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Living Arrangements of Elderly People at Old Age Homes in Pokhara, Nepal

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Abstract

Elderly people have been moving to old age homes because of detachment from their family members along with loneliness, widowhood, and aspirations of enhancement of spirituality. This has led to increasing trends of movement of elderly people towards old age home. There is a dearth of studies related to the lived experiences of elderly people with regard to living arrangement, especially in the context of Pokhara, Nepal. Therefore, this paper aims to explore perceptions of elderly people at old age home with regards to their living arrangement. This study was carried out for data collection using face to face in-depth interview with 22 people aged 60 years and above during the period May – July 2018. It follows thematic analysis, a meaning making approach, to analyse field data. Major findings of this study are better perceptions of elderly people with regard to living arrangement at old age homes in most of the cases in comparison to their place of origin. This study concludes that most of the elderly people have experienced peace, freedom and individualism at old age homes. It would be invaluable, especially for policy makers and stakeholders in order to attain the elderly people's quality of life.

Keywords: Living arrangement, Nepal, old age home, perceptions

Review of Literature

Systematic inquiry into changing population size, age structures and their policy implications on different aspects of development, such as, family structure, care of older persons, health services, housing and living arrangements, has been carried

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out, to some extent, in recent times. According to United Nations (1995), development is viewed in a broader context, that is, social, economic, cultural, and so forth. This was demonstrated by the International Conference on population and development of 1994, held in Cairo, which included many aspects such as socio-economic development, women's empowerment and reproductive health issues as well as population dynamics and age structure. Aspects covered in the literature on population and development include education, health, labour force, modernization and urbanization. These aspects influence the population in various ways. Improvements in health reduce mortality rates, leading to improved survival chances. Indeed, people can expect to live longer than any other previous generations and significantly longer than their parents and grandparents. Age structure is a crucial factor in the process of development. It is recognised that population and development affect each other. According to Pool (1996), in the process of development, demographic variables are critical components of social structures and change. The integration of population and development is inevitable from policy perspectives. The literature on population and development indicates that population factors should be integrated into development policies. Changing population size is an important aspect of development, and thus has significant policy implications. Discussing changes in population sizes and age structures, and their effects on development, Chesnais comments

> Segmentation of the ages of life, by providing the numerical size of successive generations, indicates the potential development of certain socio-economic needs in future decades: today's babies will enter the school-age population in about 5 or 6 years, the working population in about 15 or 20 years, and the retired population in about 60 years' time (1992: 284).

Adhikary (2014) suggests that Nepal's demographic changes suggest a steep in the elderly population in the coming decades as a result of declining fertility and mortality, and an increasing life expectancy at birth. This phenomenon, coupled with rapid social changes resulting in the gradual breakdown of the traditional joint family system is likely to pose serious problems for the elderly people. Subedi (2003) concludes that family has been the key social institution that provided psychological, social and economic support to the individual at different stages of life. The elderly people were considered as knowledge banks and ideal persons for the younger. However, in the present context, the structure of family has undergone changes differently at different stages of social development in Nepal. Modernization and urbanization have brought changes to family structure in Nepal to a great extent. The extended family that existed in the society has changed to a nuclear family.

This has affected the position of the elderly in the family as well as the family's capacity to take care of the elderly people. According to Geriatric Centre Nepal (2010), the family's capacity to provide quality care to older people is decreasing with the reduction of the available kin support. In the given contexts, this paper aims to explore perceptions of elderly people with regards to their living arrangements after movement from their place of origin to old age home, considering Pokhara Metropolitan City as one of their destinations in Nepal.

Research Method

As per the nature of research objective, this study follows a qualitative research approach, attempting to explore perceptions of the elderly people at old age homes. Shryock, Siegel and et al. (1976) states that elderly people are demographically considered to be those people aged 60 years and above, especially for the developing countries. I interviewed 22 elderly people who were living at four old age homes in different locations of Pokhara Metropolitan City using semi-structured questionnaires. As stated by Sarantakos (2013), after undertaking interview with the interested participants through the old age homes, additional cases were chosen by means of snowball sampling in a qualitative research method. As illustrated by Gillham (2000), this study followed face to face interviews with participants, to establish themes and subthemes using the semi-structured questionnaires to understand elderly people's experiences. For this study, I visited the old age care home and asked the managers of old age care homes, who were running the care homes for their support in interviewing old people. Once I got verbal consent from the managers, I collected data from the elderly people who were really interested in participating in the interview for this research from May to December 2018. Likewise, I visited four old age homes, one after another, till saturation point was obtained. As given by Braun and Clarke (2006) with reference to thematic analysis and meaning making approach, themes were derived from field data relative to specific research objective.

