



Independent and Resilient: The Lives of Older Adults Living Solo in Cebu City

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ABSTRACT:

The study focused on understanding the lived experiences of older adults who live alone in a community setting, providing valuable insights into their day-to-day lives, challenges, and coping mechanisms. Specifically, the research explored the experiences of elderly individuals aged 65 to 84 residing independently in Cebu City to identify the factors that contribute to their well-being. To achieve this, the study employed a descriptive phenomenological methodology, which is particularly suited for uncovering the deep, personal, and nuanced life experiences of individuals. This approach allowed the researchers to delve into the subjective realities of the elderly participants, capturing their perspectives on living alone and how they navigate their independence. In terms of participant selection, the study utilized a purposive sampling design in combination with snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling ensured that participants met specific, predefined criteria relevant to the research, such as being financially independent, living alone, and residing in a community setting in Cebu City. After the initial participants were chosen, they were asked to refer others who matched the same criteria, creating a snowball effect. This referral-based method continued until data saturation was reached, meaning no new significant information or themes emerged from additional participants. This method not only allowed for a diverse representation of older adults but also ensured that the data was comprehensive and reflective of the broader population of elderly individuals living independently in the area.

Introduction

The growing trend of older adults living independently has become a significant social phenomenon, especially in urban areas. In Cebu City, the experiences of elderly individuals who live alone highlight a unique blend of resilience, adaptability, and independence. These solo-living seniors face distinct challenges, from navigating daily tasks to maintaining emotional well-being, but their stories also reflect a profound strength and self-reliance. This study delves into the lives of older adults in Cebu City who manage their households on their own, exploring how they confront social isolation, access community support, and sustain their independence in a rapidly urbanizing environment.

Many studies talk about the physical and money-related issues of aging, but fewer look at the emotional and mental challenges of older people who live alone.

Research shows that being socially isolated can cause loneliness and mental health problems (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018; Holt-Lunstad, 2022). However, there is not much research on how these problems affect older adults in urban places like Cebu City. Moreover, several studies have looked at how social support helps aging people (Antonucci et al., 2019; Tomini et al., 2021), but they often do not consider how well these systems work in cities, especially for those living alone. There's also not much research on how informal support from family and friends, and formal support from the government and non-profits, work together to help older adults in the Philippines. Understanding this is important for meeting the needs of elderly people living on their own.

While Filipino culture traditionally values strong family ties (Derasin and Derasin, 2021; Derasin, 2024; Derasin, 2022) and intergenerational support (Derasin, 2024), urbanization and economic pressures have led to more



elderly people living alone. Older adults in Cebu City maintain family communication through visits, phone calls, and video chats, but some still experience loneliness due to physical limitations or the geographic distance of family members. Though some receive support from grandchildren or adult children, urbanization and job-related migration have made this increasingly difficult for others. Older adults living alone need regular monitoring of their health, where help may come from family, caregivers, neighbors, or the community. Many of these individuals suffer from chronic illnesses, making healthcare access and medication management critical in improving their quality of life (Derasin, 2019; Derasin et. al, 2023; Derasin and Derasin, 2024)

Despite the Philippines' long-standing emphasis on family and intergenerational care, societal changes have resulted in a growing number of older adults living alone. These changes challenge the traditional family structure and call for a deeper understanding of the lives of independently living older adults. Their experiences reveal the cultural, economic, and healthcare issues that impact their well-being. This study is particularly relevant for nursing students and future gerontologic and public health nurses, providing valuable insights for those working in community health and gerontologic settings

Methods and Materials

This study utilized a descriptive phenomenological methodology to explore the intricate and personal life experiences of older adults aged 65 to 84 who live independently in a community setting in Cebu City. The research employed qualitative approaches, specifically in-depth interviews, to elicit participants' narratives. The primary aim was to reveal the essence of their daily lives, focusing on the challenges, joys, and unique aspects that shape their experiences with aging, solitude, and urban living. Open-ended questions facilitated a rich dialogue, allowing participants to express their stories in their own words and providing a comprehensive understanding of their lived realities.

Moreover, the study employed a purposive sampling design and snowball sampling. Participants were selected based on specific criteria, with the initial participants referring others who met the same criteria.

This process continued until data saturation was achieved, ensuring that the perspectives of older adults who were financially independent and living alone in Cebu City were thoroughly represent. In addition, The research was conducted within the private homes of the participants, emphasizing the importance of their personal environments in shaping their daily experiences. Interviewing participants in their homes provided a comfortable and authentic setting, fostering open communication. This approach enabled the researchers to gain deeper insights into how the home environment influenced the participants' overall well-being.

Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the qualitative data collected from the interviews, following a systematic approach that included several key steps. First, the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, allowing the researchers to immerse themselves in the data and gain familiarity with the content. Next, key statements that directly related to the research questions were identified and highlighted. Significant statements were then coded by assigning short phrases to summarize their main ideas. Following this, similar codes were grouped into overarching themes that reflected the participants' shared experiences. In the final step, the researchers synthesized the themes into coherent narratives, supported by diagrams or models to illustrate patterns and connections in the data. Colaizzi's seven-step method was specifically applied to ensure a rigorous analysis of the participants' lived experiences, leading to credible and meaningful insights. Additionally, member checking was incorporated to validate the findings with the participants, further enhancing the study's trustworthiness.

Results

This part provides valuable insights into the rewarding and challenging aspects of their respective lives. Four main themes emerged from the findings: Faith as a pillar: Spirituality, Serenity in solitude: Peace and freedom, Pursuit of fulfillment: Contentment and satisfaction, and The strength within: Resiliency and self-reliance

Theme 1: Faith as a pillar: Spirituality

Faith consistently emerged as a crucial source of strength for the participants. For the first theme, many older adults



turned to their religious beliefs and practices for comfort and guidance, particularly during times of solitude and difficulty. Their faith acted as an anchor, providing guidance, strength, and a sense of connection to a higher power and their community. One respondent shared her total spiritual dependency on the Lord.

“Pero kalooy sa ginoo akong dependence naa gyud totally niya. Moana gud kog “Lord, unsaon mani nako, Lord.” – Respondent 2

Another respondent mentioned the power of prayer and its contribution to her living alone.

“Prayerful. Pagkaprayerful nimo, mocontribute jud na. Dako jud kaayo na’g kuan. Kay wa man ka kahibaw, ihatag na sa Ginoo imong pangayo.” – Respondent 6

Moreover, in times of worry, a respondent explained how her faith helped her cope.

“Bitaw, oo, what is there to worry? Niingon raba to si Padre Pio, St. Pio, “Never worry.” Kay ang Ginoo ray., He will provide. He will give us solutions if you have any problem. Para nako wa man koy problema.” – Respondent 3

Theme 2: Serenity in solitude: Peace and freedom

The second theme referred to the sense of inner peace and independence they obtain from their solitary existence. They enjoyed the tranquility and the ability to maintain a stress-free environment, which improved their general well-being. A respondent verbalized that it was peaceful to live alone when asked why she lived alone.

“Ganahan ko kay peaceful man.” – Respondent 1

“Way samok, way mag sige og kuan na “Kuana ri, kuana ri,” ana ba.” – Respondent 1

Another respondent also mentioned that living alone and being independent contributes to his peace compared to when living with others.

“Kanang peaceful ba na kuan, kay sauna nako nga asawa kay gubot man among kuan.” – Respondent 5

Making independent judgments and following their interests without requiring approval or being restricted by others brings solitude, another advantage they

commonly mentioned, one respondent shared her experience.

“Wa man jud ko naginusara, permero tipon man jud mig akong anak, nya pagkaminyo nila, mao na nagka buwag-buwag na. Unya ako gusto man jud ko, labi na tiguwang na, senior na, kinahanglan ko nga mopahuway, gusto ko mopahuway kanang wala bay makapugong kung gusto ko matug, matug kog ako diretso-diretso ba kay kung naa kay uban sa balay maikog man ka labi na og naay daghan buhaton. Mao na gusto ko magpuyo nga ako ra isa karong na ing- ani nako.” – Respondent 4

Theme 3: Pursuit of fulfillment: Contentment and satisfaction

The third theme centered on contentment and satisfaction of their lives, amidst their circumstances. The older adults expressed a profound appreciation of simple pleasures in life. A respondent mentioned her contentment and happiness with their current life, despite not being wealthy.

“For me, kining contented man ko sa akong life karon. Although I am not rich when it comes to money, noh? Pero, I can live well, comfortably with my friends, my hobbies, and with my connection here with my parish. Malipayon kaayo ko oy.” – Respondent 3

Likewise, another respondent replied that she was satisfied with her life when she was asked about her overall quality of life.

“Satisfied ra ko. Satisfied ra ko bisa’g wa koy dakong pension, unya kanang, used man ko sa living a simple life. Kanang pinobre, makahimo man kog kuan, so ang akong swel– ang akong pension, I wish it was more, pero saktto raman nako. Satisfied ko, happy ko, peaceful ko.” – Respondent 2

“Kontento na gyud ta kay sukol naman tag pinobrehay, oo, wa naman koy ambisyon na madato na kay edaran na.” – Respondent 5

Theme 4: The strength within Resiliency and self-reliance

The fourth theme highlighted the remarkable resilience and self-reliance. They relied on their resourcefulness



and adaptive strategies to manage daily tasks and confront adversity, illustrating determination to maintain independence. Their experiences highlighted a resilience fostered by a great sense of fortitude.

