Caring for the Filipino Elderly: A Revisit to the Document "The Dignity of Older People and their Mission in the Church and the World"

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Publication Date: December 2024

ABSTRACT

The issue of older people, their roles, and their challenges in the church and society are among the most pressing issues in the Philippines and many parts of the world today. United Nations reported that the proportion of older people in the world's population is now at ten percent and is steadily increasing. The figure is significantly higher in developed countries, increasing the demand for elderly caregiving for family members and health providers. This research paper aims to understand older people, their value, dignity, and mission in the church and society, in the light of the document "The Dignity of Older People and their Mission in the Church and the World," published by The Pontifical Council for the Laity on October 1, 1998. The specific objective is to revisit, understand and develop a sense of empathy for the elderly to provide selfless love and kindness, consonant with the older people's dignity as a human person. This qualitative research study uses the contextual method of analysis. Previous and similar studies on older persons will be articulated and used to understand the older persons' experience in the Filipino context. In the field of knowledge, this research paper can foster one's appreciation of the dignity of older persons and their potential roles and contributions to the church and society. The paper concludes by highlighting that older people shall be accorded the utmost care and respect consonant with their dignity as human persons.

Keywords: Older person, elderly, human dignity, caregiving, well-being

Suggested Citation:

Gutierrez, J., Braganza, B., & Canonicato, C.R. (2024). Caring for the Filipino Elderly: A Revisit to the Document "The Dignity of Older People and their Mission in the Church and the World". *The Philippine Association for the Sociology of Religion Journal, 4*(1), 1–12. Retrieved from https://pasrjournal.org/pasr/article/view/14

Introduction

One phenomenon that is happening in many countries of the world is the increasing proportion of older people in a nation's demography. United Nations (2024) reported that approximately 10% of the world's population is above 65 years of age and is expected to rise to 16% in 2050. In another report, 25% of the total population is under 15. This means that 65% of the world's working-age or economically active population has to bear 35% of the older and younger generations (Szmigiera, 2023). The report is higher in Europe, where people 65 years of age and above are around 19%, and in North America, at 17%, respectively. Due to the prolonging of life expectancy and new generations' attitude towards life, such as the 'one-child policy,' and the delaying or not having children at all, the population in many countries, especially in the first world, is depleting, resulting in an increasing proportion of older people (Pontifical Council for the Laity, 1998).

The role of the older persons in the society is still crucial and relevant. Pope Francis said, "The elderly are the messengers of tenderness; the elderly are the messengers of the wisdom of lived experience" (2022). Thus, it is only appropriate to provide the elderly with proper conditions and a conducive life in the family and society: a life that appreciates their significant contribution to the family and society, respects their weakness, and is sensitive to their needs. This can only be done in a society where culture recognizes the value of life, that is, open to every human being.

In the Philippines, in its survey, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported that 5.4% of its population is 65 years and above. However, it will reach a high of 8.5% if 60 years and over will be included (PSA, 2020). In another report, the percentage of Filipinos 65 years of age has been noted and is steadily increasing. In 2012, 4.39% of Filipinos were 65 years old and over, 4.55% in 2014, 4.72% in 2016, 4.94% in 2018, 5.22% in 2020, and 5.44% in 2022, respectively (O'Neill, 2024). The trend shows that the Philippines, like many nations worldwide, has an increasing proportion of elderly. The PSA projected that in the year 2035, the total population of Filipinos aged 60 and over will reach 12.8%, while those aged 65 and above will reach 8.9%, respectively (Abalos, 2018).

The figure previously underscored provided us with knowledge of the ratio of older people in the world's population and the Philippines, as well. Many Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) are in many places worldwide to provide health care, especially for the elderly. In its July 2021 news article, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) reported that caregiving remains the most preferred training because of its high and increasing demand abroad (2021). This is an explicit indication of the growing percentage of adult people requiring health care in many parts of the world.