Results

According to Aryal (2019), elderly people are eager to change their place of stay for various reasons like their poverty, loneliness, and need of spiritual enhancement. How elderly people perceive their old age home after leaving their place of origin is an important aspect of this study. There are supports, spiritual knowledge and practice, role of social worker, and perceptions of elderly people that determine their situation of living arrangements at elderly home.

Supports

There are different kinds of supports to transcendental family at old age home from their family, community and organizations. The transcendental family members are attached either with family relationship or blood relationship in one or other way. When family members come to visit their place of old age home, they come with some gifts for their relatives. In Nepali culture, there are norms and values that it would be great to visit somewhere else with some gifts. In this context, Chandra Maya, widow aged 76 years, shared her experiencers in this way: "Occasionally my daughter and daughter-in law come here. My one daughter who lives in Kathmandu comes here. All my family members come to meet me time and again". Likewise, Buddhisara, another woman, also shares her experiences in this way: "I have one cousin. He used to bring me necessary materials, food, fruits to take in. I don't have any problem for that. All the families are engaged in different jobs, so my brother and sister-in-law come occasionally". In this context, Chandra Maya, one of female participants shared her experiences in this way:

> Everything that is needed to us like comb, clothes, food, and mosquito net and umbrella during rainy season along with shoes, medicines and other things are provided. There are a lot of associations, and agencies that have been providing us support for our well-being. They [Organisations] will provide us finance also. As a donation the people provide rupees 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and many more as per their wish. We are not trapped because of the money. If we also need medicine, they provide us. They will take us to hospital if we are sick. They will call the ambulance and take us for our treatment if we are having illness. (Chandra Maya, a widow, aged 76 years)

Spiritual Knowledge and Practice

Many people have similar characteristics in terms of their age, marital status, and social and economic status. Each religion is for peace, prosperity and happiness. In this course of life journey, at old age, elderly people feel easy to share their joys and sorrows with those transcendental family members having similar characteristics. Sometimes, spiritual teachers are invited to give a speech on religion, and they can learn spiritual teachings at old age home. This makes them happy and longing for God. In this context, one of the female participants finds old age home conducive to stay and share her experiences in this way:

> There is peace and happiness in religion. There are a lot of friends like me. We share all the joys and sorrows. We are like one family [Transcendental]. For every work we can take their advice; they care and protect us. I am happy here. Some gurus are invited for religious speech. We all listen to them. I feel glad. (Buddhisara, an unmarried female aged 76 years)

Elderly people judge religious statements given in our religious books and share their heard and read stories with each other at old age home. The stories they share that have made their minds extended. In this regard, one of the male participants shared his stories:

> A guru [spiritual teacher] gave a *mantra* to him as a *shishya* [disciple] and told him that he must not share it with anyone. He said that if you share it with anyone, you will go to hell, or else you will go to heaven. But he shared it with everyone. The guru then scolded him and asked why he did so. His reply was, now I will go to hell but all of these people will go to heaven. Because of this, even the guru has now become his *chela* (follower)…This even comes in *Srimad Bhagavata Purana* (Hindu religious text) where there are stories of great sacrifices. (Narayan, a married male, aged 65 years)

Elderly people have made their old age home as a spiritual home sharing one's knowledge with others. The practice of sharing knowledge has broadened their mind in terms of spiritual knowledge and practice among transcendental family members. It is believed that sharing knowledge is one of important things in our life. Another female participant shared her concept of religion in this way: "We need to read the religious book, share the learnt things with others. If we can share the religious things with others, God blesses us and that is the most important thing of our life." Likewise, Buddhisara shares her experiences in this way:

> This religion has very broad aspect. Nothing in this world is greater than religion. God is everything. No one is powerful than God. God creates us, protects us and we should be thankful to Him for our birth. Our soul is greater than our body. One day our body will be mud but the soul never dies. I am praying not to take birth as a human in next birth. I wish no one in this world has to face any problem. Now I am waiting for my peaceful death. I don't need anything other than that. (Buddhisara, an unmarried female, aged 76 years)

Some of elderly people interviewed at old age home consider this place to have been an opportunity of serving people who visit them. This has contributed to the development of old age home at individual level. It is believed that it is way of going heaven if we can contribute whatever we can do to the individual and societal levels. Chandra Maya again shared her experience on old age home.

