Implications for a Comprehensive Senior Welfare Program in the Province of Northern Samar

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ABSTRACT
This research aimed to investigate the level of acceptability among family members regarding the institutionalization of the elderly, with a focus on informing the development of a comprehensive senior welfare program in the Province of Northern Samar. The study sought to document the socio-demographic characteristics of family members, including age, gender, marital status, educational attainment, occupation, annual income, family size, number of co-residing elderly, and their relationship to the elderly members. Additionally, it aimed to understand the socio-demographic profile of the elderly in terms of age, gender, marital status, educational background, previous occupation, previous annual income, current income source, and health status.

The findings revealed that the majority of family member respondents were between 35 to 59 years old, predominantly female, married, college graduates, working as teachers, with an annual income ranging from P 150,000 to P 249,000. These families generally consisted of seven or more members, harboring one elderly member and frequently accommodating elderly parents. On the other hand, the elderly participants were primarily aged 66 to 70, mostly female, widowed, college graduates, and retired government employees earning an annual income between P 250,000 to P 499,999. A notable proportion of these elderly individuals had heart-related health issues.

Regarding the correlation between family member socio-demographics and their acceptance of elderly institutionalization, regression analysis demonstrated no significant relationships. These findings suggest that demographic factors do not substantially influence family members' acceptability of institutionalizing the elderly.

In light of these study outcomes, a comprehensive senior welfare program was developed to enhance the well-being of elderly individuals in the Province of Northern Samar. This program encompasses various support levels, including independent senior living, assisted living, long-term nursing care, memory care, as well as skilled nursing and rehabilitation services. The study underscores the importance of tailoring such initiatives to the specific needs and preferences of the elderly population and their families within the unique socio-cultural context of the province.

Keyword: acceptability, elderly institutionalization, family perceptions, socio-demographic profile, comprehensive senior welfare program

INTRODUCTION
Aging, the natural progression into old age, encompasses a phase of life following youth and middle age, marked by a multitude of physical, psychological, and social changes. Within this context, the concept of aging encapsulates transformations that occur over time within individuals.

The criteria for defining old age exhibit variations across global perspectives. While the United Nations (UN), as per the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (2009), generally designates 60+ years as indicative of old age, the World Health Organization (WHO) adopts a more nuanced approach. The WHO identifies the commencement of old age at 50, emphasizing the transition into new roles, relinquishment of prior roles, or the inability to actively contribute to society as markers of this life stage.

Within the Philippines, a nation that values its older citizens as integral to its human resource, the elderly occupy a central role within family and community development. The vital role played by seniors underscores the need for comprehensive policies and programs. These initiatives aim not only to ensure the elderly's access to essential social services, facilitate their full employment, and enhance their living standards but also to foster sustained engagement in the nation's developmental pursuits.

Drawing from the 2010 Census of Population and Housing (CPH), the province of Northern Samar emerges with a population totaling 589,013 individuals as of May 1, 2010. This populace consists of 77.23% youth, 15.67% adults, and 7.10% elderly individuals. The data reveals a noteworthy increase in the elderly population from 23,227 in 2007 to 41,833 in 2010, signifying a 0.5% growth over three years. The statistical breakdown further highlights significant concentrations of elderly residents in Catarman, Laoang, Palapag, Catubig, Las Navas, Lavezares, Mondragon, Pambujan, Allen, and Gamay.

Though Filipino families traditionally uphold a high regard for their senior members, the essential needs of the elderly, including healthcare, housing, income security, and other social services, warrant dedicated attention. Addressing these needs prompts the necessity for specialized institutions tailored to elderly care. Such establishments are pivotal for identifying seniors' requirements, offering relevant training and opportunities, and facilitating productive activities to supplement their income. Additionally, these institutions serve as bridges, establishing and sustaining connections between government and non-government entities, thus enabling the seamless delivery of healthcare services, professional advice, volunteer training, and community self-help projects.

