

Twilight Years In Asilo De Molo: A Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

Aging is a natural process faced by the human race. Having a clear understanding of its meaning can help people better appreciate situations encountered by old people. Given the lack of recognition, this study aimed to describe the experiences of aged people in Asilo De Molo. The study was carried out as a qualitative work based on a descriptive phenomenological approach. The researcher used purposive sampling to determine the six participants through a recorded interview. The collected data were analyzed through Colaizzi's method. The researcher formulated four themes from the results as follows: 1) "Health and Well-Being" 2) "Filial Piety" 3) "Ardent Faith" & 4) "Connection". The informants were all above 60 years old and came from various places in Western Visayas, and most of them were single and unmarried. Findings revealed that aged people were gravely struggling with their health issues, giving them a hard time maintaining the same energy as they had before. Home for the aged had become their refuge, allowing them to freely show their vulnerability. They also have the liberty to become themselves and help in the various tasks without being scolded. They were able to meet new faces and feel appreciated by other people. However, physical and mental abuses were also experienced by the elderly in the nursing home which adds burden and complications to their current situation. Thus, this phenomenological inquiry brought enlightenment and awareness about the complexities encountered by aged people.

Keywords: aged, qualitative studies, nursing homes, illness, family, phenomenological

Introduction

Life is a continuous progress. It is a journey that requires the human race to grow, develop, and mature enabling them to survive the complexities of the world (Mueller, 2017). Everybody is confronted with distinct episodes and transitions in life. Nobody stays young forever. People encounter age problems that encourage them to appreciate and value life even more.

According to Shakespeare's poem "Seven Ages of Man", people undergo different stages, from 'infant mewling and puking in the nurse' arms', through schoolboy, lover, soldier, justice, and pantaloon, to the ultimate stage 'sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything'. These transitions indicate that aging is inevitable. Aging represents the closing period in the lifespan, a time when the individual looks back on life, lives on past accomplishments, and begins to finish off his life course (Singh & Misra, 2009).

Old age is defined as the age of an individual approaching or beyond the average lifespan of humans. The elderly are known differently depending on the situation. For example, in the United States, they are referred to as seniors, and in the Philippines, they are known as elderly or senior citizens. Many people understand old age as a time for resting, reflecting, and an opportunity to perform activities that beyond pursuing during their career period (Miller, 2009). Adjusting to the changes that accompany old age requires an individual to be versatile and develop new coping skills to adapt to the changes that are common to this time in their lives (Singh & Misra, 2009).

The elderly manifests itself through external changes in their body systems. The hair turns grey, the face becomes distorted where wrinkles start to show, the attractive shape and natural glow of the skin slowly vanish, and most of all physical strength leaves us resulting in general weakness and physical and mental infirmity(Kumari, 2016).

Due to this frailness, aged people now feel the need for physical, moral, financial, and emotional support from their children, who, being grossly involved in the pursuit of their career problems, love affairs, and family lives, are unable to pay any attention to the needs of their parents and satisfy their emotional hanger. The young generation and their busiest lifestyle make them unavailable to care for the grey generation. Also, some children do not like spending time with old people and look at them as a burden. Therefore, the masses send their grandparents into the aged houses and leave them under the care of strangers.

Moreover, feeling ignored and unwanted, these elderly had no other choice but to accept these challenges wholeheartedly even if it meant spending their twilight years in isolation, pain, and misery.

Knowing and recognizing these struggles faced by aged people will greatly contribute to the understanding of people of different ages to guide them on how to deal with and cater to the needs of these elderly. Their awareness and consciousness will help them better understand this ultimate transition experienced by a human being.

This research uses a phenomenological study to answer the domain of inquiry that frames this study. The researcher would like to know the stories, experiences, and challenges dealt with by the aged people living in Asilo De Molo, a home for the Aged.

Domain of Inquiry

The main concern of this descriptive phenomenology study is to describe the lived experiences of the aged people in Asilo De Molo.

