



Children's Migration and Its Effect on Elderly People: A Study at Old Age Homes in Kathmandu

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Abstract

Introduction: Very little is known about elderly parents' quality of life after their children's out migration.

Objective: Main objective of this study is to assess the impact of out migration of children on the elderly parents staying at old age homes.

Methods: This is a cross-sectional study carried out in Kathmandu valley. It has used both quantitative and qualitative study due to limited number of respondents. Total sample size was 33 and two case studies were carried out.

Results: The mean age of the respondents was 75 (± 11.0) years. Majority of the participants were female (69.7%), almost half were illiterate and nearly two third had no income source. There were various reasons for not staying with their out-migrated children like illness, children not having time to take care of their parents, children did not like to live with their parents, adjustment problem in the new place and desire to die in their home land. Due to migration of their children, half of the respondents (54.5%) had physical problem, 78.8% had emotional problem whereas only few respondents had economic and social problems.

Conclusion: With the increasing trend of both internal and external migration of youth, elderly parents are left over alone in their homelands or some old age homes; it is crucial to analyze issues related with elderly before the problem becomes chronic with more intensive research work.

Keywords: Ageing; Out migration of children; QOL; Effect on elderly; Old age homes; Nepal

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Introduction

The latest population census found 2.1 million elderly people defined as aged 60 years and above are living in Nepal [1]. Latest census data also showed the annual growth rate for the elderly (3.1%) is more than twice that for the population as a whole (1.35%). The annual growth rate of the very old (75 years and above) is even higher at 3.8%; this group currently makes up 1.7% of Nepal's population but is expected to grow rapidly [2]. In Nepal, ageing population is rising very rapidly compared to overall population growth [3].

According to the latest National Population and Housing Census Report, the absentee population has increased to about 2 million in 2011, an increase of almost 300% from the data of 2001. One male from each four households is out of the country signifying that more dependency and reliance is placed on the remaining family members particularly the elderly ones [4]. Number of youth going to abroad for employment and higher studies is increasing rapidly in the recent decades. Anecdotal information indicates that the effect of internal and out migration has significantly affected the life of elderly people. The increase in the proportion and number of elderly in Nepal is not matched by any corresponding increase in support measures through normal channels-pension or health plans-or informal channels, socioeconomic security measures or the provision of subsidies for health care or home help or any other form of nursing care. As in other Asian countries, the responsibility of welfare for the elderly lies with their own children and the government has little obligation to provide care for the elderly in Nepal [5].

Nepal is rich in the culture of paying respect to the elders and aged, however, such social culture is being broken by the changing context of the world, desire for a small family, poverty

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Age		
60-64	8	24.3
65-69	7	21.2
70-74	3	9.1
75 and above	15	45.4
Mean/standard deviation: 75/ (\pm 11.0)		
Sex		
Male	10	30.3
Female	23	69.7
Ethnicity		
Upper caste	12	36.3
Janajati	21	63.7
Educational status		
Illiterate	17	51.5
Literate	3	9.1
Below SLC	2	6.1
Above SLC	11	33.3
Number of children		
2-Jan	14	51.9
4-Mar	7	25.9
>4	6	22.2
Mean/Standard Deviation: 3.07/(\pm 1.94)		
Occupation of the respondents during adulthood		
Home maker	14	42.4
Government Job	4	12.15
Private job	7	21.2
Farmer	3	9.1
Own business	5	15.2
Source of income		
Pension	7	21.2
House rent	3	9.1
Don't have	23	69.7
Income (In Rupees)		
Up to 9,999	2	20
10,000-19,999	4	40
20,000 and above	4	40
Ownership of property		
Land	2	12.5
House	12	75
Bank balance	2	12.5
Don't have	19	57.6

and urbanization process [6]. Now, elderly people are forced to live in the care centers. There are about 1,500 elderly living in about 70 organizations registered all over Nepal at present [7]. Elderly homes, religious sites are the only destination for senior citizens out of their family during the old age. Different activities from the side of government, NGOs and individuals are being done for the senior citizens. However, many of them are still deprived of proper care

and support and basic need for comfortable survival [8]. In Nepali tradition, sons are morally obligated to provide care and support to their elderly parents. It is estimated that more than 80% of elderly in Nepal live with their children. Only 2.7% of the elderly in Nepal are living with their daughters, which may be due to the cultural taboos that prevent parents from living with married daughters [3]. Several studies in Nepal show that the long established culture and traditions of respecting elders are eroding day by day. Younger generations move away from their birthplace for employment opportunities elsewhere [7]. Consequently, more elderly today live alone [9] and are vulnerable to mental problems like loneliness, depressions and many other physical diseases [10-12].

