

# **ABANDONMENT OF ELDERLY PEOPLE IN NEPAL**

Elderly people's Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis has been written mainly from the perspective of the elderly people. The purpose of the thesis is to find out the relationship of elderly people with their family. The focus has been given on the family bond of elderly people with their children, feelings and the expectations of the elderly people who were abandoned by their own children. The theme is to explore the life situation of the elderly people with their children and to know whether the elderly people are wanted and welcomed warmly in the family or not.

The thesis topic is related with the life experiences of the elderly people, their feelings, emotions and the expectations from their children and family, therefore, qualitative research method is applied to carry out the data collection. The data collection is done in one of the elderly care home of Nepal. The semi structured interview is done with two elderly people along with a short and simple group discussion. Both primary and secondary data sources have been used to get enough information due to lack of estimated participants. The data analysis is done with thematic approach.

The finding of the thesis concludes that due to influences of western culture and modernization, the young generations are more interested towards the nucleated family that they are giving up on the traditional way of living as a joint family. Also, the study finds that due to change in the concept of the young generation, the elderly people are living the life of solitude. Most of the elderly parents who are living in the elderly care home have family with their children and grandchildren, but still they are abandoned by the family. Some elderly parents do not have good relationship with their children and some elderly parents' children are living in cities and abroad that they are not helping or supporting the elderly parents left behind. The research shows that the elderly people are not very welcomed by the family.

Keywords: Elderly people, Elderly care home, Abandonment, Feelings, Expectations

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Presently, the issue of abandonment of elderly people is increasing in Nepal and is likely to be even higher in near future. Abandonment of elderly people refers to those elderly parents who are neglected and ignored by the children and the family and are no longer getting any support from them. According to the article from spotlight Nepal, the census 2011 shows that over nine percent of total population are over sixty years old in Nepal and will likely to be more in near future due to continuous raising life expectancy.(Sharma, 2014)

Nepal is rich in culture and tradition. Approximately, there are over hundred ethnic groups following different culture and traditions. Similar to many Asian countries, Nepal is rich in culture of showing respect to the elders and taking care of them at their old age. The tradition of looking after the aged parents has been passed down from generations to generation. The life experiences that the elderly people have gained during their life time are highly appreciated by the young generations. So, they are also considered as the role model of the family and the society. The elderly people are the assets, history and the pride of the nation due to rich in their life experience, knowledge and skills that could be useful to learn from one generation to another and continue the traditional skills. (Dhakal, 2012, 15)

In Nepali family system, the eldest in the family is considered as the head of the family, and if some issues arise in the society, the youngsters think to get the advice from the elders to sort it down. It shows that the elderly people are well respected in the family and the society of the country. Hinduism as a main religion, caring for elderly people is a cherished ideal in Hindu families of the country. (Aacharya, Sally, 2015) There are different perspectives on ageing in Nepal according to the ethnic groups and culture of the people. When the elderly people reach certain age like seventy or eighty four, they are honoured as gods. In

Newar culture, one of the ethnic groups, there are three different ceremonies called 'Janku' are performed when the elderly people reach certain age. The first ceremony is called 'Bhim Ratharohan' which is celebrated when the elderly people reach the age of seventy year, seven month, seventh day, seventh hours, seventh minute and seventh second. The second ceremony is performed at the age of eighty four and the third is at the age of ninety years (NSSW 2012). (Parker, Khatri, Cook & Pant, 2014, 238.)

Old age is the age of long and wide world and life experience. However, the obvious physical and mental changes in the body brought by the old age are a big challenge for the elderly people making them unable to do their own necessary basic things. (Aacharya, 2008, 214 & 215.) During this stage of life, the elderly people become weak both physically and mentally that they entirely want to depend on their family for full support, love and care. An old age is also related to the baby stage due to the similarity in the behavior. That is why, the elderly people need the helping hands to take care of them in their daily lives. They are vulnerable at this state and are in high risk to diseases and disabilities. This is the most important period when the elderly people need the love and care from their family members due to incapability of taking care of themselves. At this age, family plays very important role to support their daily lives.