> My job is to serve them [people working at building construction] with lunch and tiffin. When guests visit this place, I serve them hot and cold drinks. There are three-four members helping me. We do work in very friendly way with cooperation. There are all the required facilities. Future is uncertain, anything can happen but till now the situation is good. We all are happy. (Chandra Maya, a widow, aged 76 years)

Likewise, Radha shares her experiences of serving visitors in this way:

> We should stay in this holy place for services not for the sake for anything. Life should be spent on services so that after our death we will get freedom in heaven. Here we can serve many people that act gives peace of heart and soul. At my home I was doing just my household activities but here I am serving people and am happier. All the members of my family were *Pranami* [A religious branch within Hindu religion]. My grandchildren at home are also following the same sect. Thus, I thought serving mankind is serving humanity. (Radha, a widow, aged 80 years)

Perception

Elderly females, especially widows with no child, find their stay conducive in joint family from both economic and social perspectives. When one's husband dies, there is more likely to be unfavorable situation in the family. One of the prime reasons behind this may be that most of the Nepalese females depend on husband's income though they are actively engaged in household chores. The household activities are unrecognized in terms of monetary value. As a result, they are seen as an income taker from the joint family but not as an income giver to the family. Abiding by orthodox Hindu norms, furthermore, females who cannot give birth to child in their lives are seen as a curse of previous life. Thus, they are not well treated in family and society. Even after death of husband, there would not be a responsible person to look after them in the family. After the death of their husband, they are bound to come to maternal home. They may take property with them to parental home if they have received any from husband's family. Even in the parental home, married daughters would not be well treated by family members. At the same time, property

of the married daughters is of great importance. Whether they are treated well or not depends upon the amount of their property. In this context, one of the widow participants, who did not give birth to any child, was not treated well at parental home even after movement from her own family after her husband's death. She shares her perceptions with regards to previous stay, parental home, and present stay at old age home:

> I was comfortable at my own home while I was with my husband. I could spend my property in my own way to sustain the life. They [Relatives] have no concern with me. I have only love for them but they love my property only and take it away. They ignore me. I have gone maternal home twice after I came here due to my own work there. Otherwise, they would not call me... Many things came in my mind. I feel very sad after remembering the situation. After the death of my husband, the family members of my brother took me to the parental home. I had some piece of land as my property. They took all my property and then mistreated me. (Goma, a widow, aged 70 years)

She further shares her perceptions with regards to old age home:

> I feel very comfortable here. We all are old here. When everyone falls sick in a moment, there is the problem for care, otherwise, I normally feel peace here. We all share the joys and sorrows and live happily. Some difficulties to be noticed are that there are only a few people here and all are old. (Goma, a widow, aged 70 years)

In Nepali culture, females perceive their happiness if they do not need to work during their old age. They think of dreams of old ages even from their younger age. They do not have any tussle at old age home as in the family at home. As mentioned above, they are given supports for meals and clothing. They do not need to struggle for those things. That's why they feel comfortable at old age home. One of the widow participants found old age home easier in comparison to parental family:

> I feel easier that I do not need to work here hard. I have not faced any difficulties for meals and clothing. I just cook, eat and stay. Things are fine with me now. What would be in the future I do not know. (Hari Maya, a widow, aged 85 years)

Elderly people who have left their home for enhancing spirituality study. They find old age home much better with conducive environment in comparison to stay with family members at home. Among others, one of the reasons behind this is there

are a lot of distractions due to phone and visitors at home. Furthermore, materialistic attachment is high in terms of clothes and foods in the family whereas people can make concentration on sole goal of attaining spirituality at old age home. It is also that *yogis* (saints) are well known about herbal medicine to use if someone gets sick. In this regard, Narayan, who has taken sole goal of enhancing spirituality (Hinduism) shares his perception at old age home compared with family at home:

> At home there are lots of distractions such as your phone, visitors. Here you are able to work with ease at your own pace. I was doing my learning at home as well but I was not very satisfied there, but I am satisfied here... It is very different like two ends of the spectrum. When you stay at home, you are focused on eating good food, talking about what is inside the family, there is materialistic attachment. There is attachment in terms of both clothes and food. For example, here we are grazing cows. To be able to drink their milk is very advantageous. You can't find it outside the old age home even if you are willing to pay higher amount of money. But here, we have that opportunity. All these [showing by pointing finger] are local cows; they are not selectively bred. Next thing, *guru* [spiritual teacher] here makes *ghee* as well. It turns out that cows' milk is like pious. I have been cured because of cow's ghee and *ayurveda* [herbal medicine]. All of these will not be available at home. (Narayan, a married man, aged 65 years)

Discussion

Reviewing increment of elderly people and the cultural transformation of Nepal, there has been a rapid increase in the elderly people on the one hand and declining norms and values of giving time to elderly people at their home (place of origin) with increasing urbanization and modernization on the other. There has been a rapid increase in numbers of elderly people aged 60 years and above in Nepal with a population growth rate nearly 4 percent during the period 2001-2011, more than a twice in comparison to national population growth rate of 1.35 percent per annum. In the given context, it is likely that support will need to increase for the basic needs of elderly people because of the rapid increase in their numbers in the country. Both male and female adults have been leaving their family, especially their aging parents for foreign employment and abroad education. Furthermore, there have been declining traditional norms and values in terms of respect, love, and attachment towards elderly people by their younger generations, sons and daughters, and their offspring.

According to (ancient) Hindu philosophy, elderly people should leave their home to enhance their spirituality at old age after having completed all responsibilities like gaining education, bearing and rearing children up to middle age. It is believed that people aged up to 25 years have to gain their education and thereafter they have to engage in married life along with bearing and rearing children. When their children are grown up, they may have free time, visiting temples and praying to God for making next life better. In Nepalese context, in the past, most of elderly people were fully engaged in caring their grand children at home whereas their sons and daughters-in-law were engaged in earning activities outside their home. Nowadays, elderly people are breaking these traditional norms and values and escaping from their old age responsibilities of rearing and caring their younger generation. Results of this study clearly exemplify that there are rare cases of elderly people leaving their home because of family disputes. Therefore, this study suggests that individualism has developed not only within younger generations but also within elderly people.

For centuries, many people and their generations in Nepal have been residing in old-style houses made of hay and thatch. Due to poverty, they could not pay attention towards living arrangement at new style of modern houses. They can only pay attention to providing the morning and evening meals. Therefore, they have a high aspiration of living in new style of modern houses in their life as everyone has expectation but poverty is a problem. As said in Nepali proverb – "*Janha kangal tyaha chandal*" meaning that where there is poverty there is quarrel. When people are very poor, they cannot fulfill their duties of looking after their elderly family members by providing food, shelter, and necessary medicines when they are ill. Consequently, there are family disputes between younger and older people. Then, elderly people attempt to find new place of living, far from their family members.

In contrast to poor family, there is affluent class of people, especially those living in urban and semi-urban of Nepal. Younger family members want to make their old age people happy and healthy and want to fulfil their desires. In such cases, old people are given options whether they stay at home or at old age home for conducive environment of spiritual enhancement. In the course of making ease for elderly people, sons and daughters have contributed financially and emotionally to construct rooms at elderly home. Thus, elderly people have made their stay at elderly homes, especially for spiritual enhancement.

Even after moving to elderly homes, there are clash between old rich people and old poor people. In Nepalese culture, identity is supposed to be high or low based on their economic status. People having high economic status who are financially

supported by their family members from their home, feel themselves of being high identity whereas old poor people who are not supported by anyone from outside the elderly homes, often feel their identity low so some old rich people treat them down. Therefore, there is clash between rich and poor people living at elderly homes though they live at the same place. In this context, one of the participants shares his experiences at elderly home: "*Bridhdhashramma Srimati Laijane Jar Pani Aoonunaparos*!". It means no one would come to old age home, even the person who accompanies his wife. They feel bad when rich elderly people are offered foods like fruits, vegetables and other good food items but they (old poor people) do not get these things being distributed equally at old age home.