International migration creates several distinct patterns of parent-child living arrangements that are specific to needs generated at different stages of life. First, in many developing areas of the world, single, adult children are expected to migrate to urban destinations and send earnings home as part of a household income-generating strategy [13]. Thus, migration may disrupt parent-child co-residence, but at the same time raise financial support to the elderly. Second, migration may create extended households in areas where married sons migrate to generate income to purchase a home or provide for the family. Third, at some point in later life, most elderly parents look to their children for old age support, but some find a limited set of alternatives given the prevalence of migration. Thus, migration may cause a rise in the number of elderly living alone or seeking alternative types of living arrangements to meet their needs [14].

Number of old age homes in Kathmandu is increasing recently [15]. Children's out migration may have contributed to the increase of old age homes in Kathmandu. There is very little study carried out focusing on the quality of life of elderly parents after their children's out migration. This study is an attempt to assess the effects of out migration of children on the elderly parents who are staying at old age homes after the migration of their children.

Methods

This is a cross-sectional study carried out in Kathmandu valley. There are very few old age homes in Kathmandu which provide paid residential services to elderly and the numbers of elderly living in such homes are also limited. So, conveniently this study has selected three such old age homes in Kathmandu valley. All the elderly living in the selected old age homes who met inclusion criteria were included in this study. An inclusion criterion of respondents was elderly people (60+ years) whose children have migrated to another place. Further, elderly with some problem to participate in the survey due to some health issues particularly were not included in the survey.

This study defines migrants as children who have moved away from their parents' home either out of the district or out of country. A total of 39 samples were identified for the purpose of this study with who met the criteria of inclusion. But, survey was completed with 33 respondents. As the sample size was small, we also carried out two in depth case studies to support our quantitative study. It took around 3 weeks to complete the whole field work.

This study was approved by the research committee of the department of Sociology and Anthropology in Padma Kanya Multiple Campus. The purpose of the study was explained to respondents before each interview. Respondents' right to refuse and withdraw from the interview at any time was accepted with the maintenance of confidentiality. Thereafter, the study sought for the informed verbal

Table 2: Information about the stay at old age homes.

Duration of stay at old age home	Frequency	Percent
Up to 12 months	14	42.4
13-24 months	10	30.3
25 months and more	9	27.3
Person responsible for paying the cost of stay		
Self	2	6.1
Son	22	66.7
Daughter	6	18.2
Others (wife, grandson, don't know)	3	9
Family member taking care before coming to old age home		
Son's family	20	60.7
Daughter's family	8	24.2
Self	4	12.1
Sister	1	3
Place of the residence of the children		
Nepal	5	15.2
Outside	28	84.8
Type of the migration of the children		
Temporary	11	33.3
Permanent	22	67.7
Reason for the migration of the children		
Study	3	9.1
Work	24	72.7
DV	6	18.2

consent of respondents before the interview which is already in use Nepal due to some problem in the written informed consent [16-18].

Data were collected through face-to-face interview. The collected data were reviewed daily for completeness and accuracy. Edited data were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 20.0 and were analyzed employing descriptive statistics.

Results

Table 1 shows the socio demographic characteristics of the respondents. The mean age of the respondents was 75 (\pm 11.0) years. Two third (69.7%) of them were female. Half of the respondents were illiterate and had an average three children. Less than half (42.4%) of the respondents were home makers; about half of the remaining (21.2%) were in private jobs; 15.2% were involved in their own business; 12.15% were involved in government service and the least were farmers i.e. 9% during their adulthood. Among them, only 30.3% had some source of income at the time of study, of which 70% was pension and 30% was from house rent. In addition, only 42.4% of the respondents had ownership on property, 75% of which was a house.

Table 2 shows that more than 42.0% of the respondents had been living in those old age home from last 12 months, 30% were living from 13 to 24 months and only one forth (25%) were living for more than 2 years. People supporting for the cost of old age home were son (66.7%), daughter (18.2%), self (6.1%), wife (3.0%), and grandson (3.0%). On the other hand, 3.0% of the respondents did

Table 3: Reason for staying at old age home.

Reason for staying at old age home	Frequency	Percent
There was no one to take care for me	27	81.8
I did not feel like staying alone at home	2	6
Children brought me here	4	12.1
Total	33	100

Table 4: Reasons for not staying with the children.

Reason for not staying with the children	Frequency	Percentage
I thought I could not adjust in the new environment	2	6.1
My formal procedures were not completed	2	6.1
I want to die in my own land	4	12.1
My children did not want me to live with them	5	15.1
Because of my illness	10	30.3
They did not have time to care me	10	30.3
Total	33	100

not know who were paying for their stay. More than three fifth of the respondents (60.7%) used to live with their son's family, about 24% with their daughter's family, about 12% alone and remaining 3% with sister immediately after the migration of their children, before coming to old age homes.