In the Philippine culture, caring for old family members is every child's responsibility. The traditional Filipino values towards parents (and grandparents) are called filial respect. The children must care for their aging parents, which is a sign of gratitude, love, and respect. On the other hand, one's neglect of the aging parent is a sign of ungratefulness (Medina, 2015). Sending one's parent (or grandparent) to the nursing home is unacceptable and can be considered abandonment of one's responsibility (Quieta, 2015, p. 59). It is interpreted as a sign of ingratitude. This traditional belief is becoming challenging, especially for working children whose tasks are becoming complex because they need to work to support both children and their aging parents. Recently, however, an increase in the number of older persons residing in homes for the aged has been noted and is slowly becoming acceptable (Laguna, 2019). In a study conducted by the Demographic Research Institute, 81% of Filipino older persons think living in the home for the aged is a good idea to lessen their children's burden and for their health to be taken care of. However, in the same survey, only 18% of the respondents desired to live in a shelter, while the rest still wanted to live with their children (Paguirigan, 2019).

Discussion on older persons and their dignity is a timely and relevant topic. Old age is an urgent concern that the human family needs to face today. This study is for the younger generations to reflect on and comprehend the lived experiences of older persons in the church and society. The

goal is to connect with the life challenges that these people bear as they grow old. Accordingly, only by understanding the challenges, significant contributions, and developing empathy with older persons can society, especially the family members and the health providers, give forms of social assistance and healthcare consonant with their needs. Care and assistance must be inspired by Christian charity, which is selfless love and kindness towards others. Also, this paper seeks to provide those no longer young an opportunity to examine the meaning of life – that as one grows older, one's mission of bringing Jesus and bearing witness to younger generations is steadfast and does not weaken.

Literature Review

As already stated, with the increasing percentage of the aging population in many nations, including the Philippines, understanding and addressing the well-being of the older members of society has become increasingly relevant. Recognizing their dignity and purpose as individuals holds significance not only locally but on a worldwide scale. This literature review seeks to gain insight into the current themes and frameworks that offer structure to the current discussions on the elderly.

Self Determination Theory (SDT)

In comprehending one's well-being, the Self Determination Theory (SDT) maps out that autonomy, competence, and relatability play an integral part (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy refers to the person's feeling of being in control of one's actions and choices, while competence involves the ability to perform tasks effectively. Furthermore, relatedness is the feeling of connection to other persons. Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are of key importance for the well-being of individuals as they navigate through various challenges associated with aging.

Christian Anthropology

Christian Anthropology provides a rich perspective on the dignity of the human person. This viewpoint emphasizes that every individual is made in the image and likeness of God and inherently possesses dignity and worth (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1700). The dignity of the human person is the very principle one should render to a person, including the older person. Accordingly, in Christian anthropology, man possesses capabilities that other created beings do not, such as knowing and loving his Creator, being the master of all earthly creatures, being made little less than the angels, and crowned with glory and honor (Gaudium et Spes, 12-16). Man is privileged for he/she is gifted with intellect, free will, and selfdetermination. Further, human dignity is founded on the spirituality of the human essence as the principle of actuality. It is highly expressed in man's beingness, actuality, and perfection as a spiritual being, which are all gifts from God to him/her as a human being (Aguas, 2009).

Understanding the Older People

Erik Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development include infancy, toddlerhood, preschooler, schooler, adolescence, young adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood stages. Each stage is characterized by each psycho-social stage (Papalia et al., 2009). In the late middle adulthood stage, they start taking the roles of leaders, trying to teach the younger people. Their virtue is active leadership for generativity (Chung, 2018). At 70, because of their declining endurance, they start shifting from active to advisory leadership, and their virtue is from generativity to wisdom. Old age people experience so many losses in life. This is the stage when one begins to face challenges such as chronic degenerative diseases, widowhood, relatives' death, loss of valued social roles, isolation, and financial difficulties (Freitas et al., 2010). Those significantly affect the self-esteem of the elderly, which leads to some problematic situations, including insecurity, frustration, and sadness, among others. At this stage, professional intervention is crucial and necessary.

