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SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTIONS ON AGING AND CHANGING ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN ELDER CARE

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Abstract: Elderly people are known for experiences, values and they are the models for society. In India, generally people above 60 are considered to be elderly. Though the elderly are impressed by the developments in society, they are equally depressed by the effects of industrialization, migration, urbanization and westernization in the value system.

The purpose of research is to explore the roles of family and significance of their participation in elderly care. The aims are to increase awareness of social work students, nurses and families regarding involvement of family members in elderly care and to find out experience of elderly residents when family members visit them. The study found that the main problem faced by the elders from lower class was economic difficulties. Data analysis was done with the use of statistical methods and thematic analysis method. This study has been conducted using mix method. A questionnaire, observation, in-depth interview methods were used for data collection. Mainly questions were about family visit and its importance, loneliness and involvement of family members in their care. The empirical data for the study were collected in the two elderly homes in Galle District. The sample was 68 residents.

This research will help social work students and family members to understand value of regular family visit in elderly home, family roles and support needed to maintain the quality of life of elderly residents. In addition, social; workers will involve family members in elderly care as well as family will be encouraged and motivated to participate actively.

Key words: Family, elderly, loneliness, family visit, family participation, family support

INTRODUCTION

The family is culturally the best place for the elderly at their post retirement life in Sri Lanka. They prefer their living arrangement with children and grandchildren which is significant for happiness. But globalization and urbanization have brought changes in this cultural system with an effect of socio-economy and political condition. The family is the institution, which keeps the members strongly bound with love, affection and respect based on traditional social values. It is the unit that keeps people together. The family plays an important role in the development of its members. The best of Asian and Western cultures teach and practice respect for elders, compassion for the sick and needy, care for elderly parents and consideration for the young. Generally, families are categorized as extended, where two or more generations live under one roof or as nuclear where the family is limited to the husband and wife and their children.

Social factors such as the breaking down of the extended family system, erosion of the traditional values due to modernization and the disintegration of not only the extended family but also the nuclear family as an institution have precipitated many adverse social consequences. Due to industrialization, urbanization and globalization, there is exposure to changing life style of the developing countries. The changing life style has resulted in the disintegration of the institution of family. This situation warrants strategies to stabilize the family and assist the protection of the elders. Living arrangements will need suitable changes when the children would find it difficult to care for the elderly as done earlier.

Elder care is the fulfillment of the special needs and requirements that are unique to senior citizens. Traditionally, eldercare has been the responsibility of family members and was provided within the extended family home. In a social environment where family networks continue to be the major source of psychosocial support and deep rooted cultural norms and perception regarding the family, although apparently declining in the near past, the role of family as the crucial source of support for the elderly people assumes a greater significance. Thus, effective family support is a key component of the overall well-being of the elderly people

As a society, we have always depended on families to provide emotional support, and to assist their older parents. Without family visit or attention, the elderly may fall into a depression, or feel all alone. Studies show that family support can improve life expectancy by several years and create a more positive and optimistic environment for the aged. For all the above mentioned reasons, many people view family care as extremely important and wish to preserve it as a social resource.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Aging is a process of growing old. It is a normal phenomenon which includes growth and maturity of the body. There are many physical and psychological changes in the process of aging or growing old. These changes are not harmful but bodily function is gradually being decline. (http://www.agingcarefl.org)

"Aging can be defined as a series of time related processes occurring in the adult individual that ultimately bring life to close. It is the most complex phenotype currently known and the only example o**f generalized biological dysfunction. Aging influences an organism's entire** physiology, impacts function at all levels, and increase susceptibility to all major chronic **diseases." (Vijg, Jan 2007, 23.)**

Sri Lanka is considered as one of the fastest aging countries in the world; growth of the elderly population is far faster-almost double- compared to other countries in the region. At **present, 2.5 million (12.4 Percent of Sri Lanka's total population are aged 60 and over i.e.,** one in every seven Sri Lankans are aged 60 and over. Further, this is expected to increase to one in every five and one in every three for

2030 and 2050, respectively. (From the IPS flagship publication Sri Lanka: State of the Economy 2017 Report)

In Sri Lanka, rapid decline in fertility and morality rates along with migration, has contributed to reshaping of the age-sex structure of the population (World Bank 2008:,Siddhisena 2005). Although Internal and international migration has no direct effect on the size or characteristics of the global population as a whole, it can have a significant impact on the age distribution of certain national and regional populations (United Nations 2009).