Most of elderly people have enjoyed with well-equipped modern facilities of their residence at elderly homes. Elderly homes have been built with modern style by using cement, rod, bricks, and sands. Furthermore, modern amenities like electricity, piped drinking water, and garden with different kinds of flowers are available around the elderly homes. In Nepal, people are moving towards modern styles of buildings replacing hut with hay and thatch. People enjoy residing in modern style of house with modern facilities. Such buildings have been well equipped with modern facilities that have made elderly people's life better from the perspective of modern styles of housing at the place of elderly homes.

Some of the elderly people, especially from poor economic background and being alone, feel discriminated in the elderly homes because they are known as only receiver from other people but not giver to anyone. They are not treated well in the elderly homes. One of the participants shared his bitter experiences of elderly home like this way:

> People who are from high economic and social background do not treat other people well. What I suggest other poor people including even for my enemy is not to stay at elderly homes as they are treated very badly. If something is given to elderly people living at old age homes, those goods are not distributed equally to poor people. (Bhuwan, a widower, aged 75 years)

As discussed in the literature review, elderly people have free time to enhance their spiritual knowledge and experiences after bearing and rearing their children and grandchildren at their home. In Nepal, people, especially elderly Hindu people are involved in different religious communities like *Krishna Pranami* (a Hindu religious community). According to this religious philosophy, they do not eat anything touched by people from other religious communities. There is no such conducive

environment in their family member as young generation want to eat meat for their physical energy that is not bearable for the elderly people. It is believed that people enhance their spiritual path ahead effectively if they can follow norms and values of the religion. According to this religious community, people should eat vegetarian food only. Therefore, old age home is conducive environment for spiritual people. For this, family and community people have helped elderly people supporting them whatever they need. This is solely for spiritual enhancement at old age. Elderly people have shared their experiences that old age home is much better for spiritual enhancement along with their stay, religious study and practices as they do not need to entertain visitors and community people like at their family home. In this context, individualism is more common among rich elderly people. Chandra Maya, shared her experiences on individualism as follows:

> I have daughter-in-law and grandchild in the village. I have handed-over the responsibility of land and agricultural production to my daughter-in-law. I had told them to take care of the assets of village and then made my destiny to the old age home. Now I feel like I don't need anything else. I am happy with what I have. I have been living here for 7 years… I cared them [Children]; made them able to stand on their own feet. At home, there are a lot of agriculture, livestock and other works. I did all these works actively when I was young. Now grandchildren are grown up, they are studying. I am also getting older. My cousin told me to go to temple, so I also like to come here. Now it is my time to remember God, live peacefully, sing the *Bhajan* (hymns) and live happily. (Chandra Maya, a widow, aged 76 years)

In this study, there are a few numbers of widows whose residence has been changed from one place to another due to loneliness, helplessness and economic hardship. The reason behind this was that they became widows at very early ages. In the past, there was no tradition of widow remarriage. In this study, some widows wondered that their stay would not be changed like this way from husband's home to parental home and from parental home to old age home if they could get married second time. It was custom that the married daughter should not get married once again even if husband died at very early age of life. They regret now that they attempted to maintain parents' prestige without thinking of second marriage. Thus, they suffered a lot in the course of spending their life with economic hardship and

the then socio-cultural practices against widows. Therefore, this study advocates for further marriage if earlier marriage does not work well for women and if they do not have any child..

Conclusion

In this study, poverty, mistreatment and residential change have been moving ahead one after another in the lives of widows, widower, and unmarried single person. After all, they have moved to old age home for their livelihood. Even at old age home, some of them feel ostracization and mistreatment from their affluent colleagues due to poverty. In contrast to poor elderly people, there are a few numbers of affluent elderly people who have moved to old age home with a view to enhancing their spirituality studies, seeking freedom, and individual development. They do not feel any sort of mistreatment either at family home or at old age home. They also find dual financial and logistic supports from both their family and old age home. Thus, perceptions of living arrangement differ depending upon the socio-economic status of elderly people.

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