Some physical changes are explicitly manifesting during the old age stage. Physical changes include shrinking muscles, fats, and skin; thinning of hair or, for some, turning to gray; and bones becoming thin, resulting in the height shortening. Vision and hearing problems may appear, loss of taste and smell is common, sleep is less, and the intensity of sexual activity is low

(Papalia et al., 2009). Cognitively, the capacity to recall past events and learned information declines.

Methodology

This research paper uses the qualitative method in doing research, employing content analysis to appropriate information relevant to comprehending the research topic. Content analysis does not require quantitative data. Instead, it only relies on interpreting the qualitative content of the gathered information (Drisco & Maschi, 2015). Content analysis is a tool to scrutinize text from various academic sources and develop new knowledge (Hubbard, 2012). Applying the method to this research paper, researchers examine the Church document "The Dignity of Older People and their Mission in the Church and the World" (DOPMCW), published by the Pontifical Council for the Laity in 1998 articulating the teachings of the Council concerning older persons and appropriating them in the contemporary context of Filipino families. The findings and recommendations can also be applied to health workers caring for older persons. Other books and related articles are also considered, including the "United Nations Principles for Older Persons (UNPOP)," published in December 1999, to arrive at an objective understanding of older people, their significant roles in society, and the way the family, health caregivers, and the society as a whole render a dignified way of giving care and respect to them.

Themes and Key Findings

The self-esteem levels of individuals significantly impact their well-being from physiological, psychological, and spiritual standpoints. In this context, factors such as social support networks, family interactions, and spiritual practices contribute to shaping the selfesteem of individuals. Research by De Guzman, Golosinda, and Gonzales (2019) revealed that elderly Filipinos with family bonds and active social circles tend to exhibit high self-esteem.

Transitioning to age presents challenges for older individuals in the country. Researchers Salvador and Alqahtani (2020) delve into how the elderly adapt to changes in their abilities, social roles, and living situations. It is vital for them to utilize coping strategies such as maintaining ties and seeking assistance to navigate this phase smoothly. Moreover, spiritual resilience, which involves drawing strength and solace from one's faith, is important in helping one navigate these transitions (Pargament, 2007).

In a study conducted in the Philippines on the phenomenon of aging, four themes emerged as the leading traumatic experiences of the Filipino elderly. These include the issue of old age or ageism, lack of healthcare support, disrespect, violation of human rights, elderly abuse, and lack of socio-cultural responsibilities (Salvador & Alqahtani, 2019). Further, aging people were considered a liability, and society failed to see their contribution in the past and may still contribute to society in the present.

Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) or independence in their life activities are important for the well-being of older Filipinos. ADLs encompass self-care tasks along with complex responsibilities like managing finances and medications. Older people who can independently carry out ADLs generally exhibit self-esteem and enjoy better overall well-being (Loa et al., 2023). Integrating practices into their routines can enrich their sense of purpose and significance in everyday life (Koenig, 2012).

International and local policies agree that it is crucial to have strategies and support systems in place to cater to the needs of the elderly. UNPOP (1991) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015), particularly Goal Three (Good Health) and Goal Ten (Reduced Inequalities), serve as a guide for protecting the rights and well-being of the older people. In the Philippines, policies like the Expanded Senior Citizen Act (Republic of the Philippines, 2010) grant privileges to the elderly, giving tax exemption on essential products and services.

The aforementioned themes shed light on how self-esteem, health, spirituality, social support, and daily activities impact the well-being of a person. The concepts from SDT and Christian anthropology offer frameworks for understanding these connections. Promoting independence, skills

development, relationships, and spiritual wellness is suggested to improve older people's life quality.

The identified research gaps include a lack of long-term studies on how spiritual practices affect well-being and whether integrated care programs, including spiritual assistance, for older persons are effective. Researchers believe that such studies are necessary to address the needs of older people, particularly on the care that their family members and appointed caregivers provide. The practical and policy implications involve the need for care programs that cater to both the spiritual aspects, increased assistance for family caregivers, and establishing community-driven initiatives providing social and spiritual backing. Furthermore, policies should prioritize enhancing healthcare accessibility and ensure the execution of existing support measures.