Sadly, those culture and traditions of taking care of elderly parents are slowly breaking down in the country. The reasons for such change are the changing environment of the world, desire for the small and happy family, poverty, urbanization process and influence of western culture and society. The ways of living together in joint family that our ancestors have followed are gradually decreasing with change in time and generations. "The historical practices of care giving to elderly people, the living arrangements with joint family and familial responsibilities towards elders that once centered around or with the patriarchal family network are changing in line with the western culture, individualistic or emotionally nuclear family systems." (Bhatarai & Bhatarai, 2014)

The way of living has changed since few decades in Nepal due to better access in quality education, advance health facilities and proper working life with many other facilities that are needed in a person's life. There has not been the change in the way of living, but in the way of thinking as well that today's younger generations are more concerned in themselves and their life. According to Bhattarai and Bhattarai (2014) the social change theories stated that when the children are involved in outside world such as school and drift away from the circle of family, the children are less likely to engage in traditional life styles. With such changes in everyday life, the family starts to become individualistic and emotionally nucleated which results in decrease in amount of time the children spent with their parents.

In this changing world, a big gap is created between the younger and the elder generation, that gap is what we call 'Generation gap'. The gap has separated the way of living and thinking in these two generations and the elderly people are left in the world of loneliness. In this situation, are the elderly people happy with their family or hiding their tears behind their fake smile?

## 2 AGEING AND ELDERLY PEOPLE IN NEPAL

In this chapter, the brief descriptions are given about ageing, abandonment along with elderly people and elderly care home in Nepal. This chapter has focused on the challenges of ageing, increased number of the elderly people as well as elderly care home and the meaning of abandonment.

### 2.1 Ageing

Ageing is a natural and an unavoidable process of growing old. Every living being born, develops, grows old and dies eventually. Compared to the young age, people are not at the same level both physically and mentally once they start ageing. "Ageing is a continuous, universal, progressive, intrinsic, and deleterious process. It is distinct from the physical and mental retardation caused by any other reasons like diseases, disability or any superficial causes. Physical disabilities, mental disorder, characterized by loss of memory and less socialization are some of the formal characteristics of ageing." (Yadav, 2012, 48)

Ageing is not a challenge in one country but in the whole world as it causes social and economic changes in every country. Gradually, the numbers of elderly people are increasing worldwide due to better facilities and advanced technologies. The worldwide drops in the fertility rate and rise in life expectancy have increased the gradual ageing of the world's population. (Yadav, 2012, 49)

Ageing could also results in depression for an individual because with ageing one starts losing the work status, freedom, health, beloved ones and family. Currently, Nepal is in similar situation facing the challenges with ageing and increasing number of elderly people. Compared to the developed countries, Nepal is not able to ensure a better provision for the elderly people. Moreover, the old age allowance from the government is not good enough to support the elderly people in Nepal. The current old age allowance of the country is one thousand rupees (around 10 Euros) per month which is enough for a cup of tea

a day. (Khanal, 2015) According to the tradition of the country, the responsibility of well being of the elderly people lies upon their own children and the family.

## 2.2. Elderly people in Nepal

Different countries have their own different ageing perspective. For instance, in United States, a senior citizen is defined as someone who is 65 years old and above. However, in Guinea, anyone who is 50 years old and above are considered as old. (Liz, 2013)The Senior Citizens Act 2063 (2007) of Nepal defines elderly people as those people who are aged 60 and above. (Khanal, 2015) However, there is a system of retirement age according to the profession in Nepal. According to Dhakal (2012) the retirement age for the general administration group is fifty eight, and sixty for health service sectors. The judiciary and University services retirement age is at sixty three years and sixty five for the chief justice and the other members of the constitutional service. The writer further adds that there is no specified retirement age in agriculture, politics and social service sectors in Nepal.

Similar to other developed countries such as Japan, Europe, North America and Australia, the numbers of elderly people have been increasing in Nepal as well. The modern technology of health facilities, advance medicine along with good education, immunization, healthy and nutritional food have increased the life expectancy of Nepalese people compared to few decades ago. The average life span of Nepali people is 71 which have increased by 12.3 years between the years 1991 and 2011. The life span of an average Nepali people used to be 27.8 years in 1954. (Magar & Kumar, 2015)

In these few decades the numbers of elderly people have increased tremendously. The 2001 census showed the elderly population of Nepal constitutes 6.5 percent of total population. In the year 1991-2001, the annual elderly population growth rate was 3.39 percent against the national population growth rate of 2.3 percent. According to the 2011 census, the percentage of elderly population has



increased to 9.1 percent (male 4.6 and female 4.5percent). (Bhattarai & Bhattarai, 2014)

