

## **INVESTIGATING THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF THE SENIOR CITIZENS AS SOCIAL PENSION BENEFICIARIES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study was conducted to determine the quality of life of senior citizens and consequently propose for a program enhancement. Using the modified questionnaire from the World Health Organization (WHO) Brief, the researcher interviewed 375 respondents chosen by stratified random sampling in the Province of Davao Oriental. The result showed that the overall level of quality of life of the senior citizens is very high. Specifically, results showed that the respondents' quality of life has scored high level in the aspects of the social relationship, psychological and emotional well-being as well as home and neighborhood environments. Moreover, they have high level of quality of life in the physical aspect and level of independence.

**KEY WORDS:** *Social Work, Senior Citizens, Social Pension, Quality of Life, Philippines*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Majority of the senior citizens have a poor quality of life, having been denied their rights and privileges for social protection and often experiencing abandonment and neglect from their families (Asian Development Bank, 2012). All over the world, only 30% of the elderly are covered by pension plans. In fact, in countries with market economies, elderly people who have no income after retirement, have no access to health care services (World Health Organization, 2002).

In the Philippines, however, the government has been conscious of the growing concerns of the older population, and the importance of social pensions. Thus laws, such as RA 9257 or the Expanded Senior Citizens Act of 2003, and RA 9994 or the Expanded Senior Citizens act of 2010, were developed to provide senior citizens with enabling mechanisms for them to enjoy a quality life (Department of Health, 2017). Nowadays, many Asian countries are confronted with the urgent need of programs for the social protection of senior citizens who are extremely affected by poverty, depression, and neglect from the family and society (Asian Development Bank, 2012). Many countries including the Philippines has faced economic challenges which greatly affect the older people sector

In the Philippines, social pension was first introduced in 2010 through the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) who leads in the implementation of the social pension program for the indigent senior citizens for ages 77 years and above which covers at least 7, 257 indigent senior citizens as beneficiaries in the entire region in 2010. However, Social Pension program is now in its five years of implementation and the beneficiaries have increased in number. Currently, there are 82, 531 indigent senior citizens who are covered by the social pension program, 14, 941 beneficiaries are from the province of Davao Oriental. However, one of the concerns around the welfare of the senior citizens is the adequacy of the pension grant against the cost of living in the country and, as such, the extent to which pension recipients are able to maintain a reasonable quality of life.

This social pension scheme is locally adopted by two cities like Tagum City in Davao del Norte and Mati City in Davao Oriental. They replicated the said program by creating a city ordinance to provide social pension to those non- beneficiaries of DSWD social pension. It has been five years since the implementation of the social pension program, but the researcher has not come across a study that investigates the quality of life of the beneficiaries, especially in Davao Oriental. This study is therefore undertaken so that an enhancement program may be introduced based on the findings of the study.

### *Statement of the Problem*

The main purpose of this study was to describe the quality of life of social pension beneficiaries. Specifically, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the level of quality of life of the social pensioners in terms of:
  - 1.1 physical health;
  - 1.2 social relationship;
  - 1.3 level of independence;
  - 1.4 home and neighborhood; and
  - 1.5 psychological and emotional wellbeing?
  
2. Is there a significant difference in the quality of life of the social pensioners when grouped according to:
  - 2.1 age;
  - 2.2 gender; and
  - 2.3 year of availment

## **METHOD**

### *Research Design*

This study employed the descriptive-comparative research design. The descriptive research design is often used as a pre-cursor to quantitative research designs, the general overview giving some valuable pointers as to what variables are worth testing quantitatively (Shuttleworth, 2008). Moreover, the comparative design is used to compare the differences in the outcomes between two or more categorical groups (Cresswell, 2003). In this study, the level of quality of life of senior citizen pensioners was investigated. Furthermore, it compared the different domains of the quality of life of the senior

citizens as beneficiaries of the social pension when grouped according to profile variables.

### *Respondents*

The respondents of this study were the 375 senior citizen pensioners in Davao Oriental which were selected through purposive sampling. This technique focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest which are senior citizens who are beneficiaries of social pension.

### *Research Instrument*

The study was carried out using a modified questionnaires from the World Health Organization (2002) Older Person Quality of Life. To ensure the appropriateness of the questionnaire and comprehensibility on the part of the target respondents, the questionnaire was subjected to reliability testing which has a Cronbach Alpha above .70.

### *Procedure*

Permission to conduct the study though a letter was sent to the office of the Regional Director of DSWD Field Office XI. Upon approval, the approved letter of permission from the Regional Director was sent to the Municipal Social Welfare Office (MSWDO) of the ten municipalities and one component city to pursue the data gathering.

With the permission of the Regional Director, the survey questionnaire was administered personally by the researcher to the identified respondents. The questionnaire was retrieved right after the respondents completely answered the survey forms. After which, the responses were collated, tabulated and analyzed.

### *Statistical Tools*

Mean was used in describing the levels of quality of life of senior citizens as social pension beneficiary in terms of physical health, social relationship, psychological and emotional wellbeing and home environment. Moreover, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) and independent t-test were used to determine the significant difference in the quality of life of the social pensioners when grouped according to their profile.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The overall level of quality of life of social pensioners in Davao Oriental is described as *very high*. Moreover, the result show *very high* levels in the aspect of *social relationship, psychological and emotional wellbeing, as well as home and neighborhood*, while having *high* levels in *physical health and level of independence*.