This literature review emphasizes the role of self-esteem, health, spirituality, social support, and living activities in maintaining the well-being of older individuals in the Philippines. These factors are thoroughly understood by incorporating frameworks like SDT and Christian anthropology. The results underscore the significance of care strategies that tend to spiritual needs, advocate for robust policies with institutional backing, and acknowledge the substantial contribution of family members and communities in aiding older individuals.

Discussions

The following are articulations of some inspiring pieces of literature concerning older persons, starting from the document The Dignity of Older People and their Mission in the Church and the World, Pope Francis' teachings on older people, and United Nations Principles for Older Persons.

The Dignity of Older People and their Mission in the Church and the World

Seeing old age as a gift and a task to build up on wisdom, the Church affirms its teaching that every stage of human life is valuable, including old age. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace emphasized that respect and dignity of the human person at every age and time are the foundation of the Church's social teachings (CSDC, 2004). The Church affirms that old age has value, dignity, and mission. It is not just a receiver of assistance but a contributor to society and the community. This view is specifically highlighted in Dignity of Older People and their Mission in the Church and the World, published on October 1, 1998, that the assistance and care given to older persons must recognize the intrinsic value of the human persons of whatever age (PCL, 1998). This document is a landmark, one that affirms that the elderly have a distinguishable treasure and experience from which the younger generations can learn.

The Church believes that older persons have unique insights and wisdom that can enrich the lives of the younger generations. The presence of the elderly is also a gift for society and the spiritual development of the youth. They are not merely burdens that need to be cared for, but through their insights and experiences, society can rediscover the meaning of life (PCL, 1998). The document also highlights charisms or gifts from which everyone can learn from older people, namely, disinterestedness, memory, experience, interdependence, and a more complete vision of life. These lessons from the older persons are their contributions to the mission of the Church. Thus, they still make an essential contribution to the life of the Church, community, society, and the world.

However, in as much as the Church would affirm the contribution of the elderly to the mission of the Church, there are also aspects towards which the Church should offer a pastoral response to the needs of the older persons. The aforementioned document puts marginalization as one of the primary concerns that afflict older people. The document notices that society nowadays prioritizes material success and perennial youth (PCL, 1998). With this value being held up, those who do not have these traits tend to be excluded, to the detriment of the older adults of society. Moreover, the document says that lack of human relations is one of the most painful dimensions of marginalization. The elderly usually suffer because of abandonment, loneliness, and isolation. This results in lessened intellectual and cultural enrichment and stimulus that they need, and thus, the quality of their lives is impoverished (PCL, 1998).

In the Philippines, even the government policy on mandatory retirement contributes to the forced isolation of older persons. Supposedly, the law rewards the older person for his/her long service to the government and the company he/she served by giving him/her rest, a monthly pension, and other benefits. Considering that many of them are still capable but are forced to retire from their work, the idleness and the sense of not being useful anymore leads to a feeling of marginalization.

Another problem that older adults face, according to the document, is their need for assistance, especially in the aspects of healthcare, retirement facilities, and financial resources. Their need for help can somehow make them feel more confined from the rest of society. The document highlights that the assistance of older people "must be sensitive to create institutions and services adapted to their real needs" (PCL, 1998). Moreover, it encourages retirement homes to respect each individual's autonomy, allowing them to pursue their interests, provide care and treatment appropriate for their age, and foster a familial attitude.

Education and employment are another concern for older people. Their need for financial security also comes with the need for personal development, even in old age. That is why, even when retirement is compulsory in most companies and institutions, the Church highlights that some form of employment shall be provided for older people beyond their retirement because it benefits them (PCL, 1998) financially, physically, and emotionally. Their access to new technologies and employment in socially useful forms of work need to be promoted, and opportunities to engage in volunteer work and services of benefit to the community are opened to them (PCL, 1998).