As already mentioned above, the improved and good quality of life is increasing the life expectancy of the elderly people. Due to quality education, the fertility rate has decreased among the young generations and along with reduction in mortality rate because of improved lifestyle. As a result, there is high probability of continuity of increase in the numbers of the elderly people in near future. 'Bhim Prasad Subedi from the Department of Geography at Tribhuvan University estimates that in the next 20 years the 60 and above population will double, turning Nepal's demographic profile from a pyramid into an hour-glass: wide at the top and wide at the bottom.' (Shrestha, 2012)

According to Bhatarai and Bhattarai (2014), the number of population of the country is increased by fifteen percent making the total population 26.6 million from 23 million in 2001, where sixty percent are living only in Kathmandu making the city congested among the world's cities. The writers further add that among the total population of the country, 2.4 million are only the elderly population and in between them, 24.2 percent live in urban areas and the 75.8 percent live in rural areas. There are many elderly people living in the rural areas compared to urban areas. Unlike the young generation who move away from their hometown in seek of better life and future, the old generations are more attached to their birthplace, family and social ties from which they do not want to be away and are left behind in the end.

The elderly people are living the life of solitude in one or another way. Some of them have lost their beloved partner and some of their children are away from them. Moreover, the elderly people are either retired from the working life or have a weak physical and mental ability to work which have make their life more miserable. During such time, family should play a key role to support the elderly parents to cope with their loneliness and poverty. Usually, according to the tradition of the country, when the parents retired from the work or are no longer in good condition physically, mentally and financially, the married children should

look after them and support them both morally and financially. 'The family can be of great help for the retiring old person (Hepworth et al. 2010). If the latter benefits from emotional care from their family, their psycho-affective state will be good. Likewise, if after retirement the old person is invited to live with one of their married children; they will feel useful again and will enjoy financial assistance, moral support and company (particularly that of his grandchildren).' (Runcan, 2013, 15)

Unfortunately, the tradition of living together with grandparents and parents are fading away slowly. According to the article of Shrestha (2012) from Nepal times, there are thousands of sixty plus elderly people who find themselves orphaned at old age. The retired and abandoned elderly people are forced to spend rest of their lives either in old age home, streets or in their own residence with no one to look after them. The article claims that the numbers of abandoned elderly parents are likely to rise in future.

### 2.3 Abandonment

Nepal is continuously struggling with hunger and poverty from past decades. Moreover, the unstable politics and the natural disasters such as an earthquake, floods and landslides are causing more problems in the country than it already has. Among all these tragedies, elderly people, both homeless and abandoned, have also been one of the main issues in these past years. Many elderly people are abandoned in the country every year. Some of them luckily managed to get in the elderly care home but some could not manage and have to settle down on their own or else the streets.

Abandonment could be referred to many cases such as abandonment of relationship (family, partners, and children) or abandonment of dreams, careers and property. In this thesis, abandonment refers to abandon the relationship with someone or leave the side of someone. Gerlach (2015) says that abandonment

is a relationship dynamic that occurs when an adult or child voluntarily denies or ignores key responsibilities that some expects them to fulfill.

The issue of elderly people who are abandoned and are no longer getting the support from their children and family are increasing. Shrestha (2012) from Nepal times says that Nepalese people do not have enough time and strength to take care of their own children due to pressure of modern life. In that situation, to provide enough time, love and care towards the elderly parents seems a challenge to a family and the elderly parents become an economic and emotional burden in the end. The average size of the family in Nepal was 5.4 which have now shrunk to 4.7, and the family size of the capital city is 3.7.

#### 2.4 Elderly care home in Nepal

Elderly care homes are the government, nongovernment or private organizations that are providing the shelters to the elderly people who are abandoned, homeless or have no one to look after them. The history of elderly care home goes back from 1938 B.S. but the actual establishment of an old age home was in 2030 B.S (1973 A.D). (Aacharya, 2008, 215) There is only one elderly care home that is supported by the government, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare Council which is also the first elderly care home of Nepal.

