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AGING AND INSTITUTIONAL CARE: CAUSES AND DEMANDS FOR INSTITUTIONAL CARE IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract: The main objective in this study is to find out the reasons why the elderly people are turning to elders' home care in Sri Lanka. There are two research questions that are addressed by this study as: what are the socio-economic factors directing elders to the care of elders' homes? and what are the attitudes that motivate elders to turn to care at elders' homes? The study was based on the two elders' homes in Kandy district since it is considered as one of the fastest growing age districts. 20 elders were selected for the study; 10 from each elders home, 5 males and 5 females from each home. Economic hardships, changing social relationships and networks, unbearable family work and responsibilities and poor mental and physical health were the main socio-economic and cultural reasons for many elders to move in to elders home while protect the dignity, attitudinal changes regarding institutional care, ultimate purpose of the life were the attitudes that elders to turn into elders' homes. The socio-economic and cultural causes that influence for elders to move into the elders homes in this study were quite common with the other research done globally. But when analyzing the attitudes that motivated elders to move with elders' homes, there are new trends that could be observed as many elders accept this as a favorable alternative mechanism with the rapid social changes. However, gender differences could be observed in the causes that motivated elders to move with elders' homes. Finally, this study recommends that practitioners, policy makers, social workers and other people who are responsible for elderly people can introduce more elderly friendly institutional mechanisms that link with the family members which contribute to have a comfortable life for both elders and family members.

Key words: Aging, Elders' Home Care, Family Care, Attitudes, Sri Lanka

INTRODUCTION

One of the major demographic phenomena of the 21st century is the gradual increase of the world's aging population. Sri Lanka is considered as the country with the fastest ageing population in South Asia and it getting close to the develop countries as well. An increase of ageing population can have various effects on a country (World Bank, 2008) with the primary issue centering on concerns of care taking. In most traditional societies, the main responsibility of taking care of ageing people resides with the family. However, due to short term and long term changes, the structure and role of the family has changed in many societies' including Sri Lanka. Thus, the moral responsibility of taking care of elderly people is seen to be gradually shifting away from the family (Silva, 2004; Weeratunga and Hugo, 2014). Even though the majority of elderly people still live with their family members, there is a gradual decline in the proportion who lives with family members in Sri Lanka. As per records, in 1992, 80% of elderly people lived with their family members (Nugagodea and Balasuriya, 1992) but it decreased to 77% in 2006 (World Bank 2008). It has further sharply decreased to 59.6% as at 2018 (Asian Development Bank, 2019).

Many studies have proved that the majority of elderly people prefer to be with their family members in their final stages of life (Liu et al, 2013; Watt et al, 2014). Despite the majority of elders believing that home or family caregiving is the ideal, Fazlulhq (2011) states that there is a huge demand for elders' care homes in Sri Lanka. Thousands of application is on waiting lists since elders homes are in short supply. This shows that there is a huge gap between the desire for institutional care or an elders home and the demand among the elders in Sri Lanka.

Although substantial studies regarding the elders' home care on elderly people have been done, these studies have mainly focused attention on the services that the care homes provides, the quality of the service, gap between the cultural attitudes and the family on elderly caring system etc. Less attention has been paid to identify the gap between desire and demand for the elders homes among elders. Therefore, the main objective in this study is to examine the reasons why the elderly people are turning to elders home care in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, there are two research questions that are addressed by this study as: what are the socio-economic factors directing elders to the care of elders' homes? and what are the attitudes that motivate elders to turn to care at elders' homes?

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the disengagement theory introduced by Kumming and Henry (1961), elders withdraw from social interactions, which can be done on their own initiative or due to someone else. According to this theory, there are several factors that contribute to the disengagement of the elderly from society as they age; gradual loss of ability to work, deviation from the production process, wish for a peaceful life, limiting of activity due to the weakening of the body, and loss in skills as they age.