The document also highlights the importance of the participation of older people in society. For them not to feel excluded in society and to highlight their belongingness, the Church encourages the elderly to "participate actively in the life of the community, both at the civil and cultural and associational levels" (PCL, 1998, p. 8). The Church encourages church and civic organizations and associations to organize and foster active participation of the elderly in the parish, community, and society.

Pope Francis' Teachings on Older People

In one of his homilies, Pope Francis said, "The richness of many years is a richness of people, of each individual person who has many years of life, experience, and history behind them... Life is a gift, and when it is long, it is a privilege… (Francis, 2020)." A long life is interpreted as God's approval of one's life. God promised to give a long life to those who remain faithful to the covenant (Psalm 91:16). One's respect for the elderly is an act of faith, a manifestation of one's obedience and recognition of the will of God.

To recognize the importance of the elderly in our Church, Pope Francis declared that every fourth Sunday of July will be the World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly (Brzezinski, 2023). The day coincides with the week of the feast day of Saints Joachim and Anna, the grandparents of Jesus. Pope Francis aims to highlight the importance of the elderly in one's family and to emphasize that they can still contribute much to family and society (Brzezinski, 2023). The pontiff stresses that the grandparents serve as the bridge between the gap, ensuring the continuity of Christian values and community traditions in the family and the community (Francis, 2016). Through the elderly, children and grandchildren realize that history does not only start with them, but they are part of the long history that started in the past and continues in the present. Pope Francis (2016) further said that a community that values and respects the elderly will certainly move forward and may prevent the mistakes of the past.

In his homily, Pope Francis said caring for the elderly is a blessing for the family and home (Brzezinski, 2023)." In Amoris Laetitia, the Pope acknowledged that caring for the elderly involves a lot of strain and hard work. Diligence in caring for elderly parents and grandparents is like expressing gratitude and love to them in return for their previous sacrifices (Pope Francis, 2016). The Pope further stated, "... how the older generation is treated today will be how the next coming generation will be treated in the future when they reach their old age (Pope Francis, 2015). As the saying goes, what one sows is what one reaps. If one is kind to his or her parents, the same kindness one will receive from his or her child. However, if one is hostile

towards his or her parents, the same hostility one will receive.

There are certain family situations where relatives are forced to place the elderly in a home care or elderly facility. In that situation, adequate care cannot be provided to the elderly for whatever reasons. The Pontifical Council for Life underscored that seeking the assistance of caregivers is acceptable as long as one is not entrapped by the "throwaway culture" or putting the older person in a home for the aged and abandoning him or her (PCL, 2021). Placing an elderly person in a facility should entail maintaining the connection and sense of belonging in the family. The elderly must continue to feel that they are part of the family, being loved, and ensuring regular communication and visitation. Sometimes, the older person finds happiness in a facility where their well-being is cared for and meets one's need for human fellowship the family cannot provide.

United Nations Principles for Older Persons

At its general assembly on December 16, 1991, the United Nations adopted the United Nations Principles for Older Persons (UNPOP). They proposed that each member country should offer opportunities for all capable older persons to participate and contribute to society's activities. Further, aware of the growing proportion of the elderly in most developed and developing countries, governments must care for the frailing senior citizens. Five principles in treating older persons were proposed. This includes 'independence' or the older person should have access to basic commodities and opportunity to work; 'participation' or the older persons should remain integrated in the life of the society; 'care' or the older persons should benefit in the care of their family members and society; 'self-fulfillment' or the older persons should be able to develop their full potentials; and 'dignity' or the older persons should be treated with utmost respect and free from exploitation and abuse (UNPOP, 1991).

