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ELDERLY IN INSTITUTIONALIZED CARE: ENHANCING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AS SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION: TOWARDS FAMILY SOCIAL WORK IN SRI LANKA**Varathagowry Vasudevan***Director, Training Division, National Institute of Social Development***Koichi Yaguchi***Director of Non-Profit Organization for Supporting Mental Health of Children and Senior Citizens in Japan**Ex-Professor of Department of Social Work, School of Health Sciences, Tokai University, Japan*

Abstract: This evidence-based practice paper attempts to reflect learning of a particular problem through qualitative inquiry of working with individual, families, and group of institutionalized elderly women. It reflects the elderly problems, intervention process, and outcome of the social work practice. It attempted to analysis the planned use of empirically supported assessment and intervention methods combined with the use of monitoring and evaluation strategies for the purpose of improving

the psychosocial well being of the elderly women. It recommends that enhancement of family social work to strengthen the interpersonal and intergenerational relationships in both aging and elderly care. The family's role as a provider of social welfare may become salient in the promoting psychosocial wellbeing of the elderly.

Key words: Elderly, Institutionalized, Interpersonal relationships, Social welfare, Psychosocial wellbeing.

INTRODUCTION

Ageing is an ascribed characteristic of final stage of an individual lifespan. Among the different stages in human life “old age” is considered as one of those periods, which bring in tremendous physical and psychological changes in individuals. The period sees the onset of many physiological, psychological and adjustment problems among the elderly and as a result of negative assumptions of others there tends to be a conflict between generations. Successful ageing requires the fulfilment of the physical, social, psychological, spiritual and economical needs of older people. It is a process leading to a better quality of life in old age. It is also indication of improved quality of life, which results in the decrease of morbidity, mortality.

Population ageing is a shift in the distribution of a country's population towards older ages. Sri Lanka, being in the Asian region experiencing rapid increase in the percentage of the elderly, has begun to develop appropriate social service measures to provide the care needed by the elderly. Since such provisions by the state do not meet the demand several private institutions have also begun to provide such services particularly in the city of Colombo and its suburbs in Sri Lanka.

Family support and intergenerational arrangements of the elderly

Research evidence from Mason, KO (1992 : 32) indicates the variations in traditions on family system and support of the elderly in Asia and changes in traditional family based- system of care due to urbanization, industrialization and migration on family structure and care of the elderly. The article's main conclusion is that future changes in Asian countries seem likely to erode traditional family-based systems of care for the elderly, even if the overall welfare of the elderly improves because of higher incomes. Problems faced by elderly women are likely to be especially acute and may require special policies to deal with them. Tudor Silva, (2004) of research on “Elderly Population, Family Support and Intergenerational Arrangements” found that the capacity of the family to take care of the elderly will be gradually eroded due to urbanization, local and international migration, the impact of displacement, the breakdown of extended families and nuclear families and the like. The Feminization of Ageing as evidence in Sri Lanka; women live longer than men. As a result of women’s longer life expectancy, more females than males will be found among the elderly population, especially in the women elderly. The health of older women is often neglected or ignored because of their lower status. Because of women’s longer life expectancy and the tendency of men to marry younger women and to remarry if their spouses die, female widows dramatically out number male widowers in all countries (WHO, 2000:14). Traditional economic and social support and care of the elderly are changing due to an erosion of traditional home- based care, the changing family system and changing lifestyles particularly of the youth (Siddhisena, 2004 : 35). Family system as a resource for change which has ability to accept change and difference on the parts of its members such a family allows its members to become autonomous. The concept of “differentiation” and fusion not only apply to the existing family system but are also inextricably linked to the past through a process of multigenerational transmission (Hatrman & Laird, 1983 : 78). These evident are basis for the family-centered practice with institutionalized elderly.

Institutionalisation of the Elderly Women in Sri Lanka

Although institutional care for the older people has been prevalent in Sri Lanka as an alternative living arrangement, it has been a relatively recent concept from colonial period in nineteenth

century. Institutional living arrangement involves the integration of accommodation with personal care. It seems to be a mechanical living arrangement, which cause for decreasing social relationship. Institutional living arrangement for the elders especially in urban areas of Sri Lanka is getting a much attention as other social support systems for the elderly. Institutionalisation refers to the generally negative aspects of institutional life when compared to community life. The majority of the elderly persons live in rural villages of Sri Lanka although the village life has hardships, which are not complex as the urban life. They live in extended family setting with their children where as urban elders may be alone at home. They have to cope up with a high cost of living, lack of housing, income and so on. Urbanization, international migration, industrialization, nuclear family systems lead elderly persons to seek residential home in urban areas rather than in rural areas. For instance, Colombo city has 32 registered residential homes, whereas the other districts have half of the figure. It has been observed that there are new residential homes emerging within the Colombo city.

