

The Quality of Life of the Elderly in Mangatarem, Pangasinan

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Abstract - This research was conducted in order to determine the relationship between the demographic characteristics of Senior Citizens and their quality of life. Elderly people who were either breadwinners, surrogate parents and/or still employed from Mangatarem, Pangasinan were included in this study. To evaluate the participant's quality of life, an overall life satisfaction scale and the ranking of different life domains were used. The results showed that among the aspects of life that were included in the study, elders were most satisfied with their relationship with their family where as they were least contented with their health. Majority of the older adults felt happiness and they were relatively satisfied with their life. Lastly, only the educational attainment of the participants was significant to their quality of life. However, other factors such as adjustment problems and the conditions of the respondent's spouses have affected the results of this study.

Keywords – elderly, life satisfaction, quality of life, senior citizen

INTRODUCTION

The main focus of this case study was the quality of life of elders who played any of the emerging roles of elders: breadwinners, surrogate parents (those who engage in childcare because of absence of a child's parent), engage in household chores and/or employed. The study was conducted in Mangatarem, Pangasinan and used the case-study method to provide an in-depth analysis. This town has a population of 69,969 [1] and 4,425 or 6% of them are senior citizens [2]. It is also a part of Region I, which has the highest proportion of population of elderly in the Philippines. Ilocos Region constitutes 9% of the total population (NSO CPH, 2010), higher than the 6.8% nationwide statistics.

Former studies about the quality of life of elderly citizens were usually from the field of medicine and economics. These were limited to objective indicators such as educational attainment and age. By making this research, we were able to look at the perspectives of the elderly, through the means of their life satisfaction, happiness and morale.

The field of developmental psychology has not yet given enough emphasis to the last stage of life. It usually revolves on children and adolescence. The elders are still part of the

society and they still play vital social roles in the country. This study contributes to the rising focus towards the elderly and will help identify which among the life domains are they most satisfied with. This study will also help contribute to the necessary needs of the Filipino senior citizens based on what domain of life they consider as the most important.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims to know the how the elders in Mangatarem, Pangasinan view their quality of life given that they have emerging roles. With this research question, the study aimed to determine the elderly citizens' quality of life in terms of their life satisfaction, happiness, morale and life domains. It also verified if elders who acquire more emerging roles are more satisfied, happier and are more confident. The study also intended to determine which among the different life domains the elders view as the most important and why, in addition to knowing why the senior citizens are satisfied/dissatisfied, with this/these domain/s of life.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

One of the main languages that is being used in Mangatarem, Pangasinan is Tagalog, aside from Ilocano and Pangasinan. Thus, the researchers opted to apply this on the guide questions. The four independent variables in this study (i.e. Socio-Economic Status, Living Arrangements, Number of Roles Played, and Social Support) will have their own series of questions, in order to get most of the information need in having a deeper understanding and knowledge of the quality of life of senior citizens in Mangatarem, Pangasinan.

The survey questionnaire was divided into two parts; the first dealt with demographic characteristics of the elderly. This included qualitative variables such as the gender, educational attainment, religion, occupation and type of living arrangement of the respondent. For the second part, a Likert scale was used. Different domains of life, such as health, family ties, wealth and religion or spiritual life were rated from 1 to 5. One (1) represents “very dissatisfied” whereas five (5) for being “very satisfied”.

The respondents were asked if they will allow the researchers to record the interview. The information were then transcribed for further analysis. With the on-going conversations between the participants and the researchers, deeper information were gathered and more productive analysis were provided.

Analysis of Variance was used to analyze the data gathered through survey questionnaires. This examined the relationship of the demographic traits of older Filipinos and their life satisfaction scores. To rank the different domains of life based on its importance in the proposed study, the means and standard deviations were computed for each. The domain with the highest mean deviation score was the life domain that satisfies senior citizens most. The qualitative characteristics of the respondents were asked in order to compare and contrast the quality of life of the elderly.

All information given by the participants were thoroughly studied. The conversations were used to peruse additional data that would be helpful on have a deeper understanding and

knowledge of the quality of life of senior citizens in Mangatarem, Pangasinan.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To determine the variables that have an effect on the quality of life of the elderly, the demographic characteristics of the respondents were regressed with their life satisfaction scores.