Specifically, it sought to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What are the struggles encountered by the aged people in Asilo De Molo?
2. Why did the aged people stay in a Home for the Aged?
3. How can aged people describe their experience in Asilo De Molo?

Significance of the Study

Awareness and knowledge of the lived experiences of aged people in the home for the aged would provide valuable insights to the following:

Aged People. The findings of the study will make the elderly feel valued and important. This will also enlighten them that they are not alone in facing the ultimate transition a human being experiences. Moreover, they will learn life lessons and be able to come up with different ideas to overcome difficulties in life as they age.

Nurses/Caregivers/Volunteers. The findings of this study will improve the services and performances rendered by the nurses, caregivers, and other volunteers of Asilo De Molo and other nursing homes to old people. They may be enlightened as to what the aged people think and feel which may lead them to develop appropriate strategies to help them create a warm and positive relationship with the elderly.

Administrators. They may provide an opportunity for administrators to develop programs to cater to the needs of the elderly. With this awareness, the administrators will develop various services and programs to provide a comfortable and relaxing environment for the old people.

The Department of Health (DOH). This may help the DOH to help them plan and conduct monitoring of different Homes for the aged. They will be able to assist the Administrators in extending help to all those elderly who are struggling especially on health issues. Also, their expertise will help the elderly to supervise their food intake.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). The DSWD will become a partner of the various Homes for the aged to give aid and help especially to those elderly who were no longer accepted by their family. Planning and Conducting of seminars and trainings will be offered by DSWD to all the staff to help them improve their services. The DSWD may also organize activities to inspire the elderly to enjoy their stay in the Home for the Aged. Appropriate actions may also be taken by DSWD to avoid maltreatment in nursing homes.

Community. The result of this study will inform the community particularly the special needs and attention of the elderly. It helps them realize that should not be regarded as an affliction. This study will provide ideas of this cohort of adults and understand all that is involved in the aging process. With this knowledge, they will be able to provide proper assistance and nurture to the elderly.

Future Researchers. They may serve as a reference for the new conduct of similar research. This research study may be a support as they unveil a new research study focusing on aged people.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed Husserlian Phenomenology. The phenomenological research approach was the most appropriate to the aim of the study, which was to describe the lived experiences of the aged people in Asilo De Molo. Phenomenology aims to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of the meaning of our everyday experiences. The phenomenological approach allowed participants, through in-depth interviews, to elicit their own meaning of their experience of being involved in performing TOPs. "Phenomenology aims to describe a person's lived experiences (phenomena) in an attempt to enrich the lived experience by drawing out its meaning" (Mamabolo & Tjallinks, 2010).

The researcher aims to describe and understand the experiences of aged people in Asilo De Molo and use the gathered data to inform and share the stories of these older people living in homes for the aged.

Using purposive sampling, researchers will select individuals for study participation based on their particular knowledge of a phenomenon for the purpose of sharing that knowledge (Jeanfreau, 2010). This is an appropriate method to select the participants for a study using a descriptive phenomenological approach because the aim is to understand and describe a particular phenomenon from the perspective of those who have experienced it.

Six informants were interviewed for this study. A phenomenological approach was implemented using open-ended (but structured) questions, as a method to gather an in-depth understanding of the individual's environment.

Environment/Locale

This phenomenological study was conducted in Asilo De Molo, located at Avaceña Street, Molo, Iloilo City. It is one of the nursing homes in the Philippines, founded in 1912 by Bishop Dennis Dougherty, Bishop of Jaro. It used to be called as the Molo Asylum, with the aim to give shelter and necessary care to the elderly in and around Iloilo City. Under the care of the Sisters of the Daughters of Charity, Asilo de Molo became a home for the homeless, and a shelter for the needy.

Asilo focused on the care of the indigent, abandoned, and neglected older persons. Through the generosity of concerned citizens, cottages were constructed for the resident older persons. A total of 44 elderly are residing in Asilo, with 4 males and 39 females.

