime (Fabonan III, 2019).

This serious topic is continuously increasing and is inevitable because no one can stop aging. And it is evident in the statistics cited in the previous paragraphs, we can say that this issue is relevant and significant in the present day. Because of the limited resources about the respondents, the goal of the study is to have a deeper understanding about the lived experiences of Abandoned Senior Citizens.

Moreover, this study explores the lived experiences and the effect of abandonment on senior citizen's psychological well-being. Self-efficacy, self-esteem, motivation, psychological well-being, physical capabilities, health problems, and sadness will be the focus of study. This also aims to spread awareness about this certain topic and contribute to the area of Education, Developmental Psychology. And for the limited literature, this research will help the future researchers who will further study on this. This study will also benefit the home for the aged here in the Philippines and also the families of the respondents.

Research Questions

This study aims to have a deeper understanding of the experiences of abandoned senior citizens in home for the aged. Specifically, this sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of abandoned senior citizens?
2. What are the challenges faced by the abandoned senior citizens?
3. What are the coping mechanisms of the abandoned senior citizens?

Methodology

This study employed Heideggerian phenomenology to explore the participant's lived experiences.

Participants of the Study

The participants of this study were the senior citizens in the home for the aged. This study explores the lived experiences of the senior citizens in home for the aged. With this, the researchers selected fifteen (15) participants in the age of 60 and above. Additionally, this study attempts to gain a greater understanding of the real-life experiences of the elderly residents of nursing homes.

Instrument of the Study

The study used an interview guide to gather the data in a methodical and coherent manner. The interview guide's question focused more on the lived experiences of the abandoned senior citizens in Home for the Aged and it is subjected to content validation for its validity. The interview questions were initially some of the abandoned senior citizens made an attempt to respond, and through the data collection process, the responses were verified in compliance with the research topic and parameters. Before the data gathering process, the participants were asked for consent research.

Data Collection Process

To gather reliable data, a systematic and structured, step by step methodology was used in the study. The researchers looked for fifteen (15) respondents who met the requirements for the study. The participants were asked for consent before the interview process as

well as recording the conversation. The researchers went into a home for the aged (Bahay Kalinga) to conduct the interview. To protect the participant's identity and confidentiality, only sound recordings were used to record the conversation and used a different device for taking photos.

During the interview, a series of questions were being asked in compliance with the interview protocol to furthermore know the participants' perspectives and are mostly related to issues and problems they encounter, their real-life experience and coping mechanisms. The participants are given the freedom to express their ideas in accordance with their own beliefs, attitude and level of self-awareness. The recorded audios were examined deeper after the interview process to make sure that the data was matching the theme and was converted into text. The researchers were able to acquire information regarding the experiences, difficulties, and coping techniques of elderly people who were abandoned in homes for the elderly.

Ethical Considerations

The approval of the data collection method and tool by the research professor ensures that consent has been obtained and that ethical guidelines have been properly adhered to. Participants who were chosen and approved to take part based on the informed permission were asked in order to give full permission under the professor's guidance.

The procedure for data collection was followed as the consent form was presented. The study's objectives were explained to the participants in reference to their voluntarily participating in it, and they were made aware that they might leave at any time. Participants received assurances that all data collected during the study's development would be utilized solely for academic and research purposes, under code names, and without regard to the participants' identities. Confidentiality was also covered. As mandated by Republic Act 10173, participants' voluntarily provided personal information will be kept private and will not be utilized in a manner that violates the Data Privacy Act.

Data Analysis Procedure

There are numerous techniques to collect qualitative data. One of the best ways to prevent content errors is to record and transcribe interviews. Making sense of the data gathered from senior citizens in Home for the Aged is required before this. Each participant's exact

remarks will be included in the interview transcripts verbatim and will go through a careful examination.

In this study, the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), which was constructed on the modified Van Kaam technique made well-known by Moustakas, was applied. Horizontalization, trying to break down experiences into their invariant parts, thematic clustering to develop core themes, comparison of different data sources to validate the invariant parts, crafting of individual textural descriptions, construction of composite structural descriptions, and synthesis of texture and structure into an expression are the seven key steps.