There are many organizations that are established for the sake of senior citizens. According to Aacharya (2008), there are approximately 52 organizations established to work for senior citizen in one or another form from the part of both government and non-government sectors. In spite of establishment of so many organizations in past decades, there are still countless of elderly people deprived of these services and are living in the street. The old age homes are not able to cover all the abandoned and homeless elderly people from the country.

All societies have their own norms and values of care providing to the elderly people. Compared to the western societies, the values and norms in eastern culture are different. “Anthropologist Jared Diamond, who has studied the treatment of the elderly across cultures, has said the geriatric in countries like the U.K and U.S. live ‘lonely lives separated from their children and lifelong friends. As their health deteriorates, the elderly in these cultures often move to retirement communities, assisted living facilities and nursing homes.” (Carter, 2013) Inheriting the eastern culture with Hinduism as a main religion, the children and the family members are responsible to provide care and support to the elderly people in Nepal. Despite being rich in culture and tradition which reflects the respect towards the elderly people, it is very surprising to see numbers of abandoned elderly people and elderly care homes in Nepal.

The research is done in one of the elderly care home in Nepal. According to the staff from the organization, many elderly people, both homeless and abandoned by the family, come to take shelter in the elderly care home but unfortunately, the organization has no capacity to take more than the limited number of elderly people that it has to reject the request of those people. (Elderly care home, 2016)

The daily life of the elderly people in this elderly care is very simple and peaceful. They come together and sing the songs of the lord, chat with other residents and take bask in the sun in day time. Some of the female residents also weave baskets and twist cottons into wicks for oil lamps to pass their time. The organization serves two meals per day with light snacks in afternoon. The staffs and the young volunteers help the elderly people to have bath and wash the clothes.

The elderly people who have come to live here have received nothing but the pain and sadness from their family. The hope or a dream that they had once in a life to live happily with their children and family has shattered. The bitter truth of their life is that they are left behind by their children and are alone in their sorrowful world. They are trying to forget the pain given by their children and consider others residents in the organization as their family now. They feel happy to

come and live in the organization. 'We are served good food and then we go for prayers in the morning and in the evening. It's better to live here than at my son's house which is filled with hatred.' (Baldrige, 2006) Many elderly people who were living with their family before feel that they are happy living in elderly home rather than in their children's home.

### 3 PURPOSES OF THE STUDY AND THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the life situation of the elderly people living in the elderly care home. The priority is given to find out the family relationship of the elderly people with the members of the family, especially with their children, and to know how happy the elderly people are with their children. The study also aims to search what kind of treatments the elderly people are given by their children or family members. The research is done in one of the elderly care homes in Nepal. The research questions of this thesis are listed below:

- How do the elderly people feel about their children?
- How are the elderly people taken care in the family?
- What are the expectations of the elderly people from their children?

The first research question aims to find out the family bond of the elderly people with their children. The elderly people, who have spent their life to take care of their family and children, during their old age, are they also given the same love and care from their children. The second research question intends to know the reasons of living in the elderly care home and to find out whether the elderly people are wanted in the family or not. When we plant a flower, we take care of it in such a way that it would bloom beautifully and make the house beautiful to live in. Similarly, when the parents bring their children in this world, they do their best to nourish the children in a hope that when the aged parents grow old and weak, the children would also give them their time, love and care. So, the third research question tries to find out expectations of the elderly people from their children and explore whether the elderly people are meeting their expectations from their children or not.

## 4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is the process explained as a way to solve the research problem methodically. It consists of research methods, selection criterion of research methods that are used in context of research and explanation of using the research methods and its reason to choose the particular methods and why other research methods are not used. (Vincze, 2013, 2)

The sources that are used in this thesis are both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data source is the research that is done by the researchers themselves and the secondary data source are the data that exist already such as books, records, Magazines, documents, news and articles. The primary data is collected through individual interviews and a group discussion and the secondary data sources are books, journals, internet news and articles which are obtained through online from the library of Diaconia University of applied Sciences and the Google websites.

### 4.1 Qualitative Research Method

According to the topic of the thesis, the qualitative research method is applied for the research. The research is based on the life experiences of the elderly people along with their emotions and feelings which could not be explained in quantifiable or measurement terms. Therefore, I have used qualitative research method.