Asilo De Molo is a non-stock, non-profit, charitable institution that offers different kinds of services such as social services, home-life care services, medical-dental services, and socio-recreational services.

Informants

This descriptive phenomenological study focuses on aged people who were living in a home for the aged. Asilo De Molo was personally chosen by the researcher to get her informants.

The informants of this study were six aged people living in Asilo De Molo, ages from 60 and above who willingly share his/her stories, experiences and struggles as old people.

The identification of informants was done through coordination with the secretary of Asilo De Molo who untiringly helped the researcher gather essential data. She provided a schedule for the researcher to conduct her interview with the six informants.

According to Salkind (2010), in order to identify subjects who will be included in a research study, a set of predefined characteristics known as the inclusion criteria were followed: A person ages 60 years old and above; a resident of Asilo De Molo; and not suffering from mental illness or speech defect.

Aged people from Asilo De Molo were used as informants in this study regardless of the number of years they stayed in Asilo for as long as they were willing to share their stories and experiences about their lives. For inclusion in the study, the informant should be 60 years old and above which in the Philippine context is considered as an elderly. The informant must be an official resident of Asilo De Molo and have the experience and knowledge of life in a home for the aged. To capture a range of experiences, attempts are being made to recruit both males and females. Also, one important factor in this study is the ability of the informant to share her experiences and be willing to impart her lived experiences as an elderly so he/she must have good mental health and is not suffering from speech defects.

Sampling Technique

This study utilized purposive sampling. The researchers select individuals for study participation based on their particular knowledge of a phenomenon for the purpose of sharing that knowledge (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). 6 informants are adequate to provide rich descriptions of the phenomenon.

Instrument

The data were obtained through the use of audio-recorder and note-taking. The researchers had a one-on-one interview with the informants about their lived experiences as aged people in Asilo De Molo.

Research Tools

The research tools employed in this study were interviews and direct observation. A self-made interview guide was used to gather the stories and experiences of the informants. The interview questions helped elicit responses from them and understand the data evolving from the lived experiences of the informants.

Data Gathering Procedure

Necessary permits were secured before the conduct of the interview. The researcher was given a schedule to start the observation and interviews with the aged people. There were strict rules that needed to be followed by the researcher, one of which was to let the informants share their experiences without pressuring them to answer the questions and make sure to conduct an orientation for them to have a clear picture of what was going to happen during the one-on-one interview. The informants shared their lived experiences through life as an aged person living in Asilo De Molo, thereby creating a significant result for this study. A group composed of six informants is appropriate, for them to express experiences related to the topic.

The interview for this study was conducted in Hiligaynon and lasted approximately one hour. The informants voluntarily shared their stories and experiences during the interview which was recorded using a cell phone.

Data Analysis

There are several approaches to data analysis within the different schools of phenomenology. Colaizzi, Giorgi, and Van Kaam formulated three methods of data analysis, based on Husserl's descriptive phenomenology.

The informants had a one-on-one interview with the researcher after asking for approval. After the data were collected through a semi-structured interview guide (audio-video taped), the rich in-depth narratives and responses to questions were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using Colaizzi's method of analysis. The researcher attempted to understand the meanings embedded in the participants' statements to uncover common themes. The focus is on how each informant constructs meaning and knowledge through their lived experiences as an aged person in Asilo De Molo. "Health and Well-being", "Filial Piety", "Ardent Faith" were the three themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews.

The results of the study were shared with six informants, who confirmed the findings as their own original descriptions, to verify the statements and validate the information.

The researcher carefully considered her own perception and prior assumptions regarding the concept of aging.

Ethical Considerations

In the conduct of the study, the researcher takes into account the ethical issues that may arise during the conduct of the study. Thus, to protect the informants of the study, the researcher will gain their trust and confidence to instill the integrity of the research, guard against misconduct and any impropriety that can be reflected in their institutions, and cope with new challenging problems.

