



Perception of Elderly towards Social Security Allowance in Nepal

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

With the worldwide increase in life expectancy, insecurities in life are increasing generally to old aged people which have never been known before. Universal Old Age Allowance distributed in cash to the elderly 70 years and above is the main social security system provided by Nepal Government to the Nepalese elderly. The main objective of this article is to explore the perception of the elderly on old age allowance in Nepal. This study has used both quantitative and qualitative data for the study purpose. Data for this purpose was gathered from Kirtipur Municipality of Kathmandu district. Total sample was 47 senior citizens receiving Social Security Allowance. For the qualitative purpose few case studies were also included.

Mean age of the respondents was 77.21 (± 4.73) years. Age ranged from 70 years to 96 years. 55.3% of the participants were female, 65.9% of the participants were illiterate. This study found Old Age Allowance (OAA) is the main source of income of the elderly and this money is used for multiple purposes: buying daily consuming food and clothes (87.2%), health related expenditure (51.1%), with offspring (14.9%) and travelling (6.4%). This study found 61.7 percentage of the elderly expressed that the old age allowance was insufficient. Further, receiving OAA was not easy as they have to wait for a longer period to receive such benefits in the office, irregularities from

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government to provide such allowance on time. People who were satisfied from this allowance reported it was an honour from government and they can use this money on their own. This finding based on sample of small population cannot be generalized to whole population but the issues explored in this study may give some idea how elderly allowance is perceived in Nepal. A detailed in depth study related to OAA is required and government should take some initiative for the better management of OAA with alternative way other than cash which leads to sustainability of the program.

Keywords: Elderly; insecurities; dissatisfaction; livelihood.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rate of ageing is growing globally due to declining fertility and mortality and increasing in the life expectancy [1]. Issues concerning older adults are recognized as a research priority in developed countries, evidenced by a growing body of research in the area of psychological, social and health needs of the aged. Despite attracting less attention, there is also a great need for research in the different aspects of elderly people in developing as well as the least developed countries so that it may help to know the well-being of elderly which is not examined in depth [2,3].

With the increase of older adults globally, concern for social security is also increasing. With the increase in age, physical capacity also decreases and vulnerability towards many issues also increases. Therefore, to safeguard the individual and the society for these uncertainties and insecurities there is a need of social security. This social security is a strategy of a state or a country to invest to the people which in long run produce good returns [4].

There is no such definition of social security which may be different from country to country according to the prevailing social legislations, culture, traditions, and principles. The basic principle of social security implies collective action by the community to help a member against misfortunes and wants she/he cannot meet with her/his own resources. It is based on business ethics "ideals of human dignity and social justice" [5]. *Matridevo Bhava* (regard your mother as a god), and *Pitridevo bhava* (regard your father as a god) were traditional norms and values system prevailing in Nepali society. Higher age was considered respectable in different social functions. Still now if we take an example of Newar caste/ethnicity society of Nepal, elderly persons are facilitated as gods in attaining certain ages through three different ceremonies called Janku. The first ceremony

called Bhim Ratharohan is conducted when a person attains the age of 77th year, 7th month, 7th day, 7th hours, 7th minute and 7th Pala (Lowest unit of Nepalese chronological time) and the second ceremony is conducted at age of 84 and the third at the age of 90 years. Even in Brahmin/Chhetri community *Chaurashi Puja* (felicitation at the age of 84 years) is very common. This shows the high respects shown by Nepalese towards their elderly persons. But, after the restoration of democracy in 1990 and political unrest (war between government and Maoist) many changes have been brought in Nepali society. Many people were displaced from their traditional living place, and people were looking for easy way to shelter themselves outside the country. At the same time, urbanization, internal migration, international labor migration, students' tendency to go to foreign countries for higher education and modernization has brought a cultural diffusion and traditional norms and values started to erode and older adults of present situation are direct victims of this situation. The extended families of Nepali societies are gradually changing to nuclear. The traditional values of providing care and support for senior members have been dominated by changing needs of families that pressure them to live independently. Therefore, exclusion by family members and thus lack of support system is increasingly becoming a common problem among the senior citizens of Nepal [6]. In the recent decades, with the migration of children to foreign countries, parents are forced to live in old age home also increasing [7,8]. Existing provisions for the protection and advancement of senior citizen, however, fall far short of rapidly growing needs. Not only is the social security system very weak, but the rights of the elderly have not yet received the prominence manifested for other groups [9]. A universal and non contributory social pension that is Nepal's Old Age Allowance provides the central pillar for the country's social protection system. In Nepal social security schemes cover disabled, widowed, endangered races and

elderly people completing aged 75 years later revised to 70 years of age in general and 60 plus for DALIT and the people living in Karnali zone (remote area). This program is very popular among the elderly and they have demanded to increase the cash and political party are also positive to provide up to Rs 5,000 per month through their manifesto during election. But with the increasing life expectancy and increasing number of elderly, government is financially under high pressure for its implementation. The main objective of this paper is to explore the perception of elderly towards old age allowance in Nepal.