Similarly, demographic changes in the country have made a significant impact on the nature of family structure. It has been mentioned that family as a social institution has been changing partly due to the changing demographic patterns but also due to modernization (Harper 2003:Bhat and Dhruvaranjan 2001:Palloni 2001). The rapid Ageing and modernization processes have placed strain on traditional family support provided by the adult children in the family (Aziz and Yusoof 2012). In this regard, the World Bank (2008) states that,

- Lower fertility rates translate into fewer children available to provide familial support

- Higher level of education increase the generation gap parents and children and possibly may create transformations in perceptions and attitudes towards responsibilities in providing support to the elderly and the family in general

- Increased number of females in the labour force reduces the available number of care givers who are capable in providing older family members with the support they need: and

- International and internal migration is drawing younger persons out of the family

Aging was not a major issue in traditional Sri Lankan society since life expectancy at birth was not high and traditional families had a larger number of family members to take care of aged. Social change has been the result of a number of reasons such as modernization, industrialization, urbanization and globalization. Decreasing fertility and mortality has resulted in the longevity of a larger number of older persons in the context of liberal economic policies, migration and other social changes. Hence it is necessary to examine the various aspects of the problems of older persons and social change with a view to finding new strategies to improve the quality of life of older persons.

Multigenerational family involving more than two generations is available due to increased life expectancy of people (Sousa, 2009). Even though there is increase in family generations, families are fragmented into small units and divided in different family patterns due to marriage, divorce, step family relations. Similarly, it has even increased with family trend to live separately, family member seeking job and studying in different places. This creates fewer young family members available to provide care to the elderly people. Also, there is decline in physical and cognitive functioning in old age. It causes institutionalization of elderly in nursing or elderly home. (WHO 2011.)

Loneliness of the Elderly

Loneliness is defined as absence of some close relationship. Almost all the elderly people who are having loneliness is because of ill **health so, they can't perform any physical activity** as well as poor mental health. Loneliness is also due to poor socio economic condition and also loss of something or someone.

Because of this loneliness there appear lots of problem like psychological problem, psychosocial problem. In order to make all these problems reduced such elderly people who are alone they should be properly supported with a good care. Lack of social support and loneliness is the most common cause of degrading physical activity as well as mental wellbeing (Active Ageing: A Policy Framework). There seems to be a particularly strong relation between loneliness and depression; loneliness is seen as a predictor of depression (Hauge, Solveig ,2012).

The phenomenon of loneliness has also been linked with increased age. This may be due to age-related losses. Age related life events such as retirements, moving to sheltered housing, limited capability, low income, death of a partner or other relatives and health problems are the main causes of loneliness in old people. Living alone, lack of family ties, infrequent contact with family members contributes to sense of isolation and loneliness. It is usually associated with the poor physical and mental health. Similarly, change in family and decr**easing number of offspring's and increasing distance between the families members** due to migration can be another reasons. This is the fact that shrinking of social network, loss of family and friends or partner are causative factors.

OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

The objectives of the research are to explore the roles of family and significance of their participation in elderly care. There are more sub objectives in this research as follow.

- To increase awareness of social work students, nurses and families regarding involvement of family members in elderly care

- To find out experience of elderly residents when family members visit them.

METHODOLOGY

The main research objective in this study is to find out whether the caring of elders is a problem in the urban society in Sri Lanka and how that problem is deviated according to the social class and the gender. The empirical data for the study were collected in the two elderly homes in Galle District. The sample was 68 residents. The total number of these elders was taken as the sample for the study. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. Primary data were collected from elders, their main caregivers, household members, neighbors, relatives, medical officers and nurses. This study has been conducted using mix method. A questionnaire, observation, in-depth interview methods were used for data collection.

DISCUSSION

It was found that the elders as well as caregivers faced a number of socio-economic problems relating to caring. The following are the major problems identified in the study.

Economic difficulties: - In case of caring elders, the main problem faced by the lower class elders was economic difficulties. Particularly, this problem is faced when fulfilling their main

necessities. Most of the lower class elders were found to have suffered from poverty throughout their lifetime.

Social insecurity: - The middle class aged mostly face the problem of social insecurity. Since the family members are engaged in their own activities, providing social security to the elders has become a problem. Hence, middle class aged suffer loneliness and isolation. They do not associate with their neighbors and live inside their own houses. In contrary, lower class aged do not face social insecurity because of the habit of association with neighbors.

Health issues: - When a person reaches his/her latter age, there is a trend to suffer from various illnesses due to the biological situation (Kart and Barbara, 1976). 64% respondents, who were between 60-74 age categories, did not suffer from severe diseases. The nature of diseases varied according to gender as well

as the social class. Accordingly, this study found that those who suffer illnesses were mostly female. Most of the aged (70-80) have problems in weaknesses in eyes and suffer from pains in joints. Diabetes, blood pressure and heart attacks could be seen among the elders. However, low-blood pressure was common among elders. Mental disabilities were not reported in the study, but some aged suffer from mental disorders such as dementia, stress and depressions.