The researcher respected the informants' rights, needs, values, and desires. The researcher will carefully ask preliminary questions about personal issues before the distribution of the questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

Out of six informants, five were females, and one was male. The informants were all above 60 years old and willingly shared their lived experiences as elderly. According to Gorman, the age of 60 or 65, is said to be the beginning of old age (WHO, 2017). The informants were mostly from Antique while two are native residents of Iloilo City. Four of the informants remained unmarried, one is separated and the other one is a widow.

Struggles Faced by Aged People

Based on the responses of the informants, an old person struggles to maintain the same energy as they have before. Different illnesses had invaded their body which resulted to confusion, frailty and poor health. They suffer from different kinds of illnesses and disability that hinders them to consistently accomplish their daily task. Their responses also indicate that as they grow old their body becomes weak which decreases their participation in different tasks.

As Besdine explains (2017) Aging is a gradual, continuous process of natural change that begins in early adulthood and later on lead to gradual declining of body functions. For example, as people age, the lens of the eye thickens, stiffens, and becomes less able to focus on close objects, such as reading materials (a disorder called presbyopia). This change occurs in virtually all older people.

The finding also shows that a life of an elderly undergone a lot of changes from their physical appearance down to their emotional stability. Older people long for the presence and care of their family, making them feel lonely and empty. This conforms to the article of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland that older people are often called on to face drastic, and sometimes unwelcome, changes— moving home, retirement from a job, and the loss of a partner. As their physical prowess wane they may have to cope with illness, pain or loss of mobility. Loneliness is a very real problem, as contemporaries die and families move. They become increasingly aware that their life on earth is nearly over and many are afraid of dying. Older people are to be recognised as part of the family, not overlooked or pushed to one side. Their advice and help should be sought whenever appropriate. If they live on their own— which is usually desirable in the interests of maintaining identity and independence

-- there should be frequent visiting and contacts. Nor should this be thought of as "one-way traffic", for grandparents, great-aunts and great-uncles have an immense contribution to make to the younger generation. Another article from Vietnam (2009) emphasized the importance of family. The family unit is strong and practical. Today the family unit is breaking part as young men and women travel widely in search of better jobs. So the chances are that the old folks will be left alone and neglected. Sometimes they are not wanted by their children at all. The luckier ones may have a child or two staying with them. The less fortunate ones may have to pine their lives away in an old-folk home or in their empty house that once was filled with the sound of children's laughter. This neglect is a very real problem in our society and it is what the old dread the most-being unwanted and uncared for in the time of need.

Staying in a Home for the Aged

Home for the aged has been providing shelter to the elderly. Based on the responses of the informants, Asilo De Molo accepted them wholeheartedly and encouraged them to develop sense of independency. The finding indicates that old person especially those who do not have children prefer to live in home for the aged to be taken care of. They cannot rely on their relatives to accept the challenge of looking out for them. According to HelpAge NGO (2017), homes for the Aged are ideal for elderly people who are alone, face health problems, depression and loneliness.

This also supports an article from Australia that sometimes, the best way to receive help and support can be by living in an aged care home (sometimes known as a nursing home) either on a permanent basis or for a short stay (called 'residential respite').

Aged people need help because of an illness, a disability, and an emergency. Staff at aged care homes can help them with day-to-day tasks (such as cleaning, cooking, laundry); personal care (such as dressing, grooming, going to the toilet); or 24-hour nursing care (such as wound care, catheter care).

The result of this study revealed that in Asilo, the elderly have the liberty to show that are becoming weak and that sometimes their illnesses and disability stop them from performing even just a simple task like going to comfort rooms.

An article from Home Instead, Inc. (2017) explained that as men and women age, they need more help with the activities of daily living and many either have limitations in what they can do, or require regular assistance. Seniors can get depressed at the thought of losing their mobility and independence. After so many years of being on their own, taking care of themselves, they now have difficulty performing even the simplest tasks. However, home care services make it possible for people to take care of their ageing loved ones and help them maintain their independence.

