

An observational study of Senior Citizen at Senior Citizen Home of Tanahun District of Nepal

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Abstract

Background: All countries have to face the population aging sooner depending on their degree of development; however, elderly care is predicted to soon become a major concern for developing countries such as Nepal.

Methodology: An qualitative study was conducted in a senior citizen home of Tanahun district. General health check-up of the 30 elderly followed by 2 focus group discussion and one KII with provider was done to know the status of elderly and their perception towards senior citizen home.

Results: Majority of the elderly were abandoned by their family members due to financial sufferings, and some of them left their home in search of their own comfort zone. Majority of them got old aged allowance which is the only way of financial security. They were living happily in the home though they missed their family in some occasion because they could have spent their leisure time by sharing their emotions and feelings with same age groups.

Conclusions: Concept of senior citizen home has to be broaden up from the living home of poor old people to relaxing comfort home for elderly. Good management and facility should be incorporated with multi disciplinary team to take care of elderly to spent dignified life in senior citizen home as well.

Keywords: Senior citizen, elderly care, old aged allowance, dignified life

Introduction

The 21st century is the century of ageing. The number of aged people >60 years is estimated to increase around 900 million in 2015 to 2.1 billion by 2050 worldwide (WHO, 2018). The increasing rate of population ageing is more problematic in Low and Middle Income Countries (Goharinezhad, Maleki, Baradaran, & Ravaghi, 2016). Similar to the global trend, Nepal is also witnessing an increase in the aging population. According to the 2011 census, elderly population is 8.13 per cent of the total population of Nepal and dependency ratio is being high.

Asian countries have a culture of caring all these aspects by their own family, however, demographic transition to nuclear family, migration to urban cities and industrialization society had directly affected the wellbeing of elderly (Rahman, 2017). According to Nepal's traditional norms, family value system and culture, the prevailing practice of taking responsibility for the well-being of elderly. This situation is changing and the primary caregivers such as sons and daughters don't have time to invest on their parents (Rahman, 2017). Government of Nepal (GoN) had formulated couple of policies to promote the welfare of senior citizen.

Nepal government has an objective to guarantee a comfortable, secured and honored life for senior citizens as well as the utilization of their knowledge and experiences. GoN has countable activities on health services, free medical treatment and specific wards, transportation facilities, financial old age allowance (OAA) and pension schemes, old aged home for abandoned to provide better elderly care and protect their dignity. However, these activities are still deprived of proper management and support. Therefore, we had visited the Senior Citizen Home (SCH) at Tanahun district which provide free food and shelter to the elderly.

Methodology

Exploratory qualitative study was conducted in a SCH at Tanahun district of Nepal. Tanahun district has a holy place Devghat where majority of the elderly population wish to live at their end stage of life. All elderly had general health check-up followed by 2 focus group discussions among elderly and one KII with provider was done to explore the

status of elderly, their perspectives on institutional life in elderly days. Ethical consideration was maintained in every step of interview to report writing. Informed verbal consent was taken with the respondents prior to discussions and written letter was given to the manager of the institution.

Findings and Discussions

A total of 30 senior citizens were observed at the center from the age 60 years to 104 years of age from different corner of Nepal. 21 female and 9 male older people were sheltered. Nepalese citizenship holder senior citizens abandoned from their family with recommendation letter from respective local government could accompany at the center. In addition, elderly must be free from any terminal illness and could accomplish their daily living activities. Once they entered to the facility, they don't have to pay a single penny for their lodging and food, however they have to take care of themselves in case of severe disease. The old aged people were fed and cared by the collection of fund from the donors. Donors as individual, or groups visit the organization to feed the elderly, organize health campaigns and also donate daily used items such as dresses, soaps, blankets etc. Only 5 (five) members had taken care of elderly for preparing food, maintaining hygiene and also helped in management of the organization. Findings were grouped according to following themes.

Theme 1: General status of senior citizen

Among the senior citizens, 9 (nine) out of 30 were unmarried. Majority of them 90% could accomplish their daily activities themselves, whereas 10% were bedridden. Regarding the health status, high blood pressure, asthma, arthritis and diabetes were the common health problems of elderly by 30%, 25%, 20% and 10% respectively. Majority of them 80% of elderly spent their days with chanting and meditation.

