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Exploring the experiences of elderly people who are brought to live in shelter homes in Karachi

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Objective: The study aimed to explore the experiences of the elderly people who are brought to live in shelter homes, in the context of Pakistan. It also aimed to identify the reasons which compelled the elderly people to reside in these shelter homes.

Methodology: A qualitative methodology, with a descriptive exploratory design, was adopted for the study. In line with the pre-set inclusion criteria, a purposive sample of 14 elderly males and females was selected for the study, from two different shelter homes in Karachi, Pakistan. Data were collected through a semi-structured interview. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed precisely. The data were coded, categorized manually, and analyzed using the guidelines given by Miles and Huberman (1994).

Results: Content analysis of the data revealed five major themes: circumstances of leaving home, experiences, challenges, coping with challenges, and decided to live in a shelter home. The analysis revealed that the elderly were experiencing a lack of physical, psychological, emotional, and financial support from their family and children. It also indicated that migration of children for better career and employment opportunities, an entrance of women into the workforce, and insensitive behavior of children, left the senior citizens neglected and helpless. The findings also uncovered the challenges of unemployment and family disputes that the elderly had to face made them dependent, distressed, and helpless, resulting in both their apparently willing and forceful decision to reside in shelter homes.

Conclusion: The study indicated the emerging notion of institutionalization of the elderly in Karachi, Pakistan. The findings point to need for further investigation of the identified areas in this study through qualitative and quantitative researches. There is a dire need for increasing public awareness through the social, electronic, and print media, and providing capacity building training to HCPs for the care of the elderly. The lobbying group can act as a catalyst in persuading the government officials for the execution of a policy on retirement, day care centers, and subsidized provision of health services for the betterment of the elderly.

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