

ELDER ABUSE: A MENACE IN PHILIPPINE SOCIETY

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In the Philippine culture, stigma is attached to the institutionalization of elderly parents in home-care facilities. Thus, Filipino families continue to be the primary provider of care and support for elderly family members. It is because Filipinos believe that intergenerational family solidarity will remain strong with the co-residence of elderly parents who share their wisdom to family members. As co-residence with the family remains to be the most common living arrangement for the elderly, the co-dependency paradigm takes place as the children is expected to take care of the elderly. This is related to the Filipino concept of paying the debt of gratitude or “utang na loob”.

However, recent changes in social and cultural norms pose many challenges to the traditional Filipino family structure. This shift has weakened the support mechanisms from the family needed by the elderly. This issue has increased with the number of elderly individuals suffering from chronic illnesses, functional limitations and severe disabilities. The four main concerns of the urban Filipino in the low to medium socio-economic status is security in old age, their health status, the impact of aging and elder abuse.

The Commission on Philippine Human Rights in 2014 documented a total of 760 human rights cases involving victims aged 60 and above. There is a range of 3.2 to 27.5% elder abuse reported by the general public, of which their own children are the main perpetrators. The types of abuse range from physical and verbal, ridicule and discrimination, negligence, to dependency of family members to the elderly parent. Though the respect for elders is ingrained in the Filipino, still an alarming number of cases of elder abuse arise in Filipino communities. The elder abuse happening in the country remains invisible and unaddressed because it occurs within their own homes. In some cases, the elderly are reluctant and unable to report incidents because it is from their own families. However, most cases show that the elderly are unaware of the abuse being done against them.

Research show that the Filipino elderly are left alone to fend for themselves or are dependent on their immediate family members for many of their activities of daily living. They only have family, relatives and friends to aid them, even if at times, they experience the abuse. Even so, most Filipino elderly still choose to reside with their children in the belief that they will be the main source of all their needed support in old age. This relationship becomes a vicious cycle of trust and abuse. The elderly who experience any kind of harm from people that they trust and rely on hampers their feeling of safety. The consequence of abuse is much more severe if done by people who are supposed to keep the elderly safe and secure. In this regard, elder abuse has taken the form of family violence which has become a menace to society. Especially in a country such as the Philippines where the elderly reside with their family, the problem can easily develop into a public health and criminal justice concern.

In line with this, nurses are in the prime position to assess elder abuse concerns as it presents itself in the community or hospital setting. As a client advocate, the nurse can devise for ways to make the condition of the elderly better. Indeed, there is a need for safety protocols in place for concerns such as elder abuse to protect the elderly from perpetrators like family members or significant others.

On the government side, the Filipino elderly also needs policy champions who will draft or mandate laws that will address their safety concerns. Likewise, the Filipino community may also lend openness to the institutionalization of the elderly if the family cannot care for them at home. A nursing home environment may be beneficial as professional and skilled workers look after their welfare on a day to day basis. There must be funding to this type of endeavor to place the elderly in a safe and secure environment or facility.

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