The Roles of Older Person in the Church and Society

Considering the above-stated pieces of literature about the elderly, it is explicit that older persons have important roles in the family, the Church and society. The teachings and principles can be clustered into two dimensions: the elderly as agents of mission, which they can uniquely give to the Church and the world due to their experiences on the one hand, and as a recipient of pastoral care which the family, caregivers, Church, and society owe them. In either case, the principles mentioned in the related literature, i.e., SDT and the Dignity of the Human Person, are important in drafting proper pastoral care. Self-determination, even in old age, gives the elderly a chance to have freedom of determination regarding the activities they want to pursue despite their age. The Principle of the Dignity of the Human Person (CSDC, 2004) backs up the importance of every stage of human life, including the old age stage.

In providing an appropriate pastoral response, the Pontifical Council for the Laity (1998) reminds us that the Church should revise its approach to the pastoral care of older people in the third and fourth ages. This includes new forms and methods, new plans affirming the sanctity of life, and consonant with older people's needs and spiritual aspirations (PCL, 1998). It is important to consider the third and fourth age and their difference in drafting a proper pastoral approach. Accordingly, the third age is the age of people who have retired from active employment but have great inner resources and can contribute to the common good of society (PCL, 1998). They are physically independent and mentally capable of activities and have many chances to be involved in active pastoral activities. Having sufficient energy and time for the activities, they can engage in different ministries in the parish and other social works in their communities. DOPMCW mentions that older people can actively engage in parish charitable activities, apostolate, liturgy, ecclesial associations, and movements, contemplation, and prayer. Promoting inclusivity among the larger society should also be emphasized when drafting a pastoral response (PCL, 1998).

The fourth age is around 75 years old and beyond. This age is quite different from the third age because, at this stage, the elderly have less energy than the previous and probably are more physically frail. In this age, it is more probable that they are recipients of care rather than active agents of it. Nevertheless, they can still dedicate

their time to prayer and contemplation, offer their trials, illness, and suffering, serve their families by their witnessing, and offer solidarity with their fellow elderly. Also, at this stage, family members and caregivers should provide care, kindness, and empathy in assisting the older person.

Senior Citizens' Challenges in the Philippines

The responsibility of caring for the aging Filipino citizens is on the Filipino families and not on the government. However, the State may also help by providing programs and enacting laws granting privileges to older persons. Issues Filipino families are facing in taking care of their elderly are the rising cost of basic commodities, education, healthcare, and recreation, among others (Carandang et al., 2019). Most of the time, Filipino households prioritize basic commodities and expenses for the education of the children rather than the needs of the senior members of the family.

To protect senior citizens, the government enacted laws to ensure that the elderly can avail of benefits and privileges. Such laws include Republic Act (R.A.) No. 7432, or the Expanded Senior Citizens Act of 2003, R.A. No. 9994, or the Expanded Senior Citizens Act of 2010, and; R.A. No. 10645, an amendment to R.A. No. 9994 or the mandatory PhilHealth coverage for all senior citizens. The retirement benefits through the Social Security System and General Service Insurance System were ensured. Although interventions and services are offered for the welfare of its senior citizens, there are still limitations in granting and improving the quality of life of older persons in the country (Angeles-Agdeppa, 2018).

One classic comprehensive study was conducted on older Filipinos aged 60 and above, measuring the social status of the older persons in the household, particularly in decisionmaking. The study revealed that older people are consulted about important household matters if they are in good health, financially independent, and living in their own residences. However, it is the opposite when these people are unemployed, dependent on their children, and unhealthy (Williams & Domingo, 1993). This is the cause of many senior citizens' frustration because they feel useless, especially when they used to be family providers. Another similar study reported that Filipino senior citizens' struggles evolved in terms of financial and physical dependence and disengagement. Older people are frustrated when they become dependent on their children. In the case of disengagement, some are happy, and some are disappointed in their family's detachment (Villegas, 2014).

Recently, mental disorders among Filipinos have been increasing, including the sector of senior citizens. Accordingly, psychological well-being serves as a protective factor against depression. In the same study, researchers revealed that the unmet needs of Filipino senior citizens include healthcare services, financial security, support from the family, and an agefriendly environment (Carandang et al., 2020). If not addressed, unmet needs become the source of older people's anxiety and depression. Another study showed that spiritual and physical wellness activities were often conducted, while intellectual and emotional activities were limited or nothing at all. The study's results implied the absence of holistic and balanced wellness and concluded that spiritual wellness is necessary but not sufficient enough to promote the emotions of older persons (Torres, 2017).