Residential care is often seen as stigmatising because of its development from the poor Law Workhouse of the nineteenth century (Encyclopaedia of social work. 2000:296). Goffman (1961) explored the process of institutionalisation as experienced by 'inmates'; he focused on the *total institution*, which has routines and structures of institutions. He argued that the removal of normal patterns of activities and identities provided a cultural and social context within which individuals became depersonalised. He developed the concept of 'institutionalisation' as a model of the *total institution* with four key features:

- All aspects of life occur in the same place, controlled by one authority.
- Each aspect of daily activity is carried out either others who are all treated the same.
- All aspects are rigidly programmed
- The separation of staff and inmates is maintained.

The concept of institutionalisation still remains with shifts and changes of various service deliveries and the provision of a homely environment for old people. Institutional living arrangement, with general aim can differ in their vision and mission for helping the elderly people.

Family as a social institution has been idealized but the reality has seen that the elderly have experienced difficulty in living with their adult children and live alone consequently. Urbanization, international migration, industrialization, nuclear family systems lead elderly persons to seek residential home in urban areas rather than in rural areas. Government and non-governmental organizations are together providing welfare services to the elderly persons in their time of needs.

The migration of the younger generation is rooted for leaving behind the old age tends to increase the problem of isolation and loneliness for the old staying behind. Due to increasing employment of women and their career aspirations lead to establish of nuclear families. Elderly women aspiration (to be freedom) depends on state or voluntary welfare services or private rather than traditional family support. Though institutional living arrangements are not very much suitable for our culture and background, today there are increasing numbers of elders who need them. Institutional living arrangements provide a wide range of services such as, residential care, day care, geriatric care, medical care, recreation and counselling. Majority of such homes are urban based.

Methodology

The availability of copious amount of data and information gathered and presented in the reports and journals submitted by the undergraduates prompted author as field practice supervisor to study the situation of the elderly women in institutionalized care in 2012. The study used sample of one case work and one group work with elderly women in two residential care in Colombo. This study used data from the supervised field placement were approved by the faculty field practice committee and administration of the National Institute of Social Development in Sri Lanka.

Objective

The main objective of this study was to look into the issues and problems encountered by the elderly women under institutionalized care, in the Colombo city and its suburbs.

Items assessed in this study

The case work & group work techniques were used to process, analyze and interpret the findings. This situational study looked into the living conditions of the elderly, their familial ties, contacts and support and type & quality of services provided, nature of their relationships with family/friends etc. perceptions of the elders regarding the services that they received through social work intervention.