Qualitative research method is the method to reveal the perception, feelings, emotions, experiences and the behavior of the target group. It is descriptive rather than predictive and statistics analysis does not fit in this research method compared to quantitative research. "The strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. It provides information about the 'human' side of an issue that

is, the often contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals.” (Qualitative Research Methods, 2013, 1)

Hancock et al (2009, 7) say that Qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena and aims to help us to understand the social world in which we live and why things are the way they are. The authors point out that qualitative research is particularly useful where the research questions are related to the situations such as exploration of concepts or views, real life context and sensitive topics where flexibility is needed. Both research methods have their own merits and demerits. However, one of the merit points of qualitative research method is the use of open ended questions where it gives opportunity to the participants to respond in their own words but not force them to choose from the fixed answers as quantitative research method. (Qualitative Research Methods, 2013, 4)

#### 4.2 Data collection

There are many ways of data collection in qualitative research methods. Interviews, focus group, observation are some of the examples of data collection method. The most common way of collecting data in qualitative research method is interview. Likewise, the interview and the group discussion methods are used to collect the data in this research. Interviews were carried out in one of the elderly care home in Nepal. At first, it was difficult to approach the elderly people for the interview because the elderly people did not show any interest to talk about their past life.

Finally, I was able to convince two elderly people to agree for the interview individually however, they come with a condition that their conversation will not be recorded. The numbers of interviewees were less than my expectation because I was targeting five elderly people for the interview. Moreover, as the tape recorder was not allowed to record the conversation, hand notes were used to note down the interviews. Additionally, the group discussion was done in a



small group of six elderly people with their permission covering the basic topic areas without any depth questions. I was asked not to go for the depth questions or the reasons of their abandonment by the group of elderly people beforehand. The group discussion was done in normal environment with informal chats because it was planned on the spot due to lack of expected participants. The interviews, both individual and group discussion, were done in Nepali language, as being a native speaker; I did not need any mediator for the interview.

There are different ways to have interview such as unstructured, semi structured or also called focused interview and structured interview. The semi structured interview is conducted with the target groups so that it would help to cover the sensitive and depth questions by applying open ended questions. According to Hancock et al (2009, 16) qualitative researchers generally use semi structured interviews which involve a number of open ended questions which helps to cover the topic areas that the researchers want to.

The open ended questions provide the researcher to investigate and cover some topic in more detail and also can change the flow of topic. "If the interviewee has difficulty answering a question or provides only a brief response, the interviewer can use cue or prompts to encourage the interviewee to consider the question further. In a semi structured interview the interviewer also has the freedom to probe the interviewee to elaborate on an original response or to follow a line of inquiry introduced by the interviewee." (Hancock, Ockleford & Windridge 2009)

Due to the nature of the thesis topic, there are some sensitive questions that have to be used to get the right data, so the semi structured interview could help both the interviewer and interviewee to change the flow of conversation if necessary that is why, the semi structured interview is used for the research.

As the numbers of interviewees were less than the expectation, the secondary data sources were used where the information were collected from books, journal, news and articles related to the thesis topic.

### 4.3. Data management

Due to sensitive questions of the research, I was not allowed to use tape recorder to record the interview so the hand notes were used to note down the interview. The notes that were taken is converted to fuller notes and kept in safe place where beside me, others could not be accessed. The identity of the participants was used as a code so that no one but only I could understand to keep the confidentiality. The field notes were written down in organized way to understand and compare the data with secondary data sources.

### 4.4 Data analysis

Data analysis is one of the important yet difficult parts of the research. There are many ways of data analysis in qualitative research and one of the common ways is thematic analysis. 'A thematic analysis is one that looks across all the data to identify the common issues that recur, and identify the main themes that summarise all the views you have collected. This is the most common method for descriptive qualitative projects.' (Patton & Cochran, 2002)

As I was not allowed to use tape recorder, the data was taken in hand notes. Furthermore, the hand notes taken down were also read aloud to the interviewee after the interview to know if there is any part the participants would like to add or cut off. The participants were not educated enough to read and write by themselves. So, the permission was given from the participants to use the notes of the interview in this thesis research. According to Hancock et al (2009), if the consent for audiotape is prohibited, then the permission for hand notes can be taken to write the conversation and should be shown to the participants after the interview. However, if the participants did not give permission to use the hand notes after the interview, then notes cannot be used for the research.