Generally, the *very high* descriptive level of the three domains such as social relationship, psychological and emotional wellbeing and home and neighboring environment denotes the positive view of the senior citizens on the level of quality life as social pension beneficiary. As perceived in the results, senior citizens strong social network and support is gained from family and friends. This finding supports the proposition of Dai, Zhang, Zhang, Li, Jiang, and Huang (2016) that senior citizens who have a strong social, psychological/emotional support coming from family and friends reduces stress in life and enjoy some measure of comfort in the “golden years”. The truthfulness of the statement is parallel to the study of Gurung and Ghimire (2014) that connections with family members and relatives is one factor to improve the quality of life of the senior citizens. Further, this affirms the statement of Dorji et al. (2007) that senior Citizens who are connected with family and friends have better quality of life. As mentioned by

Talarska, Tobis, Kotkowiak, Strugała, Stanisławska, Wieczorowska-Tobis, (2018) senior citizens receiving adequate assistance from their family and community leads to life satisfaction, thus, improves the subjective assessment of quality of life. However, the illnesses in old age will result to loneliness, social isolation and depression, which can result to negative influence on their health and overall quality of life as stated by Hamar, Coberley, Pope and Rula (2013).

On the other hand, the *high* level of quality of life of senior citizens as social pension beneficiary in the aspect of physical health and level of independence denotes that senior citizens oftentimes manifested of having enough energy to do things they wanted to do and satisfied with regards to the overall physical health. Further, results infer that they have a positive perception of their physical health by describing themselves of having a good sleep which plays an essential role in the physical well-being. This reinforces the idea of Rath et al. (2010) that having enough time of rest is gaining enough strength, it increases chances of having energy and high wellbeing throughout the day. The level of independence aspect affects the quality of life of senior citizens which posted the lowest mean score among other domains. Specifically, the item of needing assistance in doing the activities of daily living greatly affects the quality of life of senior citizens. This upholds in the statement of Keller and Engelhardt (2013) that as one aged, the physical strength and energy has declined, thus the activities of daily living are affected because they could not respond appropriately to the demand of daily activities such as bathing and eating etc. There is a need to address this affecting domain on the quality of life of the elderly and also the families by improving healthy lifestyle among them through advocacy campaign, trainings and seminars.

Meanwhile, there is no significant difference in the level of quality of life of senior citizens as social pension beneficiary when grouped by age. However, it can be noted in the aspect of the social relationship and home and neighboring environment the younger old (60-70 years old) senior citizens between the “old-old” (80 and above). This authenticates the study of Singh and Misra, (2009) that senior

citizens in early stage have the tendency to make friendship easily than those older adult who have lost their connections specifically with the same age group. Thus, with long age difference, it is foreseeable that those later age or 80 years old and above have already loose some of their age group or networks of friends and find it more difficult to develop another one to belong to new networks. Further, senior citizens in early stage are still working to earn and help support their family's to uplift economic condition in which they believe that a small contribution to the family's daily expenses especially helping their grandchildren in various ways as cited by Tangwe and Gutura (2013). Further, this would boost their confidence and self-esteem that they are not a burden to their families. This legitimizes the study on Bukuluki and Watson (2012) commissioned by Help Age that the senior citizen's regular income through pension change the perception of others, be seeing them as resources rather than a burden.

In similar vein, there is no significant difference in the quality of life of senior citizens as social pension beneficiary when grouped in gender. Gender does not define or deviate from the needs of one person to achieved quality of life. The level of satisfaction of both sexes is the same though it is in a different level or category. Furthermore, there no significant difference in the quality of life of senior citizens when group in the year of availment of the social pension program of the department. This can be interpreted that a number of years of being a recipient of social pension does not affect the quality of life of senior citizens. The received amount every month that compensate all cost is what matters to them.

Based on the study, in terms of level of independence among senior citizens as beneficiary of Social Pension Program, it ascertained that they sometimes manifest a need for assistance whenever they perform activities of daily living, while they oftentimes manifested that they move around well, regular intake of medicines and being satisfied with their work ability. Moreover, study revealed that they oftentimes manifest an overall quality of life in terms of their physical health, such as feeling good of the condition of their body, having a good sleep, use

of their senses effectively, being energetic and doing things they want to do. Therefore, an enhancement program was designed for this study to supplement and improve the existing social pension program implementation for the senior citizens in order to promote their quality of life. The proposed enhancement program will focus on the results that bring in a high level of quality of life specifically in the domains of physical health and level of independence and eventually bring them into a very high level of quality of life. Hence, development of programs and services to promote active aging and healthy lifestyle activities to improve the quality of life of senior citizens should be implemented. In addition, partner agencies and LGUs to intensify comprehensive programs and services to address the overall needs of the senior citizens most especially the findings presented in this study.

## **CONCLUSION**

The respondents “self-assessments” on the level of quality of their life as social pension beneficiaries is generally positive with a very high level of satisfaction in their physical health, social relationship, psychological and mental wellbeing, level of independence and the home and neighboring environment. However, there are specific domains that resulted in a moderate level of quality of life particularly in the domain of needing assistance to perform the activities of daily living. This denotes that senior citizens had a difficulty of performing the activities of daily living, thus they need their family member to help them to do so. On the other hand, there is no significant difference in level of quality of life of senior citizens as social pension when grouped according to age, gender, and year of availment.

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