Akbar et al (2014) have done research on elders who live in elders' homes in North India; their main objective was to examine the elders' future expectations, quality of life and test psychological stress. This study confirmed that the main reason these adults move to elders home is due to misbehavior with their son and daughter-in-law; 29.8% have given up their belongings and have moved to elderly care home. 29.3% have presented poverty and there being no financial support as the main reason

to move to the elders home care. A substantial number of elders (9.1%) also said they had given up their family and moved to the elders' home to serve Almighty God. This study confirmed that elders can disengage from their roles, states and social groups either willingly or unwillingly while engaging another set of roles, states and social groups to enhance future expectations of living and quality of life.

Dubey et al (2011) have conducted a comparative study between elders who live in home environments and elders' homes in order to assess their attitudes of life satisfaction, social relationships and personal tastes. This study revealed that elders who live in a home environment have more opportunities to get social support and community engagement, opportunities to engage with religious activities which allow elders to relax and have more space to create social networks. Based on these factors, this study confirmed that the elders who live in a home environment have a better position than those of the elders homes.

Qian et al (2018) have done research in order to examine the willingness towards institutional care between the elders who have a house to stay (family) and the elders who do not have a house (family) in China. They have done a survey using 3923 samples in Shandong, China and from this sample only 8.5% displayed willingness to access institutional care. According to this study, 'residence' or lack thereof was the main determinant factor for willingness to have institutional care among most of the elders those who do not have a house or a family were more willing. Apart from that, psychological stress, education attainment, relationship with adult children, income, and living space were other determinant factors for them to agree to the institutional care.

As per the above discussion, most of the research paid attention to the issues faced by the elders who live in elders homes the institutional problems that elders homes care have. Further, much of the research discussed above has confirmed that the social, economic and cultural conflicts, mainly harassment within the family, have mainly caused many adults to turn to institutional care. In the 'disengagement theory' Kumming and Henry (1961) confirmed that when people grow old, they themselves withdraw from many social activities or have it withdrawn by someone else. Much of the research confirmed that with rapid social change the latter is more applicable to the elders who live in institutional care mostly in South Asian context. In this research, I have explored whether the situation is still similar or whether there are new factors emerging for elders to turn to elders home care. Further, the above mentioned research has confirmed that there is a huge demand for institutional care though elders themselves express more willingness for home caregiving. Therefore, in this study, I have paid attention to why this gap exists and why people tend to receive institutional care though most of them prefer to stay with their own children.

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research methodology is used in this study since in-depth descriptions of human experiences can be explained and constructed through qualitative research methods. The study was based on the two elders' homes in Kandy district since it is considered as one of the fastest growing in age districts. There are 12 elders homes in Kandy district and two elders homes with highest elders and residents of both male and female were selected for the study. Accordingly, 20 elders were selected for the study; 10 from each elders home, 5 males and 5 females from each home based on the purposive sample method. All the respondents were in the 60 to 80 age categories and

Sinhalese Buddhist as there were no elders from other ethnicity and religious backgrounds. Thematic data analysis methods were used in order to analyses the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Many Asian and South Asian countries believe that parental care should take place within the family, while promoting it through culture and religion (Arber and Ginn, 1991; Tilak, 1993). Therefore, institutional care of parents is still believed to be an act contrary to the culture and religion of many of these countries. This may be the reason why elders homes care is still not so popular in these countries and it has also given rise to negative feelings about institutional care in the society. However, with the rapid changes taking place in the society, the responsibility of the family to look after the elderly is gradually eroding and due to this there is a strong demand for institutional care even though the elders prefer to live with their families. This in turn creates a huge gap between the willingness to access by elders themselves versus the demand for such institutional care. This study also confirmed that for almost all the elders regardless of gender, the first priority is to stay with their children, though most of the elders accept the life they spent in the elders home. The first research question in this study is to examine the socio-economic and cultural causes for elders to turn to the care of an elders home. This study confirmed that many individuals have turned to elders home care due to a combination of socio-economic and cultural factors and therefore, those factors have been explained below without categorizing into separate sections.