“Maghuwat lang ko og naa koy halin... Unya mokaon raman kog ginagmay nga...kapalit man tag ginagmay nga sud-an, unya maglung-ag raman ko, unya ang sud-an palit lang ko diha og tagsa ka hiwa, ana.” – Respondent 4

Similarly, another respondent shared her adaptability and proactive attitude in maintaining her independence and well-being, contributing to her self-reliance and resilience.

“Bag-o pakong gapuyo diri, I was expecting na maka... makapahangyo ba ko ba kay layo ang grocery kay maglakaw ra man ko kuan na sa Jai Alai. Usahay busy naman kaayo sila, mag grocery sila, di sila makapangutana nako, so I’m on my own. I buy my groceries. I buy my kanang fish and chicken, vegetables and kanang kuan... kanang fruits– almost run out nasad gani ko og fruits so mubalik nasad ko. So, gahapon lang ay, the other day ba to namalit nasad ko og daghang fruits so magplano nasad ko ugma magpalit nasad ko og fruits... Ako ra gyud nya i take it as a positive attitude, nya I need the exercise anyway so nobody is helping to buy those things for me, I might as well go and buy it myself and get the exercise that I need.” – Respondent 2

Discussion

The study found that faith plays a crucial role in the lives of many elderly individuals, with some relying solely on a higher power for strength. A 2018 study by Malone and Dadswell found that older adults often center their everyday lives around religion, spirituality, and belief systems, which significantly aid in coping with the challenges of aging. For these individuals, fervent prayer and a steadfast commitment to their beliefs serve as vital sources of strength, providing comfort and confidence during difficult times and fostering a sense of peace. Research by Can Oz et al. (2022) further supports this notion, indicating that spirituality helps older adults find meaning in their lives and navigate obstacles. Thus, for many, faith is not merely a passive element but an active force guiding their decisions and offering solace in challenging moments.

Additionally, the study revealed that living alone can bring a sense of peace and freedom to older adults. According to Weinstein et al. (2021), elderly individuals place a high value on autonomy, which positively influences their feelings of solitude and contributes to a "peaceful mood." Similarly, the current research found that a sense of peace is partially derived from the freedom that comes with living alone. Many older adults prefer this arrangement as it allows them to maintain their peace of mind without external influences dictating their actions. Other studies, such as those by Raul et al. (2019), highlight the benefits of living independently, including increased privacy, reduced dependence on family for healthcare and daily activities, and a diminished sense of being a "burden" to loved ones. For some, the choice to live alone enhances their sense of autonomy and freedom, further contributing to their overall peace of mind.

Another key finding of this study is that respondents expressed satisfaction with their daily lives, maintaining social connections and experiencing contentment. Older adults living alone in Cebu City demonstrated a profound appreciation for life’s simple pleasures, significantly enhancing their overall subjective well-being. Halaweh et al. (2018) noted that this demographic not only experiences well-being but also a sense of self-contentment, which is closely linked to feelings of happiness and satisfaction. Older adults often achieve this subjective well-being by recognizing the value of their current situation and finding joy in daily events. Suwannasarn et al. (2023) found that those with a strong sense of coherence reported greater contentment and satisfaction, reinforcing this perspective.

Lastly, the study highlighted the participants' ability to manage their daily lives effectively. With resilience and self-reliance, they navigated challenges and made autonomous decisions, allowing them to address personal and professional responsibilities independently. Resilience, increasingly recognized as a key component of healthy aging, enables older adults to adapt and thrive in various circumstances (Merchant et al., 2022). While living alone can pose risks, many elderly individuals successfully maintain their daily routines over extended periods, even in the face of physical challenges (Voie et al., 2024). Resilient and self-sufficient older adults take the initiative in managing daily activities, relying on



personal strengths such as problem-solving abilities and emotional stability to navigate difficult situations while preserving a sense of purpose and optimism.

Conclusion

The study revealed that faith, autonomy, contentment, and resilience are key factors contributing to the overall well-being of elderly individuals. Faith and spirituality provide a vital source of strength, comfort, and meaning, helping older adults cope with the challenges of aging. The ability to live independently fosters a deep sense of freedom and peace, allowing them to maintain control over their lives and preserve their privacy. Additionally, their appreciation for life's simple pleasures, coupled with strong social connections, enhances their subjective well-being and sense of contentment. Lastly, resilience and self-sufficiency enable older adults to manage their daily lives effectively, overcoming challenges with optimism and purpose. Together, these elements demonstrate that many elderly individuals can thrive in later life, finding peace, fulfillment, and stability in their everyday experiences.

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