30 elderly who are either surrogate parents, bread winners and/or still employed were included in the study. They were from the different barangays in Mangatarem, Pangasinan. 60 per cent were males, 40 per cent were female respondents. 70 per cent of the participants aged between 60-69 whereas the remaining 30 per cent were elders who were 70 or older. By means of their marital status, only 3.3 per cent of the participants were single, 76.7 were married while 20 per cent were widowed. In the Philippine setting, divorce and separation are not yet that prominent, this might be the reason why none of the senior citizens were separated nor divorced. In the sample, more than one-fourth of the sample or 26.7 per cent of the participants were elementary graduates. The same percentage, 26.7 per cent were able to attain up to the secondary level. Only 10 per cent have finished vocational courses while 23.3 per cent finished until the tertiary level. The remaining 13.3 per cent were able to have their post graduate studies. On one hand, 46.7 get money from their pension. On the other hand, more than half of them, or 53.3 per cent of the participants do not have their pension. They get money through the help of their children and/or by still being employed.

For the living arrangement of the elders in Mangatarem, 6.7 percent of the participants were living alone. 3.3 per cent live with their siblings, and 6.7 per cent live with only their spouse. Seniors staying with their spouse and children constitute only 6.7 per cent of the sample. 20 per cent have living arrangements with their children and grandchildren while 46.7 are with their spouse, children and grandchildren. Another 6.7 are with their spouse and grandchildren, lastly, only 3.3 per cent live with other relatives.

Notice that very few elderly are living alone. Most of the respondents are living with their children and their grandchildren. This is not surprising since in the Philippines there is a remarkable close family ties in which parents have difficulty letting go of their children hence they also live with their children's children or their grandchildren. More so, it is a part of the culture of the Filipinos to take care of their elderly inside their homes unlike in the west where elderly are provided with outside homes and care giving.

20 per cent have only one emerging role. 56.7 per cent have two of the following: still employed, breadwinners and/or surrogate parents. 23.3 of the sample play all of the roles. By means of the elders' social ties, majority, that is 83.3 per cent of the elderly people in the study were members of an organization. Only 16.7 per cent did not belong to any social group.

A. Overall Life Satisfaction Score

The whole sample gathered an overall life satisfaction score of 3.73 which indicate, based on the likert scale, that the whole sample is relatively satisfied with their life.

Overall, elders from Mangataram, Pangasinan who were either surrogate parents, still employed and/or were breadwinners were most satisfied with their relationship with their family (4.23) and friends or neighbours (4.07). Contrary, they were not that contented with their wealth (3.63) and they were least satisfied with their health (3.27). As was mentioned, more than half of the elder respondents do not have pension, and those senior citizens who have pension were not really satisfied with what they get due to it being inadequate for their everyday needs.

A lot of changes occur as an individual approaches the latter stages of life. This includes the decline in the physical traits and capabilities of the person. Regarding their health, most of the elders complained of having at least one illness, such as back sores, eyesight and hearing problems, and mental skills often slipped with time. Some of them even admitted of having major sickness, such as diabetes, stroke, and heart failure.

B. Importance of Various Aspects of Life

Aside from the aspects of life that they were most satisfied with, the participants in this study were also asked, which among the given list of life domains they view as the most essential. Based on the data that were gathered, majority of them perceived family as the most important domain of life. Their reasons for this answer were as follows: their family gives them strength and their family makes them feel good. They also think that their money is useless if they do not have their loved ones with them.

Senior Citizens may have primarily answered family as the central domain because it is likely to be the only thing that is stable in their life now. Having friends might be difficult, or might be rare because as older adults, they are prone to already be with the Creator. If they were people oriented when they were younger, to cope up with the lost or decreased social ties, they focused on their relationship with their family. Without their family, they feel lonely. This probably explains the strong ties senior citizens have with their families.

This was followed by health. In the case of health, the respondents stated that it is necessary to be healthy so that they can still work and they can help those that are in need. Health is always a concern for the elders. There are obvious physical and mental marks of being a senior citizen. Body pains, diminished hearing and eyesight, heart and immune function failures are some of the physical marks of the elders. Aside from memory loss, which is common in old age, other mental marks of being a senior citizen are being depressed, being cautious, and being fearful. The respondents may have been experiencing some of these, and they may know that these serve as limitations on how they deal with the relationships with other people. Elders may also think that having a poor health may render them useless or serve as burden to their loved ones. This is most likely the reason why they value health at this point of their life.