2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

This is a cross-sectional study carried out in Kirtipur Municipality (urban area) of Kathmandu District, the capital of Nepal. Kirtipur Municipality has 10 wards. The map of the study area is attached in annex 1. For the purpose of this study conveniently one ward of the municipality was selected and all the residents elderly 70 years and above receiving social security allowance were the respondents for this study. There were 47 elderly respondents in total receiving social security and all of them were included in this study. This study used both quantitative and qualitative methods for the data collection. Three in-depth interviews were carried out during this study. These in-depth interviewees were selected as they have started to share their stories during the study and later we took separate in-depth interview for the case study. Face to face interview method with semi structured questionnaire was used for the purpose of quantitative data collection while through case studies qualitative data were collected. Pre informed verbal consent with all the participants was taken to ensure the privacy of all the participations and confidentiality was maintained during the process of the study. Ethical Approval for the study was carried out from the Central Department of Population Studies, Tribhuvan University, Nepal. Data was analysed using computer software SPSS version 21. Simple descriptive tools: frequency, percentage and mean were used for data presentation.

3. RESULTS

Table 1 shows the distribution of the respondents according to socio-economic characteristics. The mean age of the respondents was 77.21(\pm 4.73) years. The age composition of sampled

respondents was 70-80 years (72.3%), 80-90 years (25.5%) and 90 years and above (2.2%). Majority of the respondents (55.3%) were female, 65.9 percentage were illiterate who didn't know how to read and write. Ethnic composition shows 74.5 percentage of the respondents were Newar, 21.3 percentage were Chhetri and 4.2 percentage were Brahmin caste/ethnic group. Further the respondents were categorised into three economic categories based on their past occupation with farmers (91.6%), business (4.2%) and carpenter (4.2%). Moreover, 8.5 percentage and 19.1 percentage washed their clothes and cooked and serve their food by themselves, respectively. However, they were being assisted by majority by son and daughter-in-law for cooking and serving food and washing clothes.

Table 2 shows how elderly were utilising the social security allowance they have received. 87.2 percentage of the beneficiaries used allowance for buying daily consuming food/clothes/transportation. Similarly, 51.1 percentage of the beneficiaries used allowance for their health related expenditure. Moreover, buying materials for offspring was another sector where the allowance was used by nearly one-fifth (14.9%) respondents. And very few (6.4%) beneficiaries used it for travelling or giving wages.

This study found that 61.7 percentage of the beneficiaries were dissatisfied with the allowance distributed. Those beneficiaries who were satisfied with the distributed amount gave the reason of satisfaction was "I can independently use it for fulfilling basic needs" with the highest proportion (47.6%) and "buying medicine independently" (4.8%) with the lowest proportion. Beneficiaries have been found even buying required materials for their offspring. Those beneficiaries who were dissatisfied with the allowance distribution gave reason "It is less money for their livelihood support" (46.2%) with the highest proportion whereas "No job depending on it" sharing the least proportion (4.8%) (See Table 3).

After exploring the sufficiency and insufficiency of allowance another attempt was made to explore the major problems and suggestions associated with the program (Table 4). As the data in the table is concerned the major problems found in the study area is the dispatching office of allowance far from their home being reported by more than half of the respondents (53.2%) and

two third (68.1%) had to wait longer period of time to receive money and few beneficiaries (4.3%) reporting system difficult in process. Similarly, about one-tenth (8.5%) beneficiaries suggested reforming the program by reducing age bar while they 31.9 percentage respondents feared that this program may be halted. There was voice of few beneficiaries to distribute medicine free of cost instead of money. However, 51.1 percentage of the beneficiaries voiced to distribute allowance from the ground floor of the office.

Case Study I: Utilization of Old Age Allowance

Sanu Mali (name changed) aged 81 female who has been living with youngest son said, "I have been getting allowance for last 10 years. Though I collect myself and control it, I have to spend all money for the family. Even I have to call and feed my daughters during special festivals with my own money. This social security allowance has kept my "heart and soul" together. So, I want to thank Manamohan Adhikari for this work and may his soul live in heaven."