1. Economic hardships

As described in the methodology section, 10 elderly men and 10 elderly women were selected for the study. It was discovered that mostly elderly men were turned over to elderly care homes due to economic hardships which were related to other causes. For instance, 65% of elderly men reported that due to the economic hardships and influence of economic hardships with other social relationships had caused them to come to the elders home while 25% elderly women reported that economic hardships caused them to join with the elders homes. Majority of the elders both men and women who were interviewed, were under-educated and did not have a sustainable job before coming to the care homes. Majority of the elderly men expressed their opinion that with the gradual decline of their ability to work, the loss of sources of income and subsequent drastic changes in their social status was unbearable and this was the main cause for them to move to the elders homes.

This shows that economic hardships are a crucial factor when becoming old in Sri Lanka. According to the Sri Lanka labour force statistics, by 2020 only 29.6% of the people over the age of 60 were in the labour force and among those, 53.6% was engaged with agriculture and industries (Department of Census and Statistics, 2020). This data further described that the majority of people do not have a formal pension scheme which causes further hardships to the aged as described above. For instance, in 2016, only 37% of the total elderly population in Sri Lanka was entitled to a formal pension scheme (Asian Development Bank, 2019). Further, a study done by the World Bank (2008) stated that 50 % of people over the age of 60 in Sri Lanka meet their financial needs through their adult children. It has also been shown that 75% of elders obtain the food, clothing and medicine needs with the assistance of their children (World Bank, 2008). This data shows that the majority of elders depended on their adult children regardless of gender. However, this study found that it impacted elderly men differently than elderly women which caused them to find alternative living

arrangements mainly because most of these elderly men believed their social status were dramatically changed with the economic hardships.

2. Changing social relationships and networks

The theoretical framework for ageing and social interactions discusses the fact that with age, people generally withdraw gradually from social interaction (Cumming and Henry, 1961). This can be especially the case with death of elderly people's friends, or by serious illness of him/herself and friends, the busyness of their adult children (Macunovich et al, 1995). But many researchers point out that although the size of social networks may gradually lessen, social interactions contribute to an elders psychological and physical wellbeing (Hobbs & Stoop, 2002; Thoits, 2011).

This study confirmed that changes in social relationships and the breakdown of social networks have led to a majority of elders turning to elders homes. The special feature found in this study was that elderly men rather than elderly women were more likely to move to an elders home due to changes and breakdowns in social networks. For instance, 60% elderly men reported that this was the main reason for them to move to an elders home while 15% of elderly women confirmed this was one of several reasons. Research has also confirmed that women's communication level is very high and they are able to have larger networks with lower density and they have a variety of networks with family, friends and neighbors. In contrast, men are more likely to maintain relationships with selective people which might have drastic impacts on elderly men while elderly women maintain stable relationships which contribute to maintaining their mental and physical wellbeing (McDonald & Mair, 2010; Fischer & Beresford, 2014).

3. Unbearable family work and responsibilities

Many studies have found that elderly people can improve their physical and mental health by engaging in small tasks and activities in daily life but heavy workload will lead to poor health for them (Standinger, et al, 2016; Adjei and Brand, 2018). According to the present study, one of the reasons for the elderly to move to elders' homes is that they had to shoulder unbearable household work in the home. However, this study too found that there is a huge gap between elderly men and women in explaining how unbearable household work caused them to join with the elders' homes. For instance, more than 80% elderly women who were interviewed revealed that the heavy workload at home was the main reason for them to move into an elderly home while none of the elderly men identified workload at home had caused them to move to the elders homes. The following interviews with an elderly woman explain how she suffered due to the heavy workload at home.

> "I lived with my daughter. When my daughter and her husband went to work in the morning I had to take care of her three children. I was assigned other chores around the house. My grandchildren are very naughty which is quite normal, but it is very tiring to look after them. My daughter comes home from work very late in the evening and I have no rest until then. My daughter's husband is also quite harsh and if some mistakes happen they get angry easily. The most painful thing is if my daughter works on Poya days, I do not get a chance to go to the temple and observe sil. I helped my children as best I could and then decided to come to this place and the villagers helped me to find this place (Interview no 6).

The above quotation describes how recent changes within the family contribute to stressful life for both family members as well as elders. Many researchers highlighted that engaging long hours of work contributes to poor health of elders. But this study found that not only the poor health, but also violence against elders, elder abuse, violation of elders' rights are also some of the results related to heavy workload assigned at home for the elders.