Furthermore, the data collected should be reorganized for further use and should be easy to understand. 'Whatever qualitative approach is involved, it is

very important to be organised when keeping records of data or reflexive notes or memos, or documents. As in all (qualitative or quantitative) research it is crucial to maintain a good audit trail which could in theory be inspected by others. It is also important to ensure that any saved records are kept in accordance with data protection regulations. This often involves careful anonymization procedures in labelling digital or analogue recordings or documents and text.' (Hancock, Ockleford & Windridge 2009,16.)

The thematic analysis is used for data analysis in the research as mentioned above. According to Patton and Cochran (2002) there are four key stages of thematic analysis. The first stage is read and annotates transcripts. The authors say to make preliminary observation rather than overview of data. However, the research is done with written hand notes due not permission of using the tape record, so the converted fuller notes are read thoroughly. The second stage is to identify themes, where the focus is given in the details of the data to identify the themes and to summarise what is going on or what the interviewee is trying to refer to. The themes of the data analysis were identified such as the feelings of elderly people, reasons of abandonment and expectations. Numbering the lines is important to represent each segment while coding the data. The third stage is to develop a coding scheme. The authors put forward that it is very useful to develop coding scheme as soon as initial data have been collected. It helps to avoid the narrow analysis path and ensures the individual bias about 'what is going on' is kept in check. The fourth or the last stage of thematic analysis is coding the data. The codes mentioned in third stage are used in all the data, by writing codes in the margin of the notes. The purpose of this analysis is to find out the answers of the research questions of this thesis.

The data collected from primary sources was analyzed carefully. The above mentioned process was used to analyze the data collected from both interview and the group discussion. Due to lack of enough participants, the secondary data source is used to support the finding of the research. The secondary data source is read thoroughly to check if they fit in the research questions and rearranged to support the objective of this thesis.

#### 4.5 Ethical consideration

The researcher should be very careful while doing the research so that the participants feel comfortable and safe. Ethical consideration is one of the most important parts to bear in mind during the research. Before taking any steps further for the research, the researcher must inform the plans to the organization and the participants so that they could take their decision.

According to Patton and Cochran (2002), one starting point in considering ethical concerns is the four principles of Tom Beauchamp and Jim Childress (1983): (i) Autonomy, respect the rights of the individual; (ii) Beneficence, doing good, (iii) Non malfeasance, not doing harm; and (iv) Justice, particularly equity.

As the research carries very sensitive questions, special attention was given while conducting the thesis research. The permission was taken from the organization so that I could visit to observe the organization and the permission was granted to take the interview of the elderly people if they are interested. However, it is not easy to find the participants who were willing to speak about their family and current situation which somehow I knew could turn out in that way. . One elderly woman with sad and bitter face told me when I asked her for the interview, 'Everyone comes here just for the interview from us'. I was frozen for a while from her reaction and I think it is no surprise.

However, with some effort, two elderly people were convinced for the interview but with the conditions that I would not reveal anything about them with anyone, which of course I would not and also not to record their conversation in recorder. So, the interview was done with few hand notes.

According to Patton and Cochran (2002) there are two ethical issues that should be considered in any research and that are consent and confidentiality. The consent means that the participants have free will to take part in and should be well aware about the research and the questions that they will be asked and if the participant does not feel comfortable with any of the research methods

then they will not be pressured to take part in the interview. And the confidentiality means to keep the identity of the participants protected by all means and should not be left in a place or file or in notes where it could be exposed easily. The researcher should always be able to avoid the harm to the participant.

The group discussion was done in a group so the elderly people seemed quite relaxed and only such questions were asked which could be answerable in the group without any hesitation. For the individual interview, the participants were assured that their identity will be kept confidential along with the hand notes that are used for the interview. The hand notes will be kept in safe place where only the researcher could get access and will be completely destroyed after the completion of the thesis. The stories of the participants were heart touching that they could not stop themselves from crying so, the time gap was given for the comfort and change of mood of the participants.

