

Lived Experiences of Frail Older Persons Living Alone in Quezon City

Lynard Andrew P. Cueto, MD; Ma. Teresa Tricia G. Bautista, MD, MHA, FPAFP, FPCGM and Goldie Lynn D. Diaz, MD, MMHoA, FPAFP

Background: Growing old is a remarkable journey filled with diverse experiences and wisdom. It's a time when individuals often reflect on their lives, cherish memories, and share invaluable lessons with younger generations. Understanding aging is crucial as it encompasses more than just physiological and psychological processes, to comprehend the subjective sensations of the phenomenon of "being an elderly person".

Objective: The purpose of this study was to describe the daily lives of frail older adults living alone in Quezon City.

Methods: The study utilized a qualitative research design. The approach employed was a descriptive phenomenological study describing the fundamental nature of being an elderly. The population consisted of frail older adult people (>60 years old) assessed using the Clinical Frailty Scale and living alone in Quezon city using a purposive sampling of those who were present in their homes during the designated interview period. The study was conducted in a private, safe and secured place both agreed by the participants and the researcher through face to face interview.

Results: Being an frail older adult in this study essentially involves balancing one's life in a flow of motion. The older adult is balancing a number of life-altering events and a shift in their circumstances influenced by recollections from various stages of life. In the life of an older adult, all ages are harmonious and wisely expressed and developed from pleasant and lovely or less pleasant and beautiful or more stressful early life experiences that went throughout adolescence and young adulthood, middle age, and later years. Their family, children and grandchildren were their source of strength and inspiration. **Conclusion:** This study gave light on the realities faced daily by a frail older adult. Insights gained from this study serve as an opportunity to develop or innovate appropriate support. This information is crucial for clinicians, community-based aged care providers, legislators, elderly associations, and other concerned citizens. On a local level, the government unit's key officials or proponents for the welfare of older adults are encouraged to delve deeper and focus on the unique needs and life experiences of the elderly population.

Key words: Frail, elderly person, clinical frailty scale

BACKGROUND

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, the life expectancy in the Philippines is 71.64 years for females and 66.11 years for males with an average of 71.47 years for the past 5 years. This means that there is an increasing number of the elderly population, thus greater interest should be exerted in exploring and understanding the aging

process and its challenges which in turn can result in a better quality of life through beneficial programs for older adults.

Societal interests support successful transitions through life's developmental processes and can increase the likelihood that older persons will age healthily. A person may be said to have life satisfaction if they have effectively navigated the problems of aging. As people age, they go through several life stages. It is crucial to understand aging in light of these stages since it encompasses more than just physiological and psychological changes as we get older.¹

A positive overall perspective about aging and how each elderly feels it can be expressed by looking at the path taken to fulfillment

Department of Family and Community Medicine, Quirino Memorial Medical Center

and happiness in old age and the factors that impact this process. This is a type of transcendence that manifests as a person's capacity for communication, love, joy, an active and creative temperament, and the growth of their own sense of identity, all of which are characteristics of successful aging or good aging.²

The term "frailty" is frequently used to describe older persons' diminished ability to maintain physiological homeostasis to stress and the accompanying risk of acquiring disease. Some literary works refer to frailty as a condition characterized by the breakdown of physical and biological functions, emphasizing the physical rather than the social and psychological aspects of frailty.

The purpose of this study was to describe the daily lives of frail older adults living alone in Quezon City

METHODS

Study Design/ Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative research design. According to Tenny et al., 2022, unlike quantitative research, which collects numerical data points and intervenes or introduces treatments, qualitative research explores and offers deeper insights into real-world issues. The approach that was employed in this study is a descriptive phenomenological study to describe the fundamental nature of being an elderly.

Study Population

The study population consisted of frail older adult people (>60 years old) assessed using the CFS (Clinical Frailty Scale) living alone in Quezon city using purposive sampling. Those who were present in their homes during the designated interview period and who had been residing there for at least one year were included.

Exclusion criteria were as follows: those living in institutions or settlements; those with vulnerable situations such as dementia or other physical or mental health conditions; and those elderly individuals who were not able to provide their consent, either verbally or through writing.