Loneliness is a complex and usually unpleasant emotional response to isolation. Loneliness typically includes anxious feelings about lack of connectedness or communality with other beings, both in the present and extending into the future. As such, loneliness can be felt even when surrounded by other people. In the present study, it was found that about 40 per **cent of the respondent's experiences loneliness in their lives.**

Fig. 1. Elderly Feelings about Loneliness
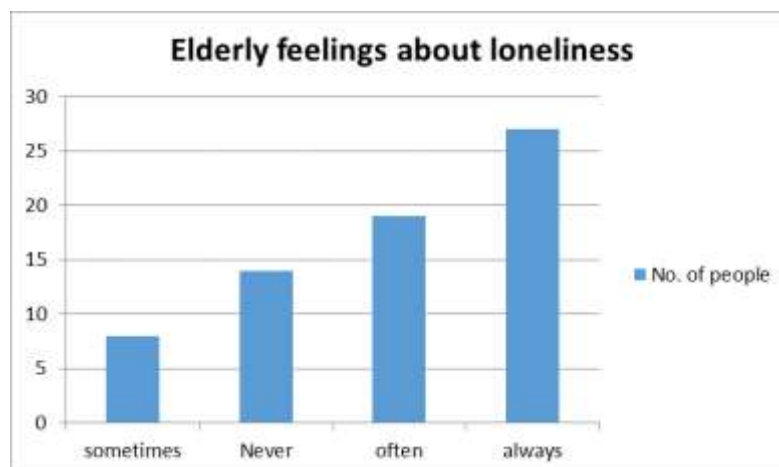
Survey Data: 2016

40% respondents answered that they feel loneliness sometimes while 27% respondents were **found to feel loneliness always. In contrast, 14% respondents answered that they didn't feel loneliness at all therefore they didn't answered** the following question about reason to feel loneliness. The important factor included by social support is participation of family members in elderly care. Communication is the key to a happy psychosocial adjustment. It is more than talking and listening, or reading and writing. Therefore family member can reduce the loneliness with good communication. It can be done via verbal or nonverbal. Use

of internet, telephone is very common in these days and such communication the feeling of loneliness can be reduced.

Table 1. Number of visits by family members in elderly home

Number of visits by family members in elderly home	No. of respondents
Once a week	15
As often as possible	10
Rarely	13
Once in a Month	11
Never	19
Once a week	15

Survey Data: 2016

It **was found that 15 respondent's family member visits their elderly regularly once a week.** But there were also residents who were rarely and never visited by their family member. Those residents who had regular family visit seem to feel less loneliness than others who were visited rarely. Over the effects of family visit, large proportion of elderly revealed that they feel happy and satisfied when family visits them. Their answers reflected that family visit increases their quality of life. They answered that the reason for rare family visits are distance and their family members are busy and working. Some elderly even mentioned that they are not important for their family member. Such elderly had experience of loneliness quite often. However, they mentioned that the family visit of their family member have effect on their quality of nursing care. Few number of elderly mentioned that they expect their family member to help them in financial matter whereas some elderly answered that they **didn't want any help fro**m their family members.

Social Work Interventions on Aging

The role of the social worker in the care of older people is to represent and advocate for the **person's wishes, while collaborating with other key stakeholders and establishing the** supports required. They have a key role to play at the interface between the older person, their families, hospital staff and community services. As such social workers are well placed to provide insights into the experiences of older people accessing or needing health and social care services.

The participants of the research along with their family members, and society by using various techniques such as really, counseling, group discussions, and recreational activities. These programmes provided opportunities for information gathering in order to improve understanding and develop competencies and skills necessary to enable changes in their situation.

Counseling was used at various stages while dealing with individual cases, interacting with children or family members of elderly, and society. It is a personal help directed toward the **solution of a problem, which a person finds that one cannot solve one's problem, seeks the** help of a skilled person whose knowledge, experience and general orientation can assist finding a possible solution. Information and clarification are used for making the client aware of the problem in a psychological help. Respondents were provided psychological support by counseling to decrease tension, sleeplessness, and loneliness.

Clinical interventions – They may provide therapy for an elderly client who feels lonely or who is suffering depression, isolation neglect or anxiety. Social workers encourage their clients to pursue stimulating activities, helping to arrange group outings. They can help clients cope with aging by recording life stories and help people say their goodbyes through writing letters, phone calls, videos, etc.

Social work tasks or types of intervention, (usually dependent on the initial and on-going social work assessment and review) include advocating on behalf of our clients to a range of services such as local authorities and social welfare services. Social workers network and liaise with community resources and provide clients and families information on a range of topics including benefits and entitlements and support services. They assist our clients to empower themselves, encourage and support them to act on their own behalf by providing information and support.

Social workers do a great deal of work with families and carers. They support families and are involved with conflict management and resolution. They also negotiate between family members and use mediation and conflict management and sometimes specialist, family work and therapy skills. They carry out risk assessment and risk management with issues such as domestic violence, financial and emotional abuse, neglect and self-neglect. For families in a care giving situation, geriatric social workers are an invaluable resource. Social workers also offer direct assistance for families, such as providing family-support services, suggesting useful technologies, and facilitating the coordination of medical care.

CONCLUSION

The present status of elderly and the problems they face are to be immediately attended and intervened to provide solution. The results of this study are consistent with prior research that indicates that when working with older adults needing a caregiver, it is in the best interest of the older adult to include the family. Social worker can understand about elderly expectation through our findings and know that family and emotional support is equally important in the life of elderly to maintain their quality of life and thus improves the relationship between family member and the elderly people. Consequently, it also increases the family visit and contacts in elderly home uplifting family participation in elderly care.

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