Results and Discussion

Based on the data collected, the following themes were identified in the study; namely (1) My Not So Perfect Life, (2) Life Stages, and (3) Fighting in the Final Moments.

My Not So Perfect Life

Getting old is sometimes a fear of many people, especially when a person who is getting old has fear of being left alone. But whatever situation may happen, elderly people who neglect should continue to live a life with their new environment and could find enough support in the Home for the aged.

Breathing in a Routined Life

When their day feels nothing special, they continually do their daily routine tasks in the facility. For this will make them feel that even when they are old, they could still do some household chores. As participant 3 said,

“Di naman kasi araw araw meron kaming bisita. Kapag wala, 9 o'clock magrosary na kami. After non, maglulunch na kami. After ng lunch manonood kaming TV hanggang alas tres. Kagaya ko, kaya kong magwalis, nagwawalis ako sa umaga. Yung mga kayang maglinis ng baso, mga pinagkainan, naglilinis. Yung mga may kaya lang, hindi sapilitan. Kanya kanya ng linis ng mga area namin, nakakahiya kasi kapag makalat”. (It's not like we have visitors every day. When there are no visitors, we will pray the rosary at 9 o'clock. After that, we will have lunch. After lunch we will watch TV until three o'clock. Like me, I can sweep, I sweep in the morning. Those who can clean the dishes, will clean. Only those who can

afford to do it, not forced. We clean our own areas, because it's embarrassing when it's messy.) (P3)

According to Chifu et al. (2022), maintaining a daily pattern fosters a sense of security and comfort, which helps older persons feel less anxious and stressed. It can also improve the chances that new information will be stored in long-term memory, which is crucial in scenarios of cognitive loss. As individuals demonstrate their independence by doing daily duties from their daily routine, their confidence and sense of self-worth may grow. Additionally, when elderly people engage in activities with their peers in a group, they can expand their social networks and, physically, they can contribute to a small group of peers. Because they engage in such meaningful tasks, they believe that their lives now have meaning and that their presence is significant for the people in that community (Salmanezhad, 2022).

A Life Dictated by Others

When working, elderly people seek to highlight their value to society. It is a method of motivating the entire community to participate in improving their health. As a protection against isolation, social engagement is thought to provide positive health benefits as people age. In addition, even though they have sufficient experience, their ability to perform the work is constrained by their physical state (Minami et al. 2015). This is why elderly people are dictated by their family members and making them stop doing their career because of age. Furthermore, many elderly people become frustrated when they discover they can no longer move as easily as they once could or feel as though they are losing some of their freedom (Companions for Seniors, 2019).

As participant 2 specifically said;

“Ako? BS Bio, sa FEU ako graduate.”

“Dati kasi nag aano ako sa ospital, tumutulong ako. Para akong assistant nurse, tapos nagtrabaho naman, noong pinatigil na ako ng mga anak ko nagkatekista ako, I'm a catechist.” (I helped before in the hospital. I'm like an assistant nurse. After that, I worked as a catechist when my children told me to stop working. I'm a catechist.) (P2)

Longing for someone

The participants expressed their gratitude for people who remembered and visited them in the facility. Participant No. 1 stated specifically;

“Kung minsan may mga bibisita. Magdadala ng mga pagkain. Kahit papaano nafifeel ko na hindi ako mag-isa. Kung baga eh may nakakausap, may nangangamusta. Kung minsan eh may mga program program silang ginagawa diyan. Eh nagpandemic pa hindi ba? Ang tagal naming walang ibang taong nakikita”. (Sometimes there are visitors. They will bring food. Somehow I feel like I'm not alone. I feel like I have someone to talk to, asking me how I am. Sometimes they do programs here. And then we had a pandemic, right? We haven't seen anyone else for a long time.) (P1)

Many elderly persons are socially disconnected and feel loneliness as a result of adjustments in their life situations according to Czaja (2021). Also, Patil (2014) stated that a moderator of stressful circumstances in life is social support. Social isolation leads to issues with both physical and mental health. Older adults' subjective well being, especially their perception of satisfaction, is significantly influenced by the social interactions that are essential to an interactive manner.