Data Saturation

The phrase "data saturation" comes from the qualitative research method known as "grounded theory," which was initially introduced by sociologists Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s.

In this study, the researcher decided when the data has reached saturation and whether the sampling could be ended.

Data Collection

The study was conducted in a private, safe and secured place both agreed by the participants and the researcher thru a face to face interview.

Participants were contacted, screened using the CFS (Clinical Frailty Scale), and selected with the help of a representative from Barangay Escopa III. The researcher provided a form and list in which participants put their names and contact number and scheduled the interview at a time that was most convenient for them.

Data Analysis

Colaizzi's Seven-Step Method for Data Analysis was used

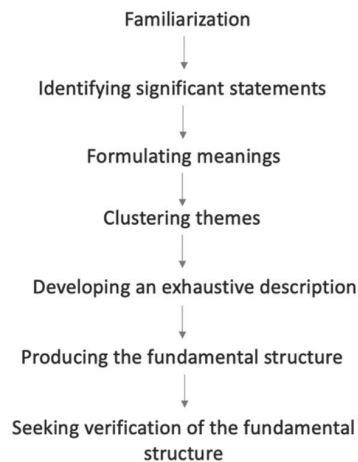


Figure 1. Colaizzi's seven -step method for data analysis

This study aimed to express the life experiences of frail older adults living alone using the Colaizzi's (1978) strategy of descriptive phenomenological data analysis. The end product was a succinct yet comprehensive account of the phenomenon under investigation, supported by its original creators. The approach was reliant on in-depth first-person reports of experience.

RESULTS

Demographics

Participants of the study ranged from 76 to 89 years of age, with a median age of 78 with majority (60%) being Mildly Frail based on the CFS (Clinical Frailty Scale). One (1) male and four (4) female participants were involved in the study. All of the subjects who participated in the study were from Quezon City's District III, Barangay Escopa III. Ample and significant data were collected regardless of the number of participants included. Women participants predominated the group, and various professional and social backgrounds were well represented. As a result, the study sample was varied. The demographics of the participants as reported at the time of their participation in face-to-face interviews are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

RESULTS

Using Colaizzi's (1978)⁴ descriptive phenomenological data analysis approach, this study sought to communicate the experiences of frail older adults living alone. After gathering data, phenomenological psychological reduction was used for analysis in an effort to meticulously characterize the experiences through descriptive phenomenological techniques. The methodology relied on detailed first-hand recollections of lived experiences.

Table 1. Summary of participants demographics (Frail Older Adults Living Alone)

Name	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Educational Status	Religion	Occupation	Clinical Frailty Scale (CFS)
BR	78	Male	Widower	Highschool graduate	Roman Catholic	Retired Government Employee	Moderately Frail
VE	89	Female	Widow	Highschool graduate	Roman Catholic	Unemployed	Mildly Frail
NDG	76	Female	Widow	Elementary graduate	Roman Catholic	Unemployed	Mildly Frail
AV	76	Female	Widow	Highschool graduate	Roman Catholic	Unemployed	Mildly Frail
FS	79	Female	Widow	Highschool graduate	Roman Catholic	Unemployed	Moderately Frail

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of study participants.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Sex		
• Male	1	20.0
• Female	4	80.0
Age		
• Young old (60-69 years old)	0	0
• Middle old (70-79 years old)	4	80.0
• Old-old (>80 years old)	1	20.0
Marital Status		
• Single	0	0
• Married	0	0
• Divorced	0	0
• Widowed	5	100.0
Educational Status		
• Elementary graduate	1	20.0
• High School Graduate	4	80.0
• College Graduate	0	0
• Post-graduate	0	0
Religion		
• Roman Catholic	5	100.0
• Christian	0	0
• Iglesia Ni Cristo	0	0
• Muslim	0	0
• No Religious Affiliations	0	0
Occupation		
• Retired	1	20.0
• Government employee	0	0
• Private institution employee	0	0
• Self-employed	0	0
• Unemployed	4	80.0
Clinical Frailty Scale (CFS)		
• Terminally Ill	0	0
• Very Severely Frail	0	0
• Severely Frail	0	0
• Moderately Frail	2	40.0
• Mildly Frail	3	60.0
• Vulnerable	0	0
• Managing Well	0	0
• Well	0	0
• Very Fit	0	0

There were three major themes from seven (7) cluster themes and twenty-one (21) formulated meanings of 21 key statements. Beginning of the End: The journey of an older adult, Embracing Solitude: Challenges in living alone, and Swan Song: Epilogue of an older adult's life, were the three themes that emerged. Based on these themes, the lived experiences of frail older adults might be accurately reflected.