Theme 2: Reasons of stay at senior citizen home

Most of the elderly people were rejected by their own family because they were very old to be taken care of and some of them don't have their own children or families to look after them. So, they came to the old age home which provide food and shelter without cost. Some respondents stated that they did not want to be the burden to family members, as they can't do any physical works for the family where as some respondents reported that they have no family members either unmarried or single or widow.

"My wife left me after 10 years of marriage. One daughter teaches in a school and another is a housewife. They are doing well in their own family. I don't like to be burden for them"

- 92 years' elderly man

Some elderly felt uncomfortable with cohabiting with married children and some elderly had poverty and lack of basic needs and desire to stay away from possible familial conflict. Some elderly felt lack of space for those who had to share space with children and grandchildren at home. Some of the respondents reported that they have daughters only and they don't like to stay with married daughters as social and cultural issue will be there.

"I had a prestigious family 5 years before. During my husband's treatment, we lost our savings and lands. After death of him, my two sons and their family migrated to Kathmandu for better income and doing daily wages works. I don't like to be burden for them."

-78 years' elderly woman

Geront World Nepal in 2007 also indicated that elderly homes are favorable for the residents and the society as a whole despite of some problems, particularly for those who are uncomfortable in their family (S Khanal, 2009).

Theme 3: Challenges of elderly

The only major challenge of elderly was financial crisis mentioned by almost all elderly. During our discussions, most of the elderly felt emotional as they recalled their sacrifice to the family or offspring and in return got nothing from them. Despite being small amount, the old age allowance has been a subsidy to purchase medicine, food and/or clothing and has been given financial strength to elderly people.

"The government is at least giving this allowance but it doesn't cover medicine so I wish it will increase in near future." - 75 years' elderly man

"As we don't have anyone to take care of us and 2000 rupees per month is enough to pay the bills of medicine."

- 83 years' elderly woman

Another challenge mentioned by some elderly was missing family members especially during festivals and the during bedridden stages. Some of them felt scared for the upcoming days that what would happen if s/he became bedridden in elderly care home? In contrast, most of the elderly felt grateful to senior citizen home and the management. They also mentioned that there should be more homes with comfort and amenities in the future so that elderly can live their dignified life without any stress.

“We are satisfied with the old aged home and their caretakers as they provide us a lovely home to live and share. We can share our feelings with similar aged people and relax our heart”

- 81 years unmarried elderly man

The senior citizens were unaware of geriatric wards at hospitals and free medicine from the government. they depend on the camps organized by some organizations at elderly home, and health post near to the aged home. Therefore, some awareness programs should be needed to make aware about the facilities that can used by elderly in free of cost.

Theme 4: Challenges of the caregiver

According to one of the caregiver, we have to change our thought about the concept of old aged home. Usually, Old aged home was seen as a shelter for neglected old people without any income or property and often neglected by their children and/or family. Therefore, lack of fund is the major challenge to manage the senior citizen home. The Senior Citizen Home has no specific fund to manage elderly and maintain their living standard. By the grace of volunteer donors (individual or organizations), the home could provide food, clothing to the elderly.

Another major challenge of caring elderly was during their poor health status. The caregivers felt need of trained medical staff, counsellor and physiotherapist so that the elderly could get enough support from the elderly home. At last, he stated that though there is a saying of caring elderly and children is similar. In fact, it's more challenging to take care elderly because they can be emotional as well as judgmental whereas, children are only emotional.

Conclusion

The senior citizen home seems to be the important and great initiative to help elderly. Most of the elderly living in old age home felt that they were living in family, sharing their feelings and emotions among the same age groups is another remedy of their loneliness. The whole concept of the homes should be changed and managed as a relaxing home with good environment to spend time with satisfaction and happiness as true happy times of the later part of their lives. In conclusion, the need of senior citizen home is increasing so, multidisciplinary team has to be mobilized to provide dignified healthy ageing to elderly.

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