Limitations of the Study

This research paper covers relevant topics related to the principles and dignity of older persons. It focuses on the roles of older persons in the third age and their possible contributions to society. This paper also discusses older persons in the fourth age range. Accordingly, help from their family members and caregivers is important consonant with their dignity as a human person. Related topics such as theological questions such as death or discussions on the pains, illness, and sufferings of the elderly are intentionally not included.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The researchers acknowledge the importance of intergenerational dialogue or the richness of treasures older people can and should pass on to the younger generations. Older persons are the "guardians of roots" and the caretakers of the nation's history and values. They are full of life and wisdom that young generations can learn. The

mistakes of the past cannot necessarily be repeated by listening to and heeding those in society who have experienced them and are full of wisdom.

The Church, through the Pontifical Council for the Laity, provided guidelines for the pastoral care of older people. It calls for the elderly to actively participate in the Church's ministries, such as charitable activities, liturgical ministries, different apostolates, and prayer meetings. In the family, older people can serve as the link to the past by telling the relevant histories for the younger generations to learn and remember. They must listen to them, especially when maintaining traditional fundamental human values.

The elderly have many things to contribute to the Church and society. For older people at the third age, it is only right, kind, and necessary to provide them with a conducive environment to optimize their capabilities. Especially for the young generations, it is necessary to be sensitive to older persons, to value their lives, and to appreciate what the elderly have contributed and are still contributing to the life of the community (Brzezinski, 2023). For older people at the fourth age, family members and health care providers must accompany them in their life journey, whether at home or in a care institution. There is a need for understanding. The family members and caregivers need to provide older persons with proper support in their physical, emotional, spiritual, and all other aspects of life while respecting their dignity as human persons. Such actions contribute a lot to maintaining the self-esteem of the people who are in the sunset stage. As Pope Francis stated, a civilized society can be gauged depending on the sensitivity to the elderly and the marginalized weak (Brzezinski, 2023).

For family members and health caregivers, the Council (PCL, 1998) underscored the importance of care and empathy for the elderly and those experiencing distress. Trials, illnesses, and suffering are part of life. In the Catholic faith, it represents the fulfillment of Christ's passion for the Church and the world. Helping older people to ease their distress is important, and it is only possible if they feel loved and esteemed. A form of pastoral care should, therefore, be provided by assuring that older people do not feel useless and a burden but a person whose life is valuable. The self-esteem of older persons is necessary to maintain, and the challenge nurses, caregivers, allied health workers, and geriatricians must identify to better assist them in achieving their life tasks (De Guzman, Golosinda & Gonzales, 2019).

For an older religious person with a deep spirituality and faith in God, pastoral words of comfort can be given. For instance, a priest, pastor, or counselor can console the sick older person so that their physical suffering can be considered one's offering. Pain can be interpreted as one's penance before encountering the Lord; everything happening in one's life is on God. Man cannot choose to live or die or decide on life or death, but only God.

Older persons are willing to invest their resources and precious time in those who have greater meaning and purpose in their lives. Seniors are happy to share life and resources only with those whom they feel they are needed.

For future studies, the researchers suggest a similar inquiry focusing on how spiritual practices impact well-being over time, assess the effectiveness of care programs, and identify requirements unique to elderly individuals across various settings. Sustained attention to these areas is vital for formulating approaches and policies to support aging citizens in the Philippines and other countries to lead lives filled with dignity, independence, and a sense of purpose. In the field of Theology, questions about life, death, and suffering are potential topics for study and articulation.

Ethics, Funding, and Declaration of Interest

There is no direct participation of any human person in gathering information. Hence, ethical approval was deemed unnecessary. There is no ethical violation in the use of human subjects. Each document was appropriately cited. Further, this research paper received no external funding. The researchers declare no conflict of interest.

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