4. Poor mental and physical health

As per the findings of the study, it can be pointed out that the poor health of elders have caused their adult children to send their parents to elders homes while some elders themselves have decided to move to the elders homes. The elders who had mental issues, dementia and some chronic diseases had also caused some of the adult children to send their parents to elders homes according to elders homes management. But some elders have moved themselves since they were not being looked after properly at home for their diseases and medication.

When examining the attitudes leading to elders moving into institutional care, the following factors could be found in this study.

I. Protect the dignity

The majority of interviewed elders express that they could not bear the gradual loss of their place in the family as they got older. The majority of elders pointed out that even though they received some form of concern in the family, they did not have the opportunity to be involved in family decisions that led to marginalization and are ignored in special family events. The feelings and attitudes of rejection have motivated them to move to the elders home. The special feature that can be observed here is that older men than older women have resorted to elders homes to protect their dignity.

II. Attitudinal changes regarding institutional care

Negative attitudes towards institutional care in many countries, mainly in the South Asian context can be seen to be changing with the rapid changes taking place in contemporary society. When analyzing the research that has been done in this regard, there are two main factors that can be identified as the main causes for this. The first is the change in attitudes of children towards elderly care (Sibai & Yamout, 2012; Compernolle, 2015). The second and most important factor is that the negative attitudes towards institutional care among the elderly are changing in a positive way up to some extent (Schoenberg & Coward, 1997).

This study also confirmed this and most of the elders explain that since they can understand their situation and their children's busy life they accept the life of an elders home they would prefer to be with their kith and kin. This study clearly observed that the majority of the elders enjoy the attention and medical treatments they get and the emotional support with the same age group reduces their tension and feelings of isolation. However, this study clearly observed the gender differences in this aspect as majority of the elder men (80%) believe that institutional care is a good alternative care method and should be further developed so that many elders could receive the help of this caring system whereas only 20% of women thought the same. Most of the women elders preferred the family unit to live with.

III. Ultimate purpose of the life

Researchers have confirmed that 'freedom' is one of the most important factors in the quality of life of a healthy elderly person (Beaumont, Kenealy & Murrell, 2003). However, the definition of freedom may depend on person to person and culture to culture (Rabiee, 2013). Analyzing the views of the elders who participated in this study revealed that they defined 'freedom' as reaching 'nirvana' and that it is the ultimate goal of their lives. In this case, it was could observed that regardless of gender almost all held this view since all the respondents were Buddhist in this study. Almost all the elders are of the view that they gave up all the things that belong to them and the free life of the elderly gives them more time to engage with religious activities which is the most important part in their life. Accordingly, this study confirmed that most of the elders disengaged on their own from previous relationships rather than disengaged by someone else as mentioned by Communig and Henry (1961).

CONCLUSION

Researchers have identified that deciding to move from homes to places of institutional care is one of the most difficult decisions for both adult children and their elderly parents or elders (Caron, Ducharme & Griffith, 2006). However, this study shows that due to the changes of both elderly people's lifestyle and the busy life of their children or caregivers, alternative mechanisms for taking care of elders are very much needed. When considering the socio-economic, cultural factors it appears that it is very pervasive globally as discussed in the literature review. And when considering the attitudes that motivate elders to move to the elders' homes, this study revealed that the elderly are starting to think positively of institutional care even though many studies highlight the negative aspect of institutional care. However, this study confirms that in order for elders and their caregivers to find happiness, well-being and a comfortable life, both parties need to find solutions to the problems they face at home. This study confirms that two factors need to be considered in this regard. The first is to rearrange the family and to make family members aware of the importance of taking care of their elders. The second would be the introduction of alternative elder care mechanisms through new dimensions. Due to the rapid changes in society, the second one might be more practical and this study also confirmed the gradual changes of attitudes of elders towards this dimension. Therefore, if the practitioners, policy makers, social workers and other people who are responsible for elderly people can introduce more elderly friendly institutional mechanisms that link with the family members, societal negative attitudes will be converted to positive attitudes towards institutional care which would offer advantageous solutions on elders' caretaking, causing relief to both elders and their adult children.

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