

Silent Suffering: A Phenomenological Study of Elder Abuse Experiences in Filipino Private Homes

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of elderly individuals who experienced abuse in Filipino private homes. Using a phenomenological qualitative approach, ten (10) elderly participants from Maguindanao del Sur were interviewed through face-to-face, in-depth interviews. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that elderly individuals experienced physical pain, emotional distress, fear, anxiety, and social withdrawal due to abuse commonly occurring within family settings. Fear, shame, dependency, and emotional attachment prevented many from reporting abuse. The study concluded that elder abuse remains a serious yet underreported issue, highlighting the need for stronger family, community, healthcare, and government support for elderly protection and well-being.

Keywords: *Elder abuse, elderly experiences, phenomenological study, Filipino private homes, silent suffering*

INTRODUCTION

Elder abuse remains a significant yet often hidden problem among older adults, particularly within private homes where mistreatment may go unnoticed. Rather than receiving care and protection, some elderly individuals experience harm from family members or caregivers on whom they depend. Such experiences can negatively affect their physical health, emotional well-being, sense of security, and overall quality of life. In the Philippine context, family obligations and concerns about preserving family relationships may discourage victims from disclosing abuse. Given the limited research exploring the perspectives of abused older adults in private homes, this study examined their lived experiences, the physical and emotional effects of abuse, the coping mechanisms they employed, and the factors that contributed to their experiences.

Statement of the Problem

This study sought to gain insight into the experiences of older adults who encountered abuse in private homes. It focused on how these experiences affected their lives, how they managed the challenges they faced, and how Filipino cultural beliefs influenced their responses. The study aimed to provide information that may help strengthen efforts to protect and support older adults.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do elderly individuals describe their experiences of abuse in private homes?
2. What physical and emotional effects did they experience?

3. What coping mechanisms did they develop?
4. What factors contributed to the occurrence of abuse in private homes?

Scope and Delimitations

This study focuses on the lived experiences of elderly individuals who suffered abuse in private homes to help raise awareness. It is limited to elderly participants in home settings and depends on their willingness to share their experiences.

Review of Related Literature

The reviewed literature emphasizes that elder abuse is a serious yet often hidden problem, particularly within private homes where many cases go unreported. Older adults who depend on family members or caregivers for daily support may be at greater risk of abuse, especially when caregiver stress, financial difficulties, and family conflicts are present. These experiences can have profound effects on the well-being of older persons, leading to fear, anxiety, emotional distress, and a lower quality of life (Dean, 2019; Pillemer et al., 2016). Although awareness of elder abuse as a public health and social issue has grown, little is known about the lived experiences of abused older adults in Filipino private homes. This gap highlights the need for qualitative research that gives voice to their experiences and provides a deeper understanding of the challenges they face.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research study explored the lived experiences of the elderly who are abused in private homes.

Research Design

This study used a descriptive qualitative research design to understand the lived experiences of elderly individuals who experienced abuse in private homes. Qualitative research focuses on understanding people's experiences and emotions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), while descriptive research aims to clearly describe a phenomenon as it naturally occurs (Polit & Beck, 2021). This design helped gather detailed stories about the physical, emotional, and social effects of abuse, as well as the coping mechanisms of the elderly participants.

Research Steps

This study used a descriptive qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of abused elderly individuals in Filipino private homes. Data were gathered through face-to-face interviews using purposive sampling. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis.

Data Collection and Sample Selection

Data were gathered through face-to-face interviews with ten (10) elderly individuals who experienced abuse in private homes. Participants were selected using purposive sampling.

Interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed while maintaining confidentiality.

Data Analysis Methods

The collected qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis to identify and organize meaningful themes from the participants' narratives.

Study Limitations and Ethical Considerations

This study followed ethical principles to protect the dignity, safety, and well-being of all participants. Informed consent was obtained, confidentiality was maintained using codes or pseudonyms, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. Guided by the Belmont Report (1979), the study upheld the principles of Respect for Persons, Beneficence, and Justice throughout the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that elder abuse is a complex and ongoing experience shaped by family relationships, dependency, emotional vulnerability, and social silence. Abuse commonly occurred within trusted family relationships, where verbal conflicts gradually escalated into physical violence, transforming the home from a place of safety into one of fear and uncertainty.

Participants experienced significant physical consequences, including bruises, chronic pain, reduced mobility, and prolonged recovery. Due to age-related frailty, even minor injuries often resulted in lasting impairment and increased dependence on others.

Beyond physical harm, abuse caused profound emotional and psychological distress. Feelings of fear, anxiety, shame, helplessness, and low self-worth were common, particularly because the abuse was perpetrated by close family members. This betrayal damaged participants' sense of trust, belonging, and personal dignity.

To cope with abuse, many participants relied on prayer, silence, avoidance, and support from trusted neighbors rather than formal reporting channels. These strategies reflected fear of retaliation, family disruption, and cultural values that prioritize family unity and privacy.

Participants identified poverty, caregiver burden, alcohol use, emotional stress, and family conflict as major causes of abuse. However, reporting remained difficult due to dependence on caregivers, fear of abandonment, shame, and concerns about worsening family relationships.

Elder abuse negatively affected daily life, family relationships, and emotional well-being. Despite their experiences, participants expressed a strong desire for dignity, understanding, protection, and opportunities to be heard, highlighting the importance of both physical safety and emotional support for elderly abuse victims.

SUMMARY

This study explored the lived experiences of elderly individuals who experienced abuse in private homes. Findings revealed that abuse commonly occurs within families due to financial stress, caregiver burden, substance use, and family conflict, causing physical and emotional harm. Many elderly individuals remained silent because of fear, shame, and dependency, highlighting the need for stronger protection, support systems, and awareness regarding elder abuse.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that elder abuse remains a serious and underreported issue, particularly within private homes where older adults are often dependent on family members and caregivers. Risk factors such as caregiver burden, financial difficulties, dependency, and family conflict contribute to the occurrence of abuse (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024; Pillemer et al., 2016). Elder abuse can negatively affect the emotional and psychological well-being of older adults, resulting in fear, anxiety, depression, and reduced quality of life. These findings highlight the need for stronger protection mechanisms, support services, and community-based interventions for vulnerable older persons (WHO, 2024).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Families, healthcare providers, and community officials should strengthen support, awareness, and protection programs to help prevent elder abuse. Further studies are also recommended to improve interventions and support systems for elderly individuals.

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AI DECLARATION STATEMENT

QuillBot was used for language editing and paraphrasing during manuscript preparation. All content was reviewed and approved by the authors. No AI tools were used in the study design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, or development of conclusions.

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