Relocating to an Old Age Home: A Qualitative Analysis of Older Adults Living in the Old Age Homes of Punjab, Pakistan

ᵃ Sana Shahid, ᵇ Jawad Tariq

ᵃ Lecturer, Lahore Business School, University of Lahore, Lahore, Pakistan
ᵇ Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Forman Christian College (A Chartered University), Lahore, Pakistan

ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
	Shifting to old age homes is a rather new concept in Pakistan. However, it is happening. And there is a need to make it an easy transition for the elderly. The idea was to explore all the issues the elderly face while shifting to old age homes so that they can be tackled in the best possible way. This qualitative study was carried out with the help of 22 respondents, including both males and females residing in three major old homes of Punjab. The interview technique was utilized to gather data, and then themes were analyzed. The thematic analysis of the gathered data indicated various themes, including autonomy and old homes, decision and dependability, quality of life, establishing new relationships and emotional reactions to relocation. Other than these themes, lack of a proper transitional process and role of the staff members are also highlighted. The themes that are being identified in the research will help in highlighting all the issues elderly face while shifting to old age homes. Since it is something that is not in accordance with our cultural values, a proper support system is required to make it as smooth as possible.

Corresponding author's email address: jawadtariq@fccollege.edu.pk

1. Introduction

Every person (children, adolescents, adults and elderly) has to go through many transitional phases in the whole lifespan as situations always change and leave different impacts on the affected persons. They require adjustment after going through any phase. Old age is a period which includes a lot of transition in terms of physical and psychological aspects (Manzo, 2003). For older people, the transition at that stage of their life is an important event. Making themselves comfortable for the adjustments may be a positive or a negative process. Some elderly feel bad about themselves that they are of no use now and feel like an outsider in their own community just because they cannot contribute efficiently now. The major problem they face includes loneliness (Atchley, 2000).

An important aspect is to compare the past and present life of an individual. It is said that if there is a small difference between the former and latter situations, there will be less damage and the adjustment process will be easy for the individual. However, if there is a greater difference between these two situations, adjustment will become difficult and the person may face a lot of problems both physical and mentally (Atchley, 2000).

Providing care to the elders of a family was not a big problem for Pakistani society because of our religious and cultural values of living in the shelter of elders. Elders were taken care of by the family members, and their burden was shared by each member of the house equally. Furthermore they were supported in all ways like emotionally and financially, their opinions were considered, their authority was accepted. However, the advancement in technology and change in values and family system from joint to nuclear often compel the elderly to live alone or shift from their own homes to old homes (Dotty, 1992; Hegde et al., 2012; Kumar et al., 2012; Devi et al., 2013; Mishra, 2008; Mudey et al., 2011).

Most of the researchers also focus on elders living in a specific community and formal and informal homes for elderly care (Andrews & Phillips, 2005). Less research is done on the residential care of elders in our country. But the researches of other English speaking countries focus on the social life of the elderly like their relationships, attitudes, behaviors, family bond. Other than social, it also put lights on the effects of the physical environment of old age homes like the concept of space, building design, atmosphere and natural landscape (Andrews & Phillips, 2005; Bernard, Bartlam, Sim, & Biggs, 2007; Gatrell, 2002; Hodge, 2008; Reed, Cook, Sullivan, & Buddidge, 2003; Reed, Payton, & Bond, 1998).

Studies conducted in China are compared with English speaking countries. The elderly are placed in old homes only if they don't have children, not financially strong or disable; all of them were placed in a single setting. They focused on physical as well as psychological and social needs of the individual (Zhan, Liu, Guan, & Bai, 2006). Researches also focus on attitudes people have regarding the old age setting, reasons for going there, financial condition, the effects of culture and values on the decision of moving into a residential care (Di & Rosenbaum, 1994; Gu et al., 2007; Guan, Zhan, & Liu, 2007; Shang, 2001; Zhan, Feng, & Luo, 2008; Zhan, Liu, & Guan, 2006; Zhan, Liu, Guan, & Bai, 2006).