The study showed that almost two third (67.7%) of the children had permanently migrated outside their place of origin and the remaining 33.3% migrated temporarily. Majority (84.8%) of those children were living outside Nepal in countries including USA, Canada, Australia, Dubai and Malaysia. While only 15.2% of the children were living in Nepal but outside their hometown. The reason that led to the migration of the children were mostly work (72.7%), DV for 18.2% and study for 9.1%.

Table 3 shows the reasons for staying at old age home. For majority of the respondents (80%) the reason for their stay at old age home was that there was no one to take care of them. 12% of the elderly were brought by their children and remaining 6 percent did not like to stay alone at their home. Table 4 reveals reasons because of which the respondents were not living with their children. They were their illness (30.3%), their children did not have time to care them (30.3%), their children did not want to live with them (15.1%), they could not adjust in the new environment (6.1%), their formal procedures were not completed (6.1%) and they wanted to die in their own land (12.1%).

Table 5 reveals that more than half of the respondents (54.5%) had physical problem, nearly four fifth (78.8%) of the respondents had emotional problem, while, only 9.1% of the respondents had some kind of economic problem and 18.2% had to face some kind of social problem after the migration of their children. The physical problems were: they had to find caretakers for themselves (34.8%), loss of appetite (34.8%), inability to do regular health checkup (17.4%) and had to do their work (13.0%). The emotional problems were anxiety (32.3%), felt lonely (25.8%), extreme desire to visit their children (12.9%), insomnia (11.3%), feel their life as a burden (8.1%), missed their children badly (6.5%) and wanted to die (3.2%). Had to sell their property (66.7%) and difficulty in managing their daily expenses (33.3%) were the economic problems faced by the respondents. Likewise, leaving their close friends (100%) was the social problem faced by the respondents, after the migration of their

Table 5: Effect of migration of children on the respondents.

Effects	Frequency	Percentage
Physical effect		
Yes	18	54.5
No	15	45.5
Types of physical problem		
Have to work myself	3	13
Unable to do regular health check up	4	17.4
Loss of appetite	8	34.8
Have to find care takers	8	34.8
Emotional problem		
Yes	26	78.8
No	7	21.2
Type of emotional problem		
Felt lonely	16	25.8
Felt life as burden	5	8.1
Willingness to die	2	3.2
Missed the children badly	4	6.5
Insomnia	7	11.3
Anxiety	20	32.3
Extreme desire to visit children	8	12.9
Economical problem		
Yes	3	9.1
No	30	90.9
Types Economical problem		
Difficulty to manage daily expenditure	1	33.3
Have to sell property	2	66.7
Social problem		
Yes	6	18.2
No	27	81.8
Type of social problem		
Had to leave my close friend	6	100

children.

Qualitative Study

Living in old age home with payment is a new culture in the context of Nepal. Traditionally, children especially sons, are supposed to care their old parents. However, with the increasing number of children's out-migration, elderly parents are left over alone. Further, this brings about a wide range of implications in the life of those elderly parents so we have carried out two in-depth studies to get better insight into their situation in the absence of their children, i.e. caretakers.

Case History I

Primaya Shrestha (name changed) 69 years old woman, previously the residence of Basantapur, Kathmandu was currently living in old age home. She has three living children; two daughters and one son. All her three children and their family are living outside country. Her elder daughter and son are living in Australia and her younger daughter is living in the USA since last ten years. She and her husband were living in their home together. She came to that old age

home after a year of her husband's death. None three of her children wanted her to be with them and she preferred to stay at old age home to dying in the foreign land. It has been almost three years that she is staying there. She shared that though it was her own decision to stay at old age home she really missed her children and grandchildren. She sometimes feels like going to meet them but that is not easy thing for her with a lot of procedural complications so her children, at least one, visit her once a year.

She also shared how she was raised in a joint Newari family. Growing up with her grandparents had made her childhood wonderful. She also had dreamt of spending her old age like her grandparents but the situation was not as she had expected and wished it to be. She told that the time had changed a lot. Family and mainly parents used to be the top priority for the children of her generation but now children are more focused on their career and their immediate family. "This feeling of neglect hurts a lot", she shared during the conversation. Family values are eroding day by day. Our culture of family is weakening by the influence of modern culture.

She shared that the old age home had become her new home and the members and staffs there were her new family members. She is thankful to god that she has ended up in such a nice place where she gets to eat good food, doctors and nurses regularly do check up and provide her medicine timely. There is a hall where a team from the old age home conducts regular praying of god. Getting an opportunity to concentrate in god helps to relieve the pain of missing her family, she shared.

At the end, she got emotional and asked what/how we thought about family, in-laws and other older members in the family. She suggested us not to leave our old parents alone as she was left by her family. According to her, parents make the most profound investment of their lifetime on their children so if they happen to end up being in old age home alone, parents feel very sad, lonely, miserable in their late life.