By using the procedures of identifying key statements, formulating interpretations, and generating cluster and emergent themes, the

participants' narratives provided a thorough account of their actual experiences. The following section describes the emerging themes based on participants' narratives gathered during the interview period.

Beginning of the End: The Journey of an Older Adult

Understanding life through them, they believe that they have a significant life existence. They expressed gratitude for the longevity and the ability to provide the basic necessities for their families. This appreciation for life, favours, challenges, and love given and received, helped them navigate the complexities of one's existence, experiencing the ups and downs, caring and trusting friends and family in the past, up to this moment when they themselves are the ones requiring assistance.

Gift of life: Gratitude Despite of Disability

Aging means that one will inevitably at one point have trouble completing everyday tasks. Despite the challenges and this reality, the participants expressed thankfulness for their lives. Their love of family and spirituality served as the foundation for their resilience in the face of adversity in life. At this point in their lives, accepting their fate has been essential to living the life they should. Notwithstanding the crippling effects of their old bodies, they were nevertheless able to make a living.

"Awa ng Diyos buhay pa kahit na may edad na, nagtitinda ako ngayon kasi wala na akong trabaho." (In God's mercy, I'm still alive even though I'm old, I'm selling now because I don't have a job anymore). – Participant 1 (BR)

"Dahil may kapansanan ako, may edad na ako, pero hindi ko dinidibdibyun. Nandyan na yan eh. Basta nananalig ako sa Panginoon na bigyan pa ako ng buhay, hanggat kaya ko pa." (Because I have a disability, I am old, but I don't worry about that. That's already there. I just trust the Lord to give me more life, as long as I can). – Participant 1 (BR)

"Hindi po kompleto ang daliri at paa ko. Ang sa akin, magpasalamat na Diyos, kasi naging maganda ang katawan ko, pati mga anak ko sana mahalina ako ng lubos lubos." (My fingers and toes are not complete. As for me, I thank God, because my body has become healthy, and I hope my children will love me completely). – Participant 2 (VE)

Golden Years: Facing the Battles of the Aging Body

The participants are thankful for their long lives while acknowledging the signs of aging on their bodies, the physical changes, the wrinkles and emerging illnesses. Through their interactions with family and friends, it was acknowledged that these changes were typical and anticipated of an aging person. They were worried that they would be unable to handle it, but they did not seem too troubled about it.

“Nung malakas lakas pa ako, parang hindi ko naramdaman na may kapansanan ako. Pero sa ngayon matanda na ako talagang iniinda ko na rin talaga. Pero hindi ako naghinakit sa kung kanino pa man. Nandyan na yan eh. Tanggap ko talaga. Inaano ko lang ngayon sa buhay, basta maintain ko lang yung gamot ko sa high blood at saka ito nagpapahilot ako sa probinsya.” (When I was strong, I didn't feel like I had a disability. But now that I'm really old, I've really taken care of it. But I don't hold a grudge against anyone. That's already there. I really accept. What I am doing now in life, as long as I can maintain my medicine for high blood and then I give birth in the province). – Participant 1 (BR)

“Sana malinaw yung mata ko. Dinasal ko lang na sana maglililaw yung paningin ko para magawa ko ang trabaho ko dito sa bahay. Mahirap rin yung malabo ang mata eh. Hindi mo makita kung anong ginagawa eh. Pero tanggap ko naman na normal ito habang tumatanda.” (I hope my eyes are clear. I just prayed that my vision would clear so I could do my chores here at home. Blurry eyes are also difficult. You can't see what you're doing. I accept that this is normal as we get older). – Participant 3 (NDG)

Embracing Solitude: Challenges in Living Alone

One harsh reality is that fragile older individuals living alone have numerous challenges, of which they often overcome discreetly and alone. This is essentially not just a call for help and sympathy, but for action as well, and it is about time they were recognized. The participants articulated and represented every obstacle they encountered, whether inside their own families, communities, or even personally.