The major reasons for moving into an elderly care homes include the busy schedule of children or lack of quality care and support. Many of them wanted to enhance the quality of life so they shifted in care homes (Zhan, Liu, & Guan, 2006). Another highlighted reason is feeling like a burden. As per the researches, this feeling may lead towards chronic or terminal illnesses (Chochinov et al.,2002; Chochinov et al., 2007; Cousineau, McDowell, Hotz & Hebert, 2003; McPherson, Wilson, Lobchuk, & Brajtman, 2007; McPherson, Wilson & Murray, 2007; Wilson, Curran, & McPherson, 2005). Residents living in old homes have better psychological and physical health due to the care and support and increase of social activities, living a better life than those who are living with their children (Zeng, Liu, Zhang, & Xiao, 2005; Zhan, Liu, & Bai, 2005).

Based on the review of related literature, it can be concluded that the transition of older people is a difficult process. A sudden change in overall surroundings and other things are somewhat disturbing. Furthermore, there are many factors which contribute to the shifting of elderly to old homes. The process through which they pass while adjusting in the old home is an important aspect. The purpose of this study is to identify the initial responses of the elderly in the transitional process. This process is identified in different countries, but in Pakistan, that process cannot be applied because

of the difference of culture and values. The identification of this process will help practitioners and other family members to design proper interventions or to support them through this phase so that elderly can be adjusted properly with a minimum of difficulty.

2. Methodology

Qualitative research method was used to conduct this research to get an elaborated point of view of the elderly living in the old homes of Punjab. The aim of the study was to explain the daily experiences of elderly, their transitional phases, shifting and their adjustments. The population of the study was all the old age people currently living in the old homes of Punjab out of which 22 residents were selected. 10 of them were females and the other 12 were males. These respondents were from 3 old homes. Out of 3, one was government based old home named "AFIAT" and the other two were private i.e. "HAPPY OLD HOMES" and "DARUL KAFALA". The reason for using 22 elderly as a sample was because of the achievement of theoretical saturation. The sampling technique used for this research is purposive sampling. The priority was to collect rich and sufficient data to explore and understand the topic so that is why purposive sampling technique was selected.

The participation was voluntary as sharing these experiences can be tough for some individuals. Also, they were asked about their consent before the start of the interview. Semi-structured interview technique was used in this research to provide the participants with the opportunity to share as much as possible information regarding the concerned topic. All of the participants were ensured of their anonymity. The data which was gathered in these interviews was then analyzed using thematic analysis. Before the thematic analysis, all the interviews were translated as they were taken in Urdu language. The words and lines of the respondents are translated into English first and are written in the form of memos and an effort was made that while transcribing, the meanings conveyed by people remain intact.

One issue which was considered was the emotional state of the respondents. The unpleasant events they have gone through and recalling them is a painful task, which can be very much disturbing for them. However, the participants were given full freedom to avoid the interview or any kind of question that is emotionally disturbing for them. Studies show that coercion should be avoided in the research (Silverman, 2010).

3. Findings

In the process of the analyzing the data obtained from the interviews, themes were identified that are explained below:

3.1   Autonomy and Old Home

The concept of autonomy changed when the participants moved into old homes. This concept is changed more for females as compared to males. When they were asked about how moving in old homes changed their life, they answered by explaining things they no longer do. The findings related to the activities that the participants no longer do which supports the activity theory. The importance of ongoing social activity and interaction is highlighted in this theory i.e. they should be provided with new roles as a substitute because they have lost their previous one due to their growing age. Both of them are important to maintain the self-concept and self-esteem of every individual. These people are disappointed because they no longer do what they used to do. As disengagement theory states that later life is mostly associated with "loss", this loss can be of anything i.e. money, social relationships etc. (Hunt, 2005).