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by socio economic characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency (N=47)	Percentage
Age		
70-80 years	34	72.3
80-90 years	12	25.5
90 years & above	1	2.2
Sex		
Male	21	44.7
Female	26	55.3
Educational level		
Illiterate	31	65.9
Literate & Primary	14	29.9
Secondary or above	2	0.6
Marital Status		
Married	47	100.0
Caste		
Brahmin	2	4.2
Chhetri	10	21.3
Newar	35	74.5
Occupation		
Farmer	43	91.6
Business person	2	4.2
Carpenter	2	4.2
Washing one self's clothes		
Self	4	8.5
Spouse	7	14.9
Son & daughter in law	36	76.6
Cooking & serving food		
Self	9	19.1
Spouse	6	12.8
Son & daughter in law	32	68.1

Source: Field survey, 2018

Table 2. Usages of allowance by beneficiaries

Usages of allowances	Frequency	Percentage
Buying daily consuming food/clothes	41	87.2
Spending for health treatment and buying medicine	24	51.1
Buying materials for offspring	7	14.9
Travelling/wages to others	3	6.4%

Source: Field Survey, 2018. Percentage exceeds 100 due to multiple responses.

Table 3. Viewing given allowance sufficient or insufficient by reasons for sufficiency or insufficiency

Sufficiency	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	18	38.3
No	29	61.7
Reasons for sufficiency	Frequency	Percentage
I don't have to give to others	3	14.3
I can independently use it for fulfilling basic needs	10	47.6
Can buy materials for my offspring	5	23.8
Buying medicine independently	1	4.8
Allowance using for self & for off springs	2	9.5
Reasons for insufficiency	Frequency	Percentage
It is less money to sustain life	12	46.2
Family need is very high	6	23.1
Half to me & half to family	5	19.2
No job depending on it	1	3.8
Less money for surviving & high price of goods	2	7.7

Field Survey, 2018. Percentage exceeds 100 due to multiple responses.

Table 4. Distribution of respondents by problems and suggestions

Problems and suggestions	Frequency	Percentage
Dispatching office of allowance far from home	25	53.2
Waiting longer period of time for allowance receiving	32	68.1
Irregular distribution of the allowance	40	85.1
Difficult in process	2	4.3
Fear of halting this program	15	31.9
Government has to reform this program by reducing age bar	4	8.5
Medicine should be given free of cost instead of allowance	2	4.3
Distribute allowance from the ground floor	24	51.1
Total	47	100

Field Survey, 2018. Percentage exceeds 100 due to multiple responses.

RITA Maharjan (name changed), aged 81 female of Bhajangal, said, “when my husband became sick, he was admitted in the hospital for five days. And the money was not enough to treat my husband's health. My son was asking others for money for my husband's health. I called my son and I gave my money that I had collected given by government as allowance. Now my husband's health is fine. Therefore, the allowance given by government for me is like relation between "Father and daughter as government is my father. So, I am very thankful to government. ”

Case Study II: Problem to receive OAA due to under age reporting

Hari Bahadur K.C(name changed), aged 73 said, "I am 73 years old. In the voter list and identity card my age is 73 years. But in citizenship certificate I am just 62 years. My parents reduced the age for what reason I do not know but now for qualifying for the allowance, citizenship is needed. My friends who were born at the same

time with me are already qualified for the allowance but still I have to wait for 8 years to be qualified for the allowance. I am suffering from pressure and diabetes. More money is required for treatment. It is always not good to ask money from children. Every time I have to ask my children for money for my treatment. So, I feel myself something what to say! If I were qualified for allowance, at least I would not ask my children for money. ”

Case Study III: children are reluctant taking care of their mother

In one of the cases, a woman aged 81, said, she has three sons. Now she is living with middle son but she is suffering from depression, pressure and other diseases. The property retained in the name of the woman for livelihood (*Juine*) was sold by their sons and they shared the money between them. When the woman went to live with the elder son, he said his family was going to America, so nobody would be in the home and

no one would remain to look after her. The woman went to live with her youngest son when the elder son denied keeping her in his house. The youngest son also said to his mother (woman) that he had no room for her. The mother or the woman wanted to live with elder or younger son because the middle son had inter-caste marriage and the woman did not like to live with middle son. At last when both the youngest and elder sons denied looking after their mother, the woman is living with the middle son. This entire scenario depressed her.