Life Stages

Life is like a story that has its own chapters and stages. As people age, they experience different stages in their lives. It may be a problem or memory they never want to forget. As what the participants of this study experienced, there are phases in their lives that they have come up with a very big decision in life that can either have good or bad results.

I Feel Appreciated

People tend to become more conscious of their physical appearance as they age, particularly if they start to notice gradual changes in their bodies, such as their hair turning white instead of black, the appearance of wrinkles on their face, and other things. Body image is defined by Ledoux et al. (1999), as cited in Farias (2018), as "the systematic, cognitive, affective, conscious, and unconscious representation that people have concerning their bodies throughout the course of their biological development and throughout their social relationships." The majority of the participants said they were okay with the changes to their bodies when the interviewer asked them if they still liked their physical appearance despite getting older, as participant 1 put it:

“Ay oo! Diba nga sinabi ko sayo? Kung anong meron ako eh wala akong pinagsisihan. Kung minsan

napapatingin ako sa kulubot eh okay lang naman. Masaya naman ako. Kahit nung bata ako ganon naman din ako eh. Di ako nagkokolorete, lipstick lang okay na. Kaya okay na din.” (Oh yes! Didn't I tell you? What I have, I have no regrets. Sometimes I look at my wrinkles, it's okay. I am happy. Even when I was a child, I was like that too. I don't wear makeup, just lipstick is fine. So it's okay.) (P1)

This demonstrates that senior citizens are still content with the changes in their bodies. Furthermore, despite their age, the people around them see no difference. Furthermore, according to Ivanoff et al. (2018), well-being and physical and mental health are closely related, and this relationship may become more important as we age because it may contribute to healthy aging. The state of well-being is a multifaceted phenomenon that refers to an individual's subjective feelings, and researching older adults' perspectives on aging well is becoming an important area of research. Positive feelings such as joy, independence, having a life purpose, self-possessed contentment, and financial security, in addition to being socially engaged and enjoying good physical and mental health, were perceived by participants to influence aging well.

I am Sensitive they say

Children who only want to look after their elderly parents tend to underestimate their parents' physical abilities. They sometimes say hurtful things to their parents even when they don't mean it. As people get older, they lose their ability to care for themselves, stand up to bullying, and fight back if they are attacked. Ailments, whether mental or physical, can make them more difficult companions for those who live with them (Robinson. et al, 2022). As participant 2 stated during the interview:

“I decided to leave them kasi ayoko nung kasi minsan magluluto ka naupo ka lang saglit ba't ko raw iniwan yung piniprito ko, yung ganon ba. Wala na nga silang katulong, ako na nga yung umaano eh lahat naman nung.. yung kasi as you grow old yung parang masyado kang sensitive diba?” (I decided to leave them because there are times when I'm cooking and I just sit down for a minute and they're saying why did I leave the dish I'm frying, something like that. They don't have maids and I helped with the chores. You know as we grow old we become sensitive, right?) (P2)

“Sabi nila sensitive ako, nurse yung mga anak ko eh, oh 'di sabi ko it eh depends, diba?” (They said I'm

sensitive, my children are nurses, so I told them it depends, right?) (P2)

It demonstrates that senior citizens become more sensitive as they age, and even though they can still do things physically, they want their children to take care of them rather than treat them as invalids. Elder neglect, as defined by Robinson et al. (2022), is the failure to fulfill a caretaking obligation. It can be deliberate or unintentional, depending on factors such as ignorance or denial that an elderly charge requires as much care as they do.

A Very Crucial Decision

Some children neglect their parents because they are so preoccupied with their own careers and lives that their parents feel alone. While some elderly people depart because they don't want to burden their families. During the interview, Participant 2 stated that:

“So I chose to be here. I have chosen this place..”

“So I have to leave them kasi ayoko nung kasi ako yung nanay eh parang feeling ko ba na naano nila ako, so I have to leave. Kaya dito magkakapareho naman kami so I decided to stay here.” (So I have to leave them because I am their mother yet they make me feel little, look down on me and I don't want that so I have to leave. Here in the facility, we're all the same so I decided to stay here.) (P2)

It shows that staying in the home of one of her children is too difficult for her, and she is having difficulty accepting what is happening in that home, which is why she made the decision to leave her family. According to a study conducted by Chaulagain et al. (2021), health-related, social and family/friend related, housing and property related push factors, and facility related pull factors positively influenced seniors' relocation intention, while family related, economic, socio-psychological, and knowledge and information barriers negatively influenced seniors' relocation intention.