Most participants brought their belongings with them to their room so they could feel comfortable. As stated by Godfrey (2008), if a sense of continuity is maintained with self and of self-esteem, it is easier to adapt to a new situation. And this adaptation will be positive. Participants explained about the things they brought with them like pictures of their family/loved one or other material things to which they are emotionally attached to. Pictures were the most common thing among all the participants of the research as it is an easy way to remember people and memories which are important. Apart from pictures, other stuff was also present. It is noted that females tend to bring more things, which are close to them due to some memory or a special person attached to that thing as compared to males. They had less material objects.

> *"I have brought most of the stuff of my home here, as we lived in a rented house and I had to leave the house after the death of my husband and marriage of my daughter so I brought my own TV, fridge and other small things that remind me of my husband. The decoration piece which we bought together. All these things are in my room and I feel like home when I am surrounded by these things."* (P14)

The people living in old homes already bear the loss of their loved one and the loss of almost everything. They live in a place with a large number of people of their age group having almost the same problems, which causes stress or it can enhance the feeling of separation from the outside world. To reduce the feeling of separation from the past life and the outside world, it is important to have some connection to something previous. It can be anything like a previous way of living, having a thing which belongs to you like pictures, a sewing machine or continuing to have some previous habits (Mali, 2008).

3.2   Decision and Dependability

This theme was emerged by the participant's response based on the decision to come into an old home and to what extent it was a participant's choice. When they were asked "Was it your decision to come to an old home?" They all replied the reason behind that decision. It was noted that most of the respondents shifted to residential homes because it was their own choice. They took the decision to leave everything and come here.

The basic point which was identified as a reason for shifting is they were dependent on others because they could not look after them either physically or financially. It is also noted that some of the elderly are living in the old home forcefully or without their will. They didn't want to come and they were forced in different ways by the children or relatives to leave their houses. As one of the respondent commented:

> *"No, it wasn't my decision. I was my husband's 14th wife; he doesn't want me to live with him anymore. He doesn't even allow our children to meet me and threatens them that he will not give them share in property. So my children stay away from me. They sent me here forcefully. I didn't want to come here but he left me with no choice."* (P2)

Another respondent, who married the brother in law of her sister and they lived in the same house, was forced to leave the house after her sister's death.. This causes a lot of anger in her and she is still constantly trying to go back to her house.
> *"I didn't want to come here. I will go back and everyone will see. My nephew forced me to leave my house but I will go back."* (P17)

3.3   Quality of life

Quality of life is a topic discussed differently by everyone because everyone has a different point of view on it. It can include a lot of concepts like satisfaction of physical needs, psychological satisfaction, happiness etc. Different researches focus in different ways on this topic. So the focus should not be on what people of this age need but on what these people want in life in order to enhance the quality which is of their choice. When respondents were asked if their pain affects their wellbeing or not,ost of them answered in a yes. If they are not physically satisfied, how their quality of life can be increased.

In this research, the quality of life of the participants is measured in a subjective way. As it was clear that residents of the old homes are provided with the basic physical care they need to carry out their usual life like food, medical, shelter facilities. So the subjective part was focused more by individuals. Some questions were asked from the respondents to evaluate their quality of life. These questions include: 1. Do you feel happy most of the time?

The answer to this question by most of the respondents was yes. Reason according to them is they are happy because they are no more a burden on anyone or they can live a life of their own choice.

"I don't have to work or think about others anymore. I can do whatever I want to do. I don't have to worry about what people will say about my non-productivity. I am getting all facilities here so I feel happy." (P22)

It was also asked if they want to have more friends to enjoy their life or to pass their time effectively. It is believed that people of the old age require company; they need someone to talk to. The response to this question was mixed. Some believe that they can't have friends of their own choices because of differences in thinking.

"Everyone asks about my decisions in life and the reasons behind them. I am not comfortable explaining everything so I want to remain quiet. I don't have friends here. I just talk to them only when it is needed. Otherwise I stay alone to avoid that kind of questioning that will hurt me. They should not ask questions about things." (P19)

People of the old age homes have a lot of common experiences, which makes their quality of life's perception somewhat similar. For example, almost all of the respondents were facing some kind of decline in their life that can be physical, mental or social which forces them to leave their house and shift here. Additionally, they are now living in a place with a monotonous routine different from the life they had laid and they also have to live with a group of people who are of their age in a common place.