Winter of life: Mixed Emotions on Living Alone

Silence at home has never been so deafening until everyone leaves to pursue their own paths. This is always the case when parents grow old and their children start to live their own lives. The house previously filled with laughter and endless conversation becomes a place shrouded by gloom and nostalgia. Although they do not want to cause a burden, the elders who were left behind remain hopeful that they will not be forgotten.

“Awa ng Diyos, sabi ko sa mga anak ko, hanggat kaya ko, wag ninyo ako intindihin. Pumapasyal pasyal lang sila. Gusto nga nila doon na ako sa probinsya pero di na ako nag ano dahil matanda na.” (In God's mercy, I said to my children, as long as I can, don't worry about me. They just visit me from time to time. They wanted me to be there in the province but I don't want because I already old). – Participant 1 (BR)

Ako ang kinasal eh, pero wala akong anak. Yung asawa niya nung una puro patay eh. May mga anak siya. Ayun minsan pumupunta naman yung mga

anak niya sakin ganun. Pero hindi naman yun madalas. Magkita lang kami sa daan ganun lang. Pero hindi dito nakatira sakin, wala. Nangangamusta lang, ganun. Yun lang. Tawagin ko lang sila pag may sakit ako, yun lang puntahan ako rito. Nung may sakit ako, sinama ko yung anak ng asawa ko. Sila ang kasama ko. Pumunta siya sa ospital, sa QMMC.” (I'm married, but I don't have children. His wife at first was dead. He has children. Sometimes his children come to me like that. But that's not often. We just meet on the way. But they don't live here, nothing. Just saying hello, that's it. That's all. I only call them when I'm sick, that's when they come here for. When I was sick, I took them with me. They are with me. He went to the hospital, to QMMC). – Participant 3 (NDG)

Home Alone: Hardships of a Home Without Companion

The realities of an aging community are their eventual struggles in doing their daily responsibilities. Not only could they not work or satisfy their wants, but while they were idle and at home, they had no alternative but to rely on others.

“Ayun nga natakot ako, wala na akong kasama. Hindi na ako makakita, ang labo na ng mata ko. Hindi ko maintindihan kung ano na mangyari sakin.” (That's how I got scared, I had no one with me. I can't see anymore, my eyes are blurry. I don't understand what happened to me). – Participant 3 (NDG)

“Nalulungkot ako kung halimbawa hindi man lang nila ako dinadalaw dito sa bahay.” (I feel sad if, for example, they don't even visit me here at home). – Participant 4 (AV)

“Kung minsan sasabihin ko ihatid niyo naman ako sa ospital, minsan hindi di nila ako pinapansin. Para bang wala na akong kabuluhan sa kanila. Kaya kung minsan nagdaramdam ako, na umiiyak na lang ako mag-isa.” (Sometimes I say take me to the hospital, sometimes they ignore me. It's like I don't matter to them anymore. So sometimes I feel sad, that I just cry alone). – Participant 4 (AV)

“Ang sakin sana alagaan ako ng mga anak ko at apo at kay Lord na wag niya ako pabaya.” (I hope that my children and grandchildren will take care of me and that the Lord will not abandon me). – Participant 5 (FS)

Swan Song: Epilogue of an Older Adult's Life

The frail aged people realized how important it was to take care of themselves and share their wisdom with others, especially the younger generations. As life progresses, the individual gains respect for their reflections on the past and how the future will reflect the current situation. Being an older adult has advantages, one of which is the ability to apply lessons learned in the past to better comprehend and highlight current events. Younger people generally regard older folks, including those with frailty, as self-aware, intelligent, and respected, and they believe that the younger generation can learn from their life experiences. Frail elderly individuals regard their children and grandchildren to be their greatest source of enjoyment in life.