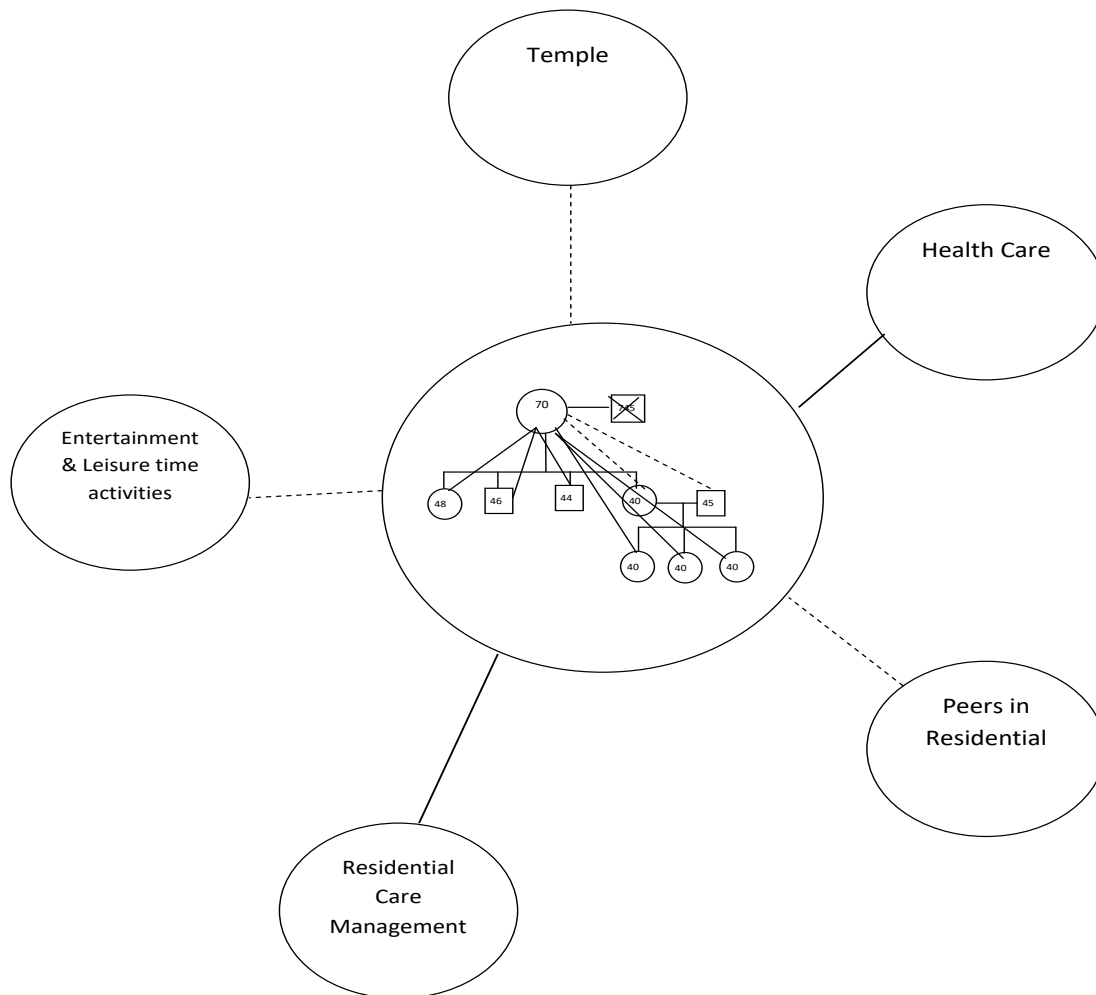
Assessment of the institutions

The initial assessment of the institution revealed that the place of origin of most of the elderly was the northern region of Sri Lanka. Furthermore the findings also showed that the immediate kith and kin of many of the elderly were either living far away or were overseas. The responses of some of the elderly indicated that they were unhappy about living under the same roof with women from different (low) castes. This traditional conservative thinking contributed in many ways to the low levels of interaction among some of them often leading to unpleasant altercations. Many of them had limited familial contacts due to the fact that the immediate family was domiciled abroad and/or other kith and kin left behind in the Northern part of Sri Lanka. Their existence in strange and unfamiliar surroundings has aggravated their feelings of destitution, loneliness and hopelessness. The Elderly Home environment was not enough conducive to encouraging good interpersonal relationships. A dominant resident was causing other. The study has therefore looked specifically into issues related to relationships, both familial and otherwise, to recommend social work interventions that enhance relationships among the females residents in the said institution, between the elderly and their families and/or friends to withdraw and thus adding to the issue of isolation.

Social work intervention with an elderly and her family

An elderly woman of 70 Years old and she was from rural and residing in a residential care for elderly in Colombo. She has four children, three of them are overseas. One (daughter) is in Colombo. She lived with her daughter in Colombo. But her relationship is broken (for 4 years) due to a problem she had with the daughter's family arising from her dominant behavior. Her conservative thinking (based on high caste) leads to unpleasant relationships with other members and she tends to dominate others even in residential care. She is an active personality and volunteers help in the administration of the Elderly Home, thus she was given some power which she misuses at times. The

social work students developed rapport and trust by giving her respect (Value based) and seeking her advice. Then, she developed trust so personal story could come out' shows another skill, maybe better than revealing story. She confided that there were issues with her son –in -Law and a crisis arose where she decided to leave their home and come to the elderly home. The social work student replied empathized response that she had left the home for concerning the best interest of her Daughter's family and happiness and decided to stay in the elderly Institution. She had had no contact with her daughter for four years. The student had studied to assess with the elderly on her environment by using the technique of Eco- map (Hartman, & Laird, 1983) to show her about her strengths, needs, and problems.(Strong relationship and ---- Weaker relationship)



The Eco -map was showed her to realize the problem of her interrelationships with family members and members of the Institution. This study found that the eco- map could be an invaluable tool to help the elderly person and her family clarify complex person- environment exchanges, identify needs, problems, resources, specify areas for intervention and plan to enhance interpersonal relationships as family support to the elderly. By using counseling skills the student enabled her to make her own decision to see her grandchildren. Social work student had played a mediating role as the student did a Home visit and intervned to draw the family's support and good will to the elderly lady. The family had accepted reciprocal duty and the value of family support to be extended to institutional care as the elderly lady decided to remain in the institution while visits to daughter's family once in a week. The lady requested the students' (with co- student social worker) support to

go to the first family meeting. Due to family -centered social work intervention, there were favorable outcome; Intergenerational relationships were restored between the elderly lady and her Daughter's family members such as with daughter, Son-in- Law and Grand children. Now every Friday the daughter takes her to the temple, and then to their home.