3.4   Establishing New Relationships

This theme highlights the importance and situation of self-interaction of residents with one another. The relationship of residents with other residents and staff will be discussed as it is important for effective communication. They know that they have to live there for life time so they should have a strong relationship with each other, which will then resolve many of their problems, especially loneliness. It is noted that existing relationships of the elderly in old homes was taken care of in a sense that the visitors are allowed to come and visit at any time hence providing them the opportunity to interact and maintain relationships. They can also send things or they can also support them financially.

Some of the residents have relatives who take care of them, send them their favorite food or support them by providing different facilities. They can come to meet or take their relatives whenever they want to and there is no time duration.

Developing new relationships over there with residents and staff members is quite difficult because there is no opportunity given to them in this regard.. Residents struggle on their own to develop some kind of friendship as they know they have to live with one another but there is no pure relationship between any of them. As on resident has said:

"I know that I have to live here till the end of my life and I cannot live on my own. I have to talk to the residents here because we have to live together but that is not our choice. We have to tolerate each other." (P7)

It is noted that females face more problems in maintaining or building relationships with each other. They were seen in the form of groups. People of one group don't talk to the people of the other group which creates a distance between them all. They have a lot of complaints about each other's behavior and thinking and the way they live. Like a lady who shares a room with one more lady has a lot of problems with the living style of the other one e.g. she has a problem that the other woman does not take bath and does not clean her side which is irritating for her.

The relationship of staff and the residents seemed to be totally distant. They talk when they need to talk. There was no such arrangement or effort from both sides to maintain a good relationship.

3.5   Emotional reactions to Relocation

The responses range from feeling very positive and happy at the moment to feeling sad and disappointed and regretful. The residents who were living on their own with no one to take care seemed to be happy and satisfied because of the facilities they get by staying in the old home. According to them, they feel safe here with no worries to think about their survival and loneliness. One participant of the study expressed her satisfaction as:

"I was tired of being alone and on my own. My son and his wife are working people. They come home late, I had to spend the whole day on my own. I was afraid of accidents and loneliness but now I know if anything happens to me, there will be someone to look after me".(P12)

It was also noted that the females mentioned this shift as an advantage. They don't have to work that much now. We live in a patriarchal system where women are responsible for all the household tasks even if they are professionals and working to earn money. They have to perform household duties and they are also responsible for the upbringing of their children which is an ongoing thing and women do not get an off in these responsibilities. So after shifting here, they no longer have to care about the household chores or food and they do not have any other responsibility regarding other people related to them.

Apart from these perspectives, other residents seemed to not be properly satisfied due to this relocation. They were okay with the relocation but there was a constant uncomfortable feeling which shows that they did not accept it wholeheartedly.

Elders living in old homes expect the staff and other people to understand their problems

without telling (Gabrenya & Hwang, 1996). Some of them do not like the way people live or interact there. Some of them also considered this shifting as a loss of autonomy or freedom as they can't do what they want to do now or what they will do if they were in their own house. For example, according to a participant,

> *"We cannot have food of our own choice, we have to eat what is cooked or present here and we have to follow the schedule, either we want to eat at that time or not. Sometimes I want to eat homemade chapatti, but I have to eat rice or tandoori chapatti because no one can do it separately for me."* (P6).

4. Discussion

The findings of this research support the important role of staff or caregivers in the old home. People included in the staff are seen as an enablers or disablers of many activities and feelings in the residents of the old homes. They have a strong influence on the activities and the way of thinking of the residents because they are the only one who are providing care to elderly in the old homes. They, with the passage of time, become an integral part in the emotional satisfaction of elderly because they are the people who interact with the residents other than their fellow residents. This is also taken as an important factor in enhancing the quality of life.