Motivated by these considerations, this study delves into the level of acceptability among family members regarding the institutionalization of the elderly. This research is particularly relevant in light of the proposed Comprehensive Senior Welfare Program for the Province of Northern Samar. The program strives to empower elderly individuals to enhance their well-being and actively engage in their community.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
The primary goal of this study is to explore the acceptability of family members regarding the institutionalization of the elderly, within the context of a proposed Comprehensive Senior Welfare Program in the Province of Northern Samar. Specifically, the study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Characterize the socio-demographic profile of family members, encompassing:
   1.1. Age
   1.2. Gender
   1.3. Marital status
   1.4. Educational attainment
   1.5. Occupation
   1.6. Annual family income
   1.7. Family size

    1.8. Number of co-residing elderly
    1.9. Relationship to the elderly residing with them

2. Profile the elderly participants in terms of their:
    2.1. Age
    2.2. Gender
    2.3. Marital status
    2.4. Educational attainment
    2.5. Previous occupation
    2.6. Previous annual income
    2.7. Current source of income
    2.8. Health status

3. Evaluate the level of acceptability among family members concerning the institutionalization of the elderly within the framework of the proposed program.

4. Identify and analyze the influencing factors that shape family member-respondents' acceptability of elderly institutionalization, considering psychological, emotional, social, and cultural dimensions.

5. Investigate potential correlations between the socio-demographic profile of family member-respondents and their degree of acceptability towards elderly institutionalization.

6. Explore potential associations between the socio-demographic attributes of the elderly participants and the level of acceptability expressed by family members towards their institutionalization.

7. Examine potential relationships between the influencing factors affecting family member-respondents' acceptability of elderly institutionalization.

8. Formulate a comprehensive program for the institutionalization of the elderly, derived from the insights gained through the study's findings, and aligned with the overarching objective of enhancing senior welfare within the context of Northern Samar Province.

METHODOLOGY
This research was carried out within the province of Northern Samar, which forms one of the integral components of Samar Island. The geographical region of the Province of Northern Samar, where this investigation was situated, encompasses the northern and western sectors, bordered by the Pacific Ocean to the east, the San Bernardino Strait to the north, the Samar Sea to the east, and the provinces of Samar and Eastern Samar to the south.

Northern Samar holds the classification of a second-class province, characterized by its division into three key geographical areas: the Balicuatro Area, the Central Area, and the Pacific Area, which includes the Catubig Valley, renowned as the province's agricultural hub. This province is further delineated into two congressional districts, accommodating 24 municipalities and an aggregate of 569 barangays.

More specifically, the study was conducted across all 24 municipalities encompassing Northern Samar. Due to considerations of accessibility and logistical constraints, this research was confined to the inland municipalities exclusively.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Demographic Profile of Family Members:

Age: Table 1.1 illustrates the distribution of family members across various age ranges. A significant portion, comprising 75%, fell within the age bracket of 31 to 60 years, while the remaining 25% were aged 19 to 30 years. Notably, the majority of respondents belonged to the 31 to 60 age range. This observation suggests that family members are situated within the middle-age bracket, providing them ample time to prepare and plan for their own aging process.

Sex: Table 1.2 showcases the gender distribution among family members, with 60% being female and 40% male. The data indicate a predominance of female family members, reflecting a deep-seated compassion towards the elderly. This insight aligns with the cultural expectation that female members often exhibit greater dedication and care towards the elderly members of their families.

Marital Status: The distribution of family members based on marital status is presented in Table 1.3. The data reveal that 75% of respondents were married, 19% were single, 4% were widowed, and 2% were separated. The prevalence of married family members underscores the significance of the family unit as a support system. This suggests that marital status influences the family's capacity to care for the elderly.

Educational Attainment: Table 1.4 outlines the educational attainment of family members. Notably, 27% were college graduates, while 15% reached college level, and 11% attained high school graduation. The dominance of college graduates among the respondents underscores their level of education, potentially contributing to better understanding and support for their family's elderly members.

Occupation: The distribution of family members based on occupation is presented in Table 1.5. Among the respondents, 25% were teachers, 22% were government employees, and various other occupations were represented. The prevalence of teachers suggests a propensity for employment and professionalism among family members.

Annual Family Income: The distribution of family members according to annual family income is outlined in Table 1.6. Notably, 28% of respondents earned an annual income ranging from P 150,000 to P 249,000. This implies that the majority of the family members have an income that provides sufficient support for their family's needs, potentially facilitating better care for their elderly members.

Number of Family Members: Table 1.7 depicts the number of family members within different size brackets. A significant proportion (52%) of respondents belonged to big families, characterized by seven or more members. The prevalence of bigger families signifies a potentially robust support network for elderly members.