Looking at the Rear Mirror: Experience is the Great Teacher

It became crucial to keep up one's self-image, look after oneself, and impart wisdom to others. With viewpoints when time passes, the

individual gains respect based on the past and how the future will reflect the current circumstances. The nicest thing about growing older was applying lessons learned from the past to understand and cast light on the circumstances of the present.

"Nung araw, mabisyo rin ako. Sigarilyo, inom. Pero awa ng Diyos, napagtanto ko na wala naman ano eh. Wala nag ano sakin na kahit na sinong doktor na bawal. Basta kusa ko lang inano jan. Naramdaman ko naman sa sarili ko rin na yun. Noon madalas ako mawalan ng pera. Imbes na ibibili ko ng beer, ibibili ko na lang ng pagkain. Ngayon awa ng Diyos pagkain na lang ang inaano ko, nakakaupa rin." (Back in the day, I was also vicious. Cigarette, drink. But God's mercy, I realized that it was nothing. No doctor has ever done anything to me that is illegal. I just did it on my own. I felt that myself too. Back then I often lost money. Instead of buying a beer, I'll just buy food. Now, God's mercy, I only allot money for food and rent). – Participant 1 (BR)

"Natuto akong magmahal, magbigayan at saka magpasalamat sa Diyos lagi. Kasi ang Diyos ang laging nasa tabi natin di ba? Kaya kayo po ang bahala, kung ako'y ano na, ok lang kako. Kaya lang gusto ko pa mabuhay para makapiling ko pa mga anak ko kako, at saka mga nagmamahal din sakín kako." (I learned to love, give and then thank God always. Because God is always by our side, right? So it's up to you, if I'm what, I'm fine. That's why I want to live so that I can be with my children, and also those who love me). – Participant 2 (VE)

"Sa mga makakarinig sa kasaysayan ko, di sana dapat nung bata ka pa, yung malakas ka, sana nagsikap ka maski, marami naman diyan mahihirap din ang mga magulang." (To those who will hear my story, I hope it shouldn't have been when you were young, that you were strong, I hope you worked hard, there are many people who have poor parents). – Participant 4 (AV)

Right Here, Right Now: Walking Towards the End of the Road that Lies Ahead

"Carpe diem" - What the participants learned as years passed by was to seize the day; to take hold of what they have and live one day at a time without compromising the future. They aim to maximize their strengths by giving value to their health and not falling into the pleasures of life such as vices.

"Kailangan wag mong abusuhin yung katawan mo, gaya ng mga bisyo bisyo na yan. Wala kang makukuha dyan." (You must not abuse your body, like those vices. You can't get anything there). – Participant 1 (BR)

"Dapat mga tao kasi, bago magkilos muna, humingi ng guidance at blessing ng Diyos. Kasi ang Diyos nasa ating lahat di ba? Binebless niya tayo. Kung anong ginagawa niyo mabless niya kayo kako nga eh. Dapat magdasal kayo lagi sa kanya. Yan ang kagi kong sinasabi sa kanila. Pati apo ko, oh ito magdasal tayo para maganda ang katawan natin kako nga eh. Natuto naman din sila." (People should ask for God's guidance and blessing before taking action. It is because God is in all of us, right? He blesses us. Whatever you do, may He bless you. You should always pray to Him. That's what I always tell them. Even my granddaughter, let's pray for our bodies to be healthy. They also learned from it). – Participant 2 (VE)

"Enjoy life hehe. Depende naman din sa pamilya. Sa akin naman masaya ako lalo na kapag pinupuntahan ako ng mga anak ko at apo ko. At

shempre ingatan ang katawan. Kapag may problema sabihin at ilabas" (Enjoy life (laughs). It also depends on the family. As for me, I am happy especially when my children and grandchildren visit me. And of course take care of your body. When there is a problem say it and let it out). – Participant 5 (FS)

Blessing with Angels: Warmth and Joy with Family

There were happy, healthy, and active older adults among the participants. The elderly felt that spending time with family, especially children and grandchildren, was vital, and they felt less joyful when they could not see or spend time with them. Their loved ones provided them with hope and joy, and they cherished their company and wishes to be visited.