Case History II

Raman Gurung (name changed: male), earlier resident of Kavre used to live with his daughter. Now 75 years, has been staying in old age care home since 9 months. He is a wheel chair user. His daughter used to take care of him. However, she had to go to her son's family in Canada, to take care of his great grandson. He shared that he could not go with her because he uses wheel chair for movement. Therefore, his family decided to keep him at Care Center before leaving to Canada.

He shared that this nine months at the old age home were tough for him emotionally. Not being able to be with the family at this age was painful he shared. He suffered from insomnia after coming to OAH. He is having better sleep these days because of the medicine. "I used to be sad most of the time. I did not feel like talking to anyone. Nevertheless, slowly, I started feeling there is nothing I could do to better my situation. Seeing other elderly, whose children did not like them made me feel that I was lucky that my family loved me though we are physically apart. Nowadays I spend most of my time watching TV. I also get to talk with my family once a week through internet. The sister from OAH helps me be connected with my family as Saturday is the visitors' day in the care home".

Remembering his youth, he said that as a young army man had never imagined that he would be in such situation someday. "Money alone cannot fulfill the emotional need of an individual", he

concluded.

Discussion

The issue of how migration of adult children affects older age parents is significant as current trends towards globalization and population ageing throughout the developing world is increasing. There is very little study carried out focussing on the quality of life of elderly parents after their children's out migration. This study is trying to assess the effects of out migration of children on the elderly parents who are staying at old age homes after the migration of their children. This study revealed significant physical and emotional problems faced by the elderly respondents. However, it showed very few respondents faced economic and social problem. This study also highlights the the growing trend of international youth migration in search of better career.

In the Nepali culture, generally parents live with their children especially with son. A study shows more than 80% live with their children and only 2.7% elderly were living with their daughters [5]. Children are also considered as insurance for old age because other social security system is not well developed in Nepal [3]. This study shows majority (84.8%) of the children of the respondents were living outside Nepal comparable with the latest census which shows that 1.9 million people as absent population in Nepal on whom the elderly population depends for care and support [1]. This study found person responsible for the care of elderly before they moved to elderly home were son's family (60.7%), daughter's family (12.1%) and self (12.1%). It shows the traditional pattern of living arrangement and care is also changing with increasing out migration of children. It has resulted old age home as an alternative choice for elderly people [7]. But, this study shows elderly want to spend their old age with their children and they are missing their children in the absence of them.

This study showed that, various physical problems were faced by more than fifty percent of the respondents including, they had to find caretakers, loss of appetite, inability to do regular health checkup, and difficulty to do their work. Similar to a research carried out in Bangladesh that has found that those left behind by adult migrant children face risks stemming from the loss of personal support and care [19,20].

This study revealed almost three forth of the respondents had emotional problems including feeling of loneliness (25.8%), extreme desire to visit their children (12.9%), insomnia (11.3%), and missing their children badly (6.5%). A previous study from Nepal also showed that feeling of loneliness was high among Nepalese elderly although they lived in joint family system (Chalise et al. [21]). Similar to this study, a study from Kyrgyzstan showed loneliness (32%) and missing their children (22%) were major problems after their children's out migration. Similarly, a study carried out in Thailand showed that out-migration of adult children was highly associated with poor mental health but was not associated with the physical health of elderly left behind [19]. In addition, a study carried out in China suggests that adult children's ongoing migration has a negative effect on the health of the older adults [22].

This study found majority of elderly living in old age homes did not have economic problem. Only 9.1% of the respondents in this study had economical problem. It may be due to children's financial support through remittance to their parents. Similar to a study conducted in Thailand that suggests for many, probably most rural Thai elderly parents, the migration of children to urban areas

contributes positively to their material well-being. Negative impacts of migration on social support, defined in terms of maintaining contact and visits, have been attenuated by the advent of technological changes in communication and by improvements in transportation [23].

Although this is a first study from Nepal that studied the effect of out migration of children on parents QOL, findings of this study should be interpreted based on its limitations. First, this is a cross-sectional study and causality cannot be assumed. Second, old age homes are selected only from Kathmandu valley and cannot be generalized for all other older adults living in old age homes. Third, data were collected through face to face interview: there may be possibility of asking bias. Fourth, sample size was not big enough for the statistical test.

Conclusion

Given that children are seen as the leaning stick (support) for the old age, Nepalese elderly parents find their life miserable after the out-migration of their children. Major problem encountered by elderly in the absence of their children were lack of people for the care, physical and emotional support. Due to the increasing trend of youth out-migration without any proper government initiatives to manage elderly care, the life of those elderly parents seems to become distressing, leading them to old age homes as the only option available for support and care. A more in-depth study and problem-solving initiations should be brought by the government and other agencies through policy interventions like social welfare measures, elderly care programs etc. so that elderly parents can live happier life.

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