Firstly, as elderly citizens, they feel happy because they were able to sustain the needs and demands of the family. This view may have come from the fact that they spent most of their life doing their best to provide for their children.

Having this responsibility and still continually doing it at this age may give them a sense of contentment. Knowing that they are still the breadwinners of their family give them the realization that they are still a vital part of the family because they are still being needed.

This is also true with the second point, that is, elders still being employed. Erikson's seventh stage of psychosocial development, Generativity versus Stagnation, may be seen in this aspect. This happens during middle adulthood (40-65), while most of the elders who were still employed and are still able to provide for their family are on the early years of adulthood. Knowing that they can still contribute not only to their family but also to society, by being active both in their homes and their community, gives them joy and a sense of pride.

Lastly, several respondents said that they do not feel useless because they are still capable to take care of their grandchildren, with or without the help of their offspring. Being able to act as a parent once more may give them the idea that they were already used on doing this when they were younger, thus, making them confident that they know that they are doing the right things. Also, every time their grandchildren receive awards, such as being an outstanding student, they also have a sense of fulfilment. They may feel that they are a big reason for the successes of their grandchildren.

Aside from the domains of life (health, relationship with family, friends and neighbours, wealth) that were listed in the likert scale, 40 per cent of the sample view religion as another important aspect in their life at present. Religion for elderly people is a "perception of a measure of control over life through prayer, and faith in God as a way of interpreting misfortunes" [3]. For the respondents in the study, they said something similar about religion. Religion for them is a guide and helps to solve their problems. Above all, they said that religion is part of their preparation for death. That is because through religion, specifically prayer, they can tell anything to the Lord and he will listen no matter what time of the day.

Religion is somehow an expected answer for the aspect of life that is relevant for the

elderly. However, it was not included in the list of the life domains because relatively few literatures support its effect in an individual's well-being. Since our nation is considered as a Christian country, most Filipinos have been taught the importance of religion even at a very young age. The older citizens might have 'carried over' the values that they have learned while they were growing up, therefore, they continue to be spiritually active. Also, elderly citizens might still have remaining friends in the church. By going to church, both their relationship with the Lord and their relationship with people who share similar beliefs with them become deeper. Through religion, they have found not only comfort but also understanding, therefore, at church they do not feel outcasted.

C. Quality of Life Based on the Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

The results show that males were more satisfied with their life compared to their female counterparts. This shows that at age 64, the satisfaction of males with family life exceeds the satisfaction of females [4]. The males, according to their study, came closer to fulfilling their life goals, and they were more satisfied with their financial situations and family life. Another possible reason as to why males were more contented was that as males become senior citizen, there is a tendency for them to just enjoy their days relaxing, while expecting their female counterpart to still do the household chores, to look over their grandchildren, and to even decide on how to manage their everyday budget.

Elderly people between 70 and 74 were the most contented among the four age groups. Whereas those 65 to 69 were the most dissatisfied.

The respondents from Mangatarem who were at least 60 years old have already accepted the consequences brought by old age. They were no longer afraid of death because they have already established a strong relationship with the Lord. Religion was perceived to be very important by the participants and they see praying as a preparation for death.

Compared to single and/or married, widowed individuals were the ones that were

satisfied the most. This does not support the claims of previous studies [5] that married elders were more likely to be happier and satisfied than those who were never/or no longer married. On one hand, those who were widowed felt sadness as their spouse died, however they probably have a higher score of life satisfaction because they have had more freedom after grieving. As time passes, widows became more socially involved [6].

Six of the respondents in this study were widowed. They were all members of at least one organization. They have experienced the pain of having their partner passed away. But almost all of them explained the importance of their families, friends, and their respective organizations on their being able to let go and “accept the realities of life”. These social supports were very important at that stage of their lives, as they felt that they were not alone and they belonged to a group or family who can understand them and will always be there for them. They also emphasized that the love and support from these people made them stronger and more grateful. Widowed seniors continued to find sources of happiness despite the loss of their spouses. As one elder said, “I lost my husband, but I now have a grandchild” while the other stated that their family's bond became stronger after a love one died. Another widower stated the importance of her religious group on her coping up stage that was full of stress and sadness. She was able to live her life wholeheartedly for the Lord.