"Iniisip ko lang ang mga anak ko, mga apo ko, makapiling sila. Tapos masaya yung makapiling sila di ba? Kapag makapiling mo mga anak mo, mga apo mo, masaya ka rin ah." (I'm just thinking about my children, my grandchildren, to be with them. Then it's fun to be with them, isn't it? When you can be with your children, your grandchildren, you are also happy). – Participant 2 (VE)

"Masaya ako kung nadadalaw ako dito ng mga anak ko, lalo na yung anak ko na malayo nasa Pampanga iisang babae lang. At tsaka nasisiyahan rin ako kung nakakapunta sila dito, at saka itong mga apo ko." (I am happy when my children visit me here, especially my daughter who is far away in Pampanga, only one girl. And besides, I'm also happy if they can come here, and then these are my grandchildren). – Participant 4 (AV)

"Ang nagpapasaya sa akin yung mga anak ko tsaka yung aking mga Apo, kaya mayasa ako sa mga apo ko." (What makes me happy are my children and my grandchildren, so I am happy with my grandchildren). – Participant 5 (FS)

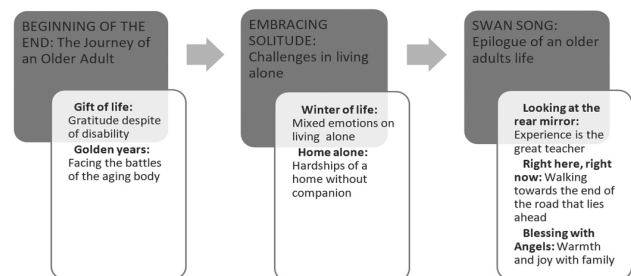


Figure 2. Simulacrum of the journey of frail older adults living alone

Essence

Older adults lived experiences as a process to deeply understand them. Frailty in itself is a challenge in balancing one's self in the flow of life. The older adult is balancing a number of life-altering events and a shift in their circumstances as recollections from various ages throughout life. In the lifeworld of an older adult, all ages are harmonious and wisely expressed and developed from a multitude of life experiences: from childhood to adolescence, throughout young adulthood, middle age, and later years. They rely on their families, children, and grandchildren for support and inspiration. The elderly have historically and will continue to be regarded since they mirror contemporary situations.

DISCUSSION

According to this study, one characteristic of older adults is their capacity for perspective switching. The elderly recognize the physical changes they will experience as they age; they view these changes as inevitable, hence, there is no need to cover them up with makeup or other methods. This study also exhibited the fragility of these older adults, the fickleness which often leads to taking their health for granted as influenced by the changes of the mind and body they are experiencing. Also accepting the inevitability of losing their strength and becoming dependent on others for even the most basic tasks results to the philosophical concept of “alterability,” sometimes known as “changeability,” which describes the condition in which elderly people must deal with physical changes and the uncertainty of their bodies while maintaining their fundamental moral principles.

The older adults who participated in this study navigated life by putting their trust in their family and friends in supporting them, be it from the past or in the future. As age increases, there will be changes in various aspects of a person’s life, and the participants of the study value their children and grandchildren the most which gives them happiness and inspiration.

CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding their weakness, older adults handle the continuing life transition. They’ll be shifting their viewpoints on ambiguity and in flow patterns as time passes.

In this study, the authors have elucidated what it means to be an older adult and provided insight into their daily lives. In order to offer aging individuals with appropriate support, this information may be crucial for clinicians, community-based aged care providers, legislators,

elderly associations, and other concerned citizens. If Quezon City’s concerned citizens want to help the elderly, they may need to focus more on their unique needs and life experiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The viewpoints of frail older adults living alone are not well understood. It would be interesting to broaden the study’s focus in order to cover community-dwelling older adults in rural areas.

The number of older persons is starting to climb, therefore going forward, it would be ideal if additional researchers carried out the work that the original researcher had begun in order to support, listen to, and appropriately address the needs and concerns of those who require attention.

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