However, the participants involved in this study explain the role of staff in a very light way, they see them as a neutral person who performs their duty. According to residents, the staff did not have much time to spend with them as they had to look after many other residents at a time.

Elderly should be given their basic rights to live a life of their own decision or at least they should have a liberty of taking some of their decisions. In this research, the elderly are given autonomy in a way that they are allowed to bring their own stuff to the old home and also they can go anywhere or they can visit a relative if they want to. They are provided with basic autonomy but other than that in some ways, they are bound as well. For example, they cannot have food of their own choice. They have to eat what is available or cooked, if they want to eat something else they can have it from the market.

The purpose of this research was to contribute to the understanding of the transitional process of the older people living in old homes, different aspects from which they have to pass to be adjusted in the new place. The indicators of healthy transition is subjective in nature (Schumacher and Meleis, 1994). Every person has different types of mental abilities and they are all gone through different situations which will build their capacity to adjust to a new situation. The differences in the adjustment is noted in different participants in a way that the time taken by them to adjust is different. Some of them are adjusted in a very small time. It also depends on different factors people face. If a person gets to know the new people easily, they can adjust more easily as compared to the other person who is not open with others.

The establishment of interpersonal relationships is important for the survival of residents in the old homes. Residents who had good relationships with others tend to adjust rather easily as compared to other people who are alone. The relationship with the residents as friends tends to increase a sense of security and companionship in the older people.

In this research, women seemed to have their own groups. They are friends with the ones who understand them well. So, they barely talk to other women. Having said that, some women face more difficulty in maintaining relationships because they have less self-control and are more mentally

disturbed with the transition or shifting process so they only interact with the ones who have either the same stories or understand them well.

Males, on the other hand, have an open relationship with everyone. They sit together all day and interact with each other hence have support to some extent. This sense of belongingness creates the environment easy to adapt (Hagerty et al., 1992). Satisfaction is another factor which contributes to better adjustment. Satisfaction with the environment and other things. It is difficult to achieve satisfaction both physically and mentally.

Old homes are mostly responsible for providing physical satisfaction to the residents. Physically they almost have all the facilities like food, shelter and other aspects but the psychological satisfaction is more important. Almost all of them have gone through a difficult situation in life before coming here which makes them more psychologically disturb which will then hinder in their adjustment.

In this research, the older people seemed to be happy to share their experiences and share their problems when they shifted into the old home. Most of them were happy to talk to someone about their issues and to share lessons of life. They were used to giving interviews to people because of frequent visits of the students. They already knew some of the questions which were to be asked and they answered it before even asking about it.

5. Conclusion

This research was conducted to explore the experiences of the elderly living in old homes. The findings of this research highlights some issues. The first one is the amount of autonomy residents of the old home enjoys. The residents do not as such have autonomy in making their life decisions, they take autonomy in a sense of activities they don't do after the shift in the old homes. Also, they highlighted that they, to some extent, have autonomy that they are allowed to bring their stuff with them, the stuff they are emotionally attached to. The next issue is the feeling of being dependent on someone, the feeling of being a burden. Old age is all about dependability, and people have to depend on others both physically and emotionally.

Another highlighted theme is the maintenance of quality of life. The definition of quality is different for every individual living in old homes, but the main concerns are the physical environment and the facilities they are having while living in the old homes. These facilities include food, medical and others. The next theme is the establishment of new relationships, the beginning of new life with a new social circle. It is important for a person to have a social circle of his own friends. But it was noted that the residents mostly try to stay at a distance with others and the reason is that they don't understand them but some of them also have close friends.

Emotional reactions to the relocation process is the next basic theme. Some feel more emotionally disturbed because of the behaviors of their family and others take it as a relief from the heart breaking behaviors of other people. For females, it was also seen as a benefit in a sense that they don't have to work anymore. However, others also pointed out the loneliness they feel in the absence of their loved ones. The identification of these issues will help the authorities in creating strategies that are beneficial for the residents of old homes.

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