Elders living with only their spouse and grandchildren have the highest overall life satisfaction score but senior citizens who have pensions were least contented with their life during the study. Based on the data gathered, those who do not have pension were more satisfied with their life because they were helped by their children to sustain for the needs of the family. They have closer bonds with their family and they were also the same individuals who view wealth to be not that important. They are already satisfied as long as they are able to provide for their needs.

It is also relevant to explain that senior citizens who have pensions receive their funds

from Social Security System (SSS) and/or Government Service Insurance System (GSIS). These retirement funds were insufficient relative to what they spend on their everyday needs. One elder even stated that the pension that he was getting was just being used for the payment on his debts. He was not able to enjoy it as compared to what he expected before. In another case, some of the elders who do not receive pension have children, grandchildren, or other relatives abroad that send them ample amount of money to provide for their needs. This can be a possible explanation why those who do not have pension were more satisfied with their life than those who were receiving their pension.

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It is also noteworthy that the money that pensioners were earning when they were still working is relatively bigger than what they are receiving as their pension at present. They are not used to the decrease in their financial status. Most probably, those who do not have their pension are already used to not having “that much” even before. Therefore, unlike those who have pension, they did not experience adjustment problems.

Those who play more roles were happier than those with lesser tasks. Activity theory suggests that “individuals who are able to remain socially active will be more likely to achieve a positive self-image, social integration, and satisfaction with their life” [7]. The answers of the senior citizens were consistent with the activity theory. Members of an organization were more contented than non-members.

D. The Role of Education in the Well-being of the Elderly

Post graduates gained the highest overall life satisfaction score (4.13) if analyzed by means of their educational attainment. This was consistent with the common notion about the

relationship between educational attainment and life satisfaction. Individuals who were able to reach a higher educational level usually have higher satisfaction scores. Despite this, if the data were to be further analyzed, it can be noticed that there was a twist in the results that were gathered. College graduates (3.46) have a lower score than the elementary (3.72), high school (3.91) and vocational graduates (4.08). This was consistent with the common notion that individuals who were able to reach a higher educational level usually have higher satisfaction scores. However, this study shows that as the college graduates registered the lowest mean satisfaction score of 3.46, basically lower than that of the primary (3.72), high school (3.91) and vocational graduates (4.08). Those who have tertiary education seemed to be the most dissatisfied with their lives.

Post graduates on the contrary, may also not be able to use their skills, but they are still widely recognized after their retirement. They are still labelled as doctors, or as a master’s degree holder. This may also be the reason why they also gained the highest life satisfaction score if based on educational attainment. Also, having a post graduate degree is a source of pride not many are able to achieve this level of education.

In terms of financial matters, despite having their monthly pensions, the elderly’s

dissatisfaction might emanate from the fact that their salaries before are higher compared to their pension. Their financial capacity has been decreased. In the case of those with lower educational attainment, no sudden change in their financial power could be observed since most of them are not working before. So even if they do not have pensions, dissatisfaction is not that high. For those with post graduate degree, financial matter is not an issue since they are still productive. Having a high educational degree they are usually tapped as speakers and consultants.

Since education is widely considered as important in the Philippine setting, having a high degree boosts the confidence of those who were able to achieve it. Generally speaking, once one has finished schooling, everything else usually follows, like a good job then a good future.

With regards to psychological effect, those who have tertiary education are having a hard time dealing with their new environment. They feel that there is a complete turnover of their lives. The sudden change in all their activities is an indication that they are indeed growing old and no longer needed in the society. An in-depth analysis of the situations of the respondents will reveal that most of them are dealing with various issues with their lives.

Analysis between the Life Domains

Table 1: Frequency table of the Life Domains

		DOMAIN			
		Wealth	Health	Family	Social Life
Rating	1	2	0	0	0
	2	1	0	0	0
	3	16	1	5	5
	4	9	21	18	18
	5	2	8	7	7
Mean		3.24	4.23	4.07	4.07
Std. Deviation		0.907	0.504	0.64	0.64

If the different domains of life were to be regressed, they elicit significant results. Family garnered the highest mean of satisfaction. This confirms that the respondents were really happy with their family. The lowest variance was also registered, which indicates that the ratings of the

respondents were similar with each other. On the other hand, health registered the lowest mean which also indicates that they were not satisfied with their health. It must be noted however that it also recorded highest variance which shows that responses are somewhat varied.