Fighting in the Final moments

Being alone is difficult but imagine being alone in a situation that you don't want to be in. You are left to fight a battle that you don't want to fight. It's like being in a war. Except for in a war, you chose to be in a battle. Similar situation is happening in these abandoned senior citizens except for the fact they have no choice.

But then again, like one of the participants said in the interview, “Saglit lang ang buhay.” So, these people have developed coping mechanisms to fight this battle that they are facing. Three things appeared in the data which is faith (faith driven life/fulfillment of a promise), happiness and self-acceptance.

Sanctuary

In accordance with the data gathered, people inside the home for the aged found peace and happiness inside the facility. The reason behind this is because of past experiences. Most of the participants did not surrender to the home for the aged, hence, they chose to be in that place because their siblings don't treat them the way they did before.

“Ako?. Well, masaya, I'm happy staying here, helping them ... I have no problem staying here..” (Me? Well, I'm happy, I'm happy staying here, helping them. I can help them in the morning, I have no problem staying here.)

This response from participant (2), shows contentment. Finding happiness in the place you are in is a good thing. Most of them are verbally abused so the social support that their peers provide helps them cope up.

Segal (2018) said in his journal that people living in an elderly home seek for social support and religious activities help them cope up. Hence, the respondent of this research found peace and happiness because of the social support and the environment provided by the facility.

Faith-driven life

Participants who responded in the interview mentioned tradition and religious activities as one of their dwelling places in times of troubles. The idea that there is a higher being makes them feel secure even if they are in a painful situation.

“Eh ako kuntento na ako. Kasi ako nakabase ang kasiyahan ko sa Panginoon eh. Kaya kuntento na ako kung anong meron ako.” (Well, I'm satisfied. Because I base my happiness on the Lord. So I'm satisfied with what I have.)

Just like in this line mentioned by participant 1, their happiness does not depend on their circumstances but on the will of God. Every 9am in the morning, they conduct daily rosary prayer.

A researcher (Mubaganzi, year not mentioned) in

Uganda mentioned how impactful religious traditions are in the well-being of abandoned senior citizens or in a senior citizen in general. This study proves that one of their coping mechanisms is faith-driven, that they seek purpose by following their God.

The end draws near

Aging and death is inevitable. And if the most suitable people to say this are these people living in their 60s, the last chapter of their life. Their body says it all, the time draws near. Their bodies are becoming weaker and weaker. Health problems are haunting them. They have accepted the fact that soon they will be gone in this world.

“Malapit na akong kunin ni Lord. Eh kung minsan naaalala ako ng mga anak ko. Eh expected naman nating lahat diba? Mamamatay tayo. Pero ang hiling ko eh wag naman muna ngayon.” (The Lord is about to take me. Sometimes my children remember me. Well, we all expected it, right? We will die. But my request is not now. But of course if the Lord wills it, I will never refuse. Who am I, right? Even if I don't want it if He wants it. But I'm ready.)

People accepted the fact that they are going to die soon. A study of Tjernberg (2020) has a similar finding. People are not afraid of the thought of death but have some worries about dying. They accepted the idea that soon enough they might face death but they don't want to die just yet.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were derived: (1) Most of the senior citizens who are abandoned chose to be in a home for the aged for being neglected in their homes. Data also shows that they want to live with their children and they are longing for them. But the fact that they are becoming a burden makes them feel uneasy causing them to leave. (2) Faith and religious works significantly affect abandoned senior citizens' psychological well-being. Also, it is one of the main factors that they use to cope up with the fact of being abandoned. (3) Physical appearance has no importance with the self-esteem of abandoned senior citizens. (4) Social support is related with the psychological well-being of the abandoned senior citizens. (5) Being neglected at their original homes is one of the biggest factors why senior citizens left their families and stayed in a home for the aged. (6) Abandoned senior

citizens know the fact that death is closer for them due to their age. However, they similarly answered that they don't want to die yet.

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