Experiences in Asilo

The findings revealed that Asilo has served as a home for the aged people. They are able to help in doing chores like washing their own clothes and cleaning their room. They were given the opportunity to take part in different activities and programs. According to an article from SeniorHomes.com (2017), no matter the type or location of the elderly home, activities play a vital role in helping residents of all physical abilities live as fully as possible. Activities should be designed not only to honor residents' preferences and needs, but also to engage body, mind and spirit. Through these different services and programs, older people were able to help them forget the weariness of life. Also, providing nursing home residents with stimulating activities is an important part of improving their quality of life (Roper, 2016).

Based on the results, the informants also shared that Asilo motivated them build strong relationship with God. The elders were encouraged to pray the rosary and attend daily mass. These spiritual activities allowed the elderly to deepen their connection with God. As explained by Erichsen & Bussing (2013), there is a need to care not only for their physical health but also for their psychosocial aspects. Furthermore, a study from the late 80th stated that "older persons have significant needs that cannot be met by psychotherapy, social work, or other disciplines," particularly because these elderly "often feel useless and without dignity" on the one hand and have to struggle with "thoughts of dying" on the other hand. A small pilot enrolling ten patients from a care of the elderly assessment unit found that elderly patients stated needs "related to religion, meaning, love and belonging, morality, and death and dying" (Erichsen & Bussing, 2013). Such needs indicate a gap between specific expectations and the situation as it is, or, in other words, "if the individual resources to deal with the challenges (...) are insufficient to restore well-being, patients may express specific needs". With respect to patients' unmet needs, patients may expect that the fulfillment of their spiritual needs can have a positive influence on their quality of life and life satisfaction. For several people interviewed, religion was also an important determinant of quality of life. Therefore, approaches that promote appropriate and regular times for religious practice within nursing homes should be encouraged (Cahill & Diaz, 2010).

However, two informants of this study shared that they have experienced violence inside the nursing home. And these encounters had caused harm and uneasiness to them. The findings indicate that old people who experience violence develop hatred and discomfort. This result conforms to the study of WHO (2017) that it is generally agreed that abuse of older people is either an act of commission or omission (in which case it is usually described as ("neglect"), and that it may be either intentional or unintentional.

During their stay in Asilo, the informants were given the chance to meet new people. The findings also revealed that aged people enjoy interacting with visitors. Relationships with outsiders were also considered very important to some elderly residents who often enjoyed seeing new faces come into the nursing homes. Initiatives that facilitate these relationships, such as voluntary workers coming into the nursing homes, or transitional students doing work placements within and approaches that encourage residents to maintain links and sustain relationships with significant people outside the nursing home may help promote a positive quality of life (Chill & Diaz, 2010).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the study revealed that as to age, the majority of the informants belong to the age bracket of 75 years old and above and only one is 65 years old. As to place of residence, three out of six were a native resident of Antique, two informants were certified Ilonggo, and one was from Capiz as to their marital status four out of six were single and unmarried, one was separated and the other was a widow.

The results revealed that as people get old, they suffer from a sheer number of illnesses and disabilities. They become weak and brittle, enduring changes in appearance and losing strength. It also revealed that aged people gradually experience a gradual decline in body functions. However, the effects of aging also vary from person to person. As indicated in the findings, other elderly are still able to perform tasks while others cannot.

As reflected in the responses of the informants, old people spend their twilight years in Asilo De Molo because they have no family or relatives who would care for them. Five out of six informants were childless and for this reason, they do not have someone to take the responsibility of looking out for them. With this, they decided to stay in Asilo De Molo where there are people who provide assistance and aid.

The findings show that Asilo De Molo offers varied and rich experiences to aged people. They were able to exhibit what they can still do despite being old. Also, their stay in Asilo helped them strengthen their faith and trust in God as they faced the ultimate transition of the human life cycle. Moreover, the results also explained the importance of having a confidante, and being able to enjoy a good social life, or simply having company, companionship, and someone to talk to, which were identified as vital components of helping aged people to improve their quality of life. These better help the elderly to overcome boredom and loneliness. The findings also revealed that aged people suffer from maltreatment and violence.