Result of the ANOVA indicates that the respondents level of satisfaction in the different domains vary significantly. While they were satisfied with their family and social life domains, they gave health a significantly lower rating.

Family has higher satisfaction rating than health and wealth. Higher satisfaction rating was given for social life than health. Therefore, the respondents were not that contented with their wealth and health.

Table 2: Multiple Comparisons of the Different life Domains

(I) DOMAIN	(J) DOMAIN	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval
					Lower Bound
Health	Family	-.96667*	.18268	.000	-1.4428
	Social Life	-.80000*	.18268	.000	-1.2762
	Wealth	-.36667	.18268	.191	-.8428
Family	Health	.96667*	.18268	.000	.4905
	Social Life	.16667	.18268	.798	-.3095
	Wealth	.60000*	.18268	.007	.1238
Social Life	Health	.80000*	.18268	.000	.3238
	Family	-.16667	.18268	.798	-.6428
	Wealth	.43333	.18268	.088	-.0428
Wealth	Health	.36667	.18268	.191	-.1095
	Family	-.60000*	.18268	.007	-1.0762
	Social Life	-.43333	.18268	.088	-.9095

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level. Since the domains of life have significantly varied from one another, it can be shown that there are big differences between the rankings of this domain. Meaning, the satisfaction score of the overall population for their family is ‘deeper’ than their satisfaction score for the life domains with lower rankings. The respondents are highly satisfied in their family in a great degree.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study looked upon the effects of socio-economic status, living arrangements, number of roles and their social support on the quality of life of senior citizens in Mangatarem, Pangasinan. To evaluate their quality of life, an overall life satisfaction scale and the ranking of

different domains of life were used. Among the domains of life, elderly people were most satisfied with their relationship with their family. They also perceived that the most important thing in their life at this stage is also their family. This research has found out that this is the case because most of the participants are supported by their relatives both financially and emotionally.

Of all the variables that were used in the study, only the educational attainment of the participants was significant to their quality of life. Since education is widely treasured in the Philippines, those who have higher educational attainment felt a sense of achievement and a more optimistic sense of well-being especially in the case of those with postgraduate degree. Education played an important role in the quality of life of the elderly. In the case of those who have tertiary education on the other hand a sense of dissatisfaction could be noted due to the shift in

their life from a productive individual to a basically idle one. This is also one of the reasons why they engaged into different organizations such as senior citizens club, for them to have something to be busy with.

However, the quality of life of the participants in this study was not only limited to education alone. Other factors, such as the health of the participants, the conditions of their spouses and adjustments problems have also affected the outcome of the study. Overall, elderly citizens were mostly happy in having to still play emerging roles despite their age. Through this study, not only the government, but also the individuals surrounding the senior citizens are able to get ideas of the perceptions of the elders. This also focused on the concerns and needs of older people therefore; policy makers may be able to use this research if ever they plan on revising the current senior citizen code of the country.

Lots of efforts have been devoted in the making of this study. However, just like other studies about the quality of life of the elderly, this research has its limitations and pitfalls. Therefore, in order to further develop the scope of this study, various recommendations are suggested in this section.

One area of further exploration to enhance the study is to increase the time allotted for this study. Since this was the case, the time to

look for qualified participants was also limited and difficult. Therefore, the number of the participants was relatively small. Having more respondents could give more narratives that would provide additional and essential information for this research. This also caused a limitation to the amount of data that could be collected and further analyzed in this study. To avoid biases and to increase the variation of the respondents, it is highly recommended to increase the sample size.

Also, to make comparisons across various groups of the elderly it is suggested to have two groups of senior citizens for the future studies. One group will consist of conventional elders whereas the second group will be made up of older adults who have emerging roles. Through this, we can determine if there are differences in the perceptions of elders who are either breadwinners, surrogate parents and/or still employed from those who are not. Comparing these two groups will deepen the understanding of the quality of their life and may contribute to the limited studies conducted about the elderly.

As an addition, further researches should consider other variables in the study such as socio-economic status. Other studies have more variables. Time is just too limited. The situation of the elderly could have been taken into consideration – if they are tired, they wouldn't be able to answer well.

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