4. DISCUSSION

Population ageing is not only an issue of developed countries now but it is a serious issue of developing countries too [10]. Population aging has implications for health and other areas of social policy [11]. Living longer does not always mean we will also have better or a good quality of life in later years [12]. Nepal government has introduced social security for elderly in 1995/1996 [11,13] but very few studies were carried out focussing on this issue. In Nepal social security schemes cover disabled, widowed, endangered races and elderly people completing aged 75 years later revised to 70 years of age in general and 60 plus for DALIT and the people living in Karnali zone (remote area). In the U.S Social Security System, individuals are entitled to claim benefits as early as age 62 but they can also differ the age at which they claim to as late age 70. Eligibility participants of social security system have the ability to claim benefits being actuarially adjusted based on date of claiming [14]. In Canada if a person is a low income senior, the person may be eligible for other benefits as early as age 60 but the person must apply to receive old age security benefits. In Hongkong, monthly benefits amount to HK\$ 675 for those aged 70 and HK\$ 595 for those aged 65-69 [15]. The result of earlier research and empirical evidence show that social cash transfer can be feasible even in Low Income Countries if well designed and adapted like in Senegal and Tanzania in Africa [16]. Therefore, there can be good discussion about the age threshold such as on which basis the age for social security should be taken: either on the basis of longevity or depending on national budget and so on.

This study found OAA is a major source of income and it was utilised for buying daily consuming foods and clothes (87.2%), health related expenditure (51.1%), with kids (14.9%)

and travelling (6.4%). Similar to this study, a previous study in Bhaktapur also found 75 percent of males and 82.5 percent of females without source of income and using their allowance for their needs and desires [17]. Another study also shows 86% beneficiaries using allowance for health service, 73 percent food and 71 percent clothes [18]. Similarly a study from South India also shows half of the beneficiaries (49.3%) utilized the pension money for health needs (like medicines, visiting doctor); while one-third used it for travel; around 14 percent used it for their daily activities and social needs like visiting relatives attending social functions and ceremonies. 54.6% of the subjects felt that they possess financial autonomy in utilization of pension amount [19]. A study carried out by NPC (2012) in Nepal also shows majority of beneficiaries (79%) using allowance to purchase health service and medicines [20].

This study shows 61.7 percent expressed that OAA provided by the government was not sufficient. Similar types of voices were also raised in previous studies by Acharya [17] and Kharel [18]. A government study also shows insufficiency of allowance reported by recipients [20].

Best part of OAA in this is that almost all the elderly reported they own full ownership for its utilisation and they spend it according to their immediate need. A study from India also found around 85% subjects (n=175) told that they spend the entire pension amount received on their own. However, the remaining 15% gave some economic support towards their family; among them, the money was handled by their son (13%) or daughter and spouse (1.5%) [19].

Many countries across the globe introduced the social security system so that the minimum standard of living for its old age population is maintained. A non contributory pension in South Africa which reached 85 percent of the population has been responsible for reducing poverty gap by 57 percent among households containing an older person. Evidence from Namibia also suggests that the social security pension of the elderly is used as a household coping device. The social security program in Bangladesh after significant attention from policy makers gave immense values to the country's poor older people by assisting them in meeting basic needs, enhancing their status at home and giving them mental relief by providing a reliable source of income. Social pensions in Brazil have

revealed significant improvement in the height of children in households receiving a pension payment principally due to improved nutrition [15]. In the context of Nepal, there is no in-depth study how much this old age allowance has supported to reduce the poverty in old age. According to the views expressed by elderly in this research, OAA has helped to some extent to reduce the old age poverty in Nepal too.

5. CONCLUSION

This study found OAA is the main source of income of majority of Nepalese elderly. Nepali elderly utilised OAA in buying daily consuming food, clothes, health related expenditure, with offspring, and travelling. More than 50 percent elderly have expressed some expectation to increase the OAA by the government because it was not sufficient. Further, receiving OAA through local administrative should make elderly friendly. On the other hand some people have taken the OAA as an honour from the government. Best part of OAA was that elderly can use it in their own way. Findings based on this cross sectional small study cannot be generalized to whole elderly in Nepal. A detailed in depth study with large and national representative sample size both in quantitative and qualitative is required to know the real perception of elderly towards OAA. Government should take the issues of seniors seriously as it as a part of social security and related with quality of life of elderly, and should take some steps towards sustainability of the program as well. First, this is a cross sectional study carried out in small area and findings cannot be generalised. Secondly, the study has incorporated the perception of elderly towards non contributory social security allowance and perception of others age groups and recipients of other social security like pensions are not applicable in this study. Third, the study has used simple statistical tools such as frequency distribution, percentage, and average only. Correlations and any other statistical tools have not been used.

ETHIC AND CONSENT DISCLAIMER

Pre-informed verbal consent with all the participants was taken to ensure the privacy of all the participations and confidentially was maintained during the process of the study. Ethical Approval for the study was carried out from the Central Department of Population Studies, Tribhuvan University, Nepal.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Annex 1. Map of study area Kirtipur, Kathmandu, Nepal in the Nepal Map



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