Conclusions

Based on the aforementioned findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn;

As revealed, an older adult is defined as someone age 60 or older. Aged people living in Asilo De Molo come from different places that were abandoned and neglected by their families and relatives. These old people spend their sunset years in Asilo since they do not have children to turn to. Most of them remained single and unmarried. This may be because they focus more on looking for jobs to help them provide for their needs and survive life. Most of the informants were orphaned which indicates that they were taught to strive hard to help themselves overcome the struggles of life.

The changes in appearance and vulnerability of people to sickness and disability suggest that they are experiencing the aging process – from the deluge of diseases to sagging skin and the dulling of the senses, old age is beset with creeping failures, medical interventions, and low expectations. Some may start feeling weak and useless while others struggle to keep the fire burning. Emotional stability becomes a challenge that requires them to reinvent themselves. This may also mean that getting old is taking a leap of faith. Clueless of what is ahead but hopeful that everything happens for a reason.

Nursing homes like Asilo De Molo play an important role in the lives of older people. Aged people who were abandoned and neglected find refuge in Asilo. It accepted them the way they were and uplifted them physically, mentally, and emotionally. This is maybe because nursing homes like Asilo De Molo were built to care for those old people who were ignored by their families and society. Also, this may also suggest that no one in their family or relatives was brave enough to accept the challenge of caring for them.

Programs and activities in nursing homes greatly contribute to the holistic development of old people. Exposing them to different activities enhances their physical, mental, and emotional health. It also shows that spiritual support for people living in Asilo and other long-term care facilities is vital to their well-being and a requisite for the holistic care we strive to achieve. Spiritual and religious activities for people profoundly influence their sense of well-being. Activities such as attending the Mass, praying or singing together, and/or receiving faith counsel from a Minister of religion. Visitations from other people also enhanced the emotional stability of the elderly. Meeting new faces and interacting with visitors motivate them to value and appreciate their life even more. Asilo provides many experiences for the aged people to become weary and miserable.

Recommendations

Getting older involves change, both negative and positive, it is important to understand these changes to avoid complications. Gathering senior citizens and educating them on the possible changes they might possibly undergo when they get old. Asilo De Molo and other nursing homes may start organizing enjoyable and

nurturing activities to alleviate not only their physical and mental health but their emotional health as well. Preparing seminars and training for the elderly, nurses, caregivers, and volunteers will allow them to gain new knowledge and improve what they already know. Showing respect and recognition will increase old people's self esteem and self-respect. Furthermore, allowing aged people to engage in an active lifestyle will boost their health conditions. The involvement of aged people in doing chores will most likely elevate their worth as an individual.

As a dwelling place for aged people, Asilo De Molo can continue arranging excellent activities for aged people to enjoy their stay in Asilo. These activities may lessen their painful experiences outside the four walls of the nursing home. More training and workshops may be provided to the faculty and staff of Asilo and other nursing homes to remind them of the extra care and attention that must be extended to the old people. The Administration should ensure that the facilities in the nursing home function or else this may lead to discomfort and uneasiness. Administrators should make a move in reconciling society and aged people to build strong relationships that could help the country's progress.

Asilo De Molo aims to provide a warm and pleasant environment to the elderly. Creations of wide and varied activities will eventually intensify the lifestyle and moods of aged people. A strong relationship and communication with God could heighten their desire to live and be satisfied with their current state. This will guide them to maintain a sense of purpose as they spend their golden years. Imparting new things and sharing new ideas which could inspire them to become the best version of themselves. Aged people hope to spend their final years with contentment and happiness, through the support of the faculty and staff this could be attained. The Administrators should find ways to reach out to the families and relatives to reconnect with their loved ones in Asilo.

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