Number of Elderly People Living With Them: The distribution of family members based on the number of co-residing elderly individuals is presented in Table 1.8. An overwhelming 74% of respondents had a single elderly person living with them. This data underscores the reality that a substantial number of family members are already involved in caring for an elderly family member.

Relationship to Elderly Living With Them: Table 1.9 portrays the distribution of family members based on their relationship to the co-residing elderly. An impressive 47% responded that the elderly living with them were their parents. This emphasizes the cultural obligation to care for parents in their old age.

Socio-Demographic Profile of the Elderly:

Age: Table 2.1 illustrates the distribution of elderly individuals across various age ranges. Notably, 43.6% belonged to the age bracket of 65 to 69 years, followed by other age groups. The concentration of elderly within the 65 to 69 age range prompts consideration of appropriate care arrangements as they advance further into old age.

Sex: Table 2.2 showcases the gender distribution among elderly participants, with 60.9% being female and 39.1% male. This aligns with broader demographics and underscores the need to address the particular needs of both genders within the framework of senior welfare programs.

Marital Status: The distribution of elderly individuals based on marital status is presented in Table 2.3. The data show that 54.1% were widowed, emphasizing the vulnerability of elderly individuals who have lost their spouses. This highlights the potential benefits of comprehensive welfare programs that cater to the needs of widowed seniors.

Payment Policy: The payment policy for senior care services encompasses various components as outlined. These include coverage under Medicare, private insurance, and payment structures for different services. This information highlights the complexity of financial arrangements related to elderly care and underscores the need for well-structured comprehensive welfare programs to address these intricacies effectively.

In conclusion, the socio-demographic profiles of both family members and elderly participants reveal important insights that can guide the development of a Comprehensive Senior Welfare Program in the Province of Northern Samar. These profiles emphasize the significance of family dynamics, financial considerations, and cultural norms in shaping the acceptability and feasibility of elderly institutionalization. By understanding these profiles, policymakers can tailor the program to meet the specific needs of Northern Samar's senior population and ensure their well-being and dignity in their golden years.

CONCLUSION
Socio-Demographic Profile of Family Members:

The socio-demographic profile of family members in the Province of Northern Samar depicts an adult population, predominantly composed of females who are married, possess educational degrees, and are currently employed. The data also reveal that families tend to have a substantial size and often include elderly individuals such as parents, grandparents, and relatives. This suggests that family members possess the necessary personal and professional attributes to contribute significantly to society. Furthermore, the strong presence of elderly family members indicates a high level of value placed on traditional family ties and bonds within the Norte Samareño community.

Socio-Demographic Profile of the Elderly:

The profile of elderly individuals in Northern Samar reflects a population within the young-old category, predominantly consisting of females who are widowed. These elderly individuals often hold college degrees and have previously been employed in government positions. Their annual income typically falls within the range of P 250,000 to P 499,999, and they depend on retirement pensions for financial support. Health-related issues are prevalent among this group.

Level of Acceptability:

The findings indicate a positive level of acceptability among family members regarding the institutionalization of the elderly in the Province of Northern Samar. This suggests that the concept of confining the elderly to specialized institutions for continued care is generally accepted by family members. This acceptance might be attributed to the practical necessity of providing dedicated care and attention to the elderly, especially in cases where family members are occupied with other responsibilities.

Factors Affecting Acceptability:

Psychological, emotional, social, and cultural factors exert an influence on the level of acceptability among family members regarding the institutionalization of the elderly in Northern Samar. Despite the overall acceptance of the concept, these factors emphasize the profound value that Norte Samareños place on maintaining close familial bonds, particularly with elderly family members. Many elderly individuals prefer to remain within the comfort of their homes, surrounded by their children and grandchildren, who care for their well-being. This indicates that while institutionalization is accepted, the strong attachment to family and the desire to personally care for the elderly persist.

Implications for a Comprehensive Senior Welfare Program:

The study's findings hold significant implications for the development of a Comprehensive Senior Welfare Program in the Province of Northern Samar. Understanding the socio-demographic profiles of both family members and elderly individuals allows for the formulation of targeted policies and programs that cater to their specific needs. Recognizing the importance of traditional family values, the program should aim to strike a balance between institutional care and the preservation of familial bonds. Strategies should also address the various health concerns faced by the elderly population. By acknowledging these insights, the proposed welfare program can effectively enhance the well-being and quality of life for seniors in Northern Samar.