Social work intervention with Institutional members as group

The social group work aim was to enhance residents' support of each other, and build positive relationships within the Elderly Home to address loneliness issues. Group work Intervention was begun with formation of group who were able to join in the group. 13 Elderly women joint in the group as a closed group of the member of the residential care home for the women. The bedridden elderly were excluded from the group. The first phase was concentrated trust building among the elderly ladies to open up with their favorable memories and discussion positive strengths of each other. There were able to bond each other sharing stories of their own. The observation was used to measure their changes of attitude during the group dynamics in which social work intervention of trust building was achieved with the help of group activities. The second phase focused the resolving conflicts with the dominant lady and others by using the skill of good chairmanship to ensure each person had an equal turn in groups, and set limits for the dominant lady and made her to share the leadership with others. The group members were happy to listen to each other and accepting the norms to respect and discuss about their own wishes to do activities. Third phased the group was able to perform the following activities. Tuckerman's (1965) Stages of group development in which the elderly group was quickly developed through the stages of forming, storming, norming and performing stages. The group was able to perform the following activities

Promoted regular interactions among residents through

- Celebration of birthdays
- Organized activities according to their skills – eg. Singing
- Organized group activities and social events (evening party) to enhance interpersonal relationships
- Organized outings/ pilgrimages / spiritual activities to ease the `cooped up' feelings of those lonely elderly.

Improving activities and events for the elderly within and outside the institution were also recommended as a palliative to the problems of loneliness and hopelessness that were identified. Regular interaction with people from outside through social events were also recommended to ease the `cooped up' feelings of those lonely elderly. These were expected to improve the negative perceptions of their own existence, improve feelings of companionship among themselves and enhance family ties wherever possible and appropriate.

The evaluation of social work with group of the elderly, the individual members and group achievement was positive. The feedback from these group work activities was very positive. Thus, I can recommend these for use in similar situations. Although the professional relationship was terminated with the elderly ladies they could not continue the group activities as they were with help of social work help, which has indicated needed continuous follow up social work facilitation in the Institution.

Social work intervention and identified gaps in the institution

- Working with the institution to look at quality of life standards in the care of the elderly. An overseas quality of living standard is “Communal rooms (common room) and bedrooms are domestic in character and suitable for the range of interests and activities preferred by residents.”
- If the elderly home can be more like a ‘home’ it will make the people feel happier.
- Recreating a family, where family ties are no longer very accessible. This would include the ‘home’ being a family environment fostering values that enrich family life.
- Less regimented so residents can have some choice about their life style.

It is to recommend the following possible interventions in future

- Training workshop on social welfare management for people who run homes.
- Social work technical input on know-how for creating friendly environment and training programmes for care workers

Recommendations Family Social Work with Institutionalized elderly

- Social work interventions that enhance relationships with their families and/or friends. (family meetings)
- Enhance intergenerational relations within the family (Intergenerational solidarity) and family responsibility
- Strengthen institutional facilities and increase the awareness of the staff of the importance of maintaining family relationships. Eg. Importance of a phone.
- family member’s responsibility to monitor the institutional care (engage the family in monitor and thus address issues of care by the institution when necessary)
- Create activities -events/ meetings - to address the issue of loneliness
- Assist elderly who wish to return to their original homes (With family assistance)

To implement these recommendations the said institution was advised to obtain the services of competent professional Social workers without further delay. This study has demonstrated very clearly the important role that professional social workers need to take to enhance interrelationships among the people who are in need of such improvements by providing specialized services.

To conclude, the social work intervention with institutionalized elderly, role of family policy is to be spelt out for enhancing family care, strengthen the bond in intergenerational relationships, and extending family support for their elderly towards institutional care takers. A strong family unit would promote healthy elderly care. In this context, a partnership between the family and institutionalized service system is needed. This is an evident that to enhance elderly care, direct work with institutionalized elderly is not adequate. The family life and the family’s environment also must be enriched.

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和文抄録:-

本論は、個人、家族、施設で生活する高齢婦人について実施された質的調査を通じて得られた特定の問題についての考察を行うために計画されたものである。それは、高齢者の問題、介入のプロセス、ソーシャルワーク実践の成果に関する論考である。それは、また高齢婦人の心理社会的幸福を高めるために、経験的に支持されている評価法や介入の方法を計画的に活用する方策について分析する試みであった。その結果、人の老いや高齢者のケアにおける個人間ならびに世代間の関係性を強化するための家族ソーシャルワークの実践を広く展開させることが推奨される。とくに、高齢者の心理社会的安寧を高めるには、社会福祉の提供者としての家族の役割が重要である。