#### 4.6 Limitations of study

In every research process, there may arise some limitations of study. The limitations of the study are those characteristics of design or methodology that impacted or influenced the interpretation of the findings from the research. (University of Southern California, 2017)

The tape recorder was not permitted to record the conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee. Due to the fact, there is chance of losing some of the important information from the interviewee. The hand notes were used to note down the conversation of the interviewee and it is not possible to write down or remember each and every words of the interviewee while writing. Also, it is not polite to stop the conversation and ask the interviewee to repeat the words missed by the interviewer as the topic and the questions are very sensitive that it might affect the flow of the conversation and the interviewee could feel uncomfortable to express themselves again.

## 5 FINDINGS

Findings are the information that is obtained from the research and the investigation. Here are the findings of my research that are obtained from the interviews and the group discussion. There are three different themes of the research and they are feelings of the elderly people, feelings of burden and expectations of the elderly people.

### 5.1 Feelings of elderly people

“Feelings are the thoughts inside of us.” (Frender; Schiffmiller, Dittrich, Dennis, 2007) There are different kinds of feelings such as feelings of happiness, sadness, jealousy, nervousness, confident and so forth. Some feelings can be described and some cannot be. Everyone has feelings, and so does these abandoned elderly parents.

Every parent wants to see their children grow well, be educated and get success in their lives. Therefore, the parents themselves have worked hard so that they could help their children move forward. Leaving their dreams behind, day and night the parents put their effort on how to fulfill the needs of the children. However, they felt that their hard works and sacrifices have brought even more sorrows in their life.

*There was a time when my children were kids; I used to eat the corn because there was no sufficient rice for all of us, and go to work so that my children could eat the rice. My parents also have done the same. I loved my parents a lot and took care of them with all my might. Now to think that I am abandoned by my own children, it feels like a nightmare to me. (Interviewee 1)*

Nepal is one of the poorest countries in Asia. A country ranked in 28<sup>th</sup> position in the list of the poorest countries in the world. (Gergson, Jonathan, 2017, 12) Compared to the developed countries, the life of the country people are struggling. For the average middle class family, the life is very expensive that the

bread owner has to work day and night to feed the family. Furthermore, in Nepal, the male members are considered as the bread winner and the female members are supposed to take care of the house and the children, though the concept has changed over past years but mainly in cities only. Not showing any sign of sigh, every parent has struggled in their lives to up bring their children and provide them their necessities with single hope keeping in their heart and mind that one day, when the parents grow old and weak, their children would look after them.

*During my time, I had a small and old traditional home in village where my parents, wife and the children lived together happily, but now my children work in big offices and are living in cities in big concrete house and still there is not enough space for this old man to live with them. (Interviewee 1)*

The old age is very vulnerable age for all the elderly people. It is very difficult for them to cope with the changes in health, income, physical and mental ability and many others things that they are used to in their adult age but not possible in old age. At this time, the important support that they need to cope with such changes and encourage them to live their life fullest is their family and their warm love and care. However, the changed concept of the young generation is affecting the lifestyles of the elderly people. The tradition of living together with elderly parents is fading away slowly. "Nepal, being a traditional society had enjoyed the familial ties with elderly people in past, however, the changed family model does not support to elderly and people need their own income sources even to fulfil ordinary demands in old ages." (Yadav, 2012, 53)

According to the article from Nepal times, a 77 year old woman from Eastern Nepal makes her life by opening a small stall of cigarettes, shampoo sachets, nail polish and chewing tobacco to survive. She did not choose to go to elderly care home and struggled to survive by working. She is the mother of two children and her husband has passed away. Her son and daughter in law (whom she has not met yet) live in Kathmandu and have not come to see her for three years. (Shrestha, 2012) Every elderly people who are ignored and abandoned by their children do not choose to go and live in elderly care home. Some of

them try to survive by themselves like an elderly woman mentioned in the paragraph.

The elderly people feel betrayed by their own children. The dream that they had since their children were born has been completely broken.

*There is a proverb that children are the stick of the old age. I was so happy when I had my first child, and he was a son. Since his born, I started having wonderful dream about him and us. I did not mind all those hard works and the sacrifices we made just for the sake of our children, with a hope that they will give us the same love and care when we are like a setting sun. The belief which I had that my children will be my old age stick is nothing but just my imagination, I guess. (Interviewee 2)*

I believe, every parent, mainly in Nepal, wish to live with their family till their last breath. But, due to recent changes in the society of the new generation, most of the elderly people wish has remained just a wish. According to the article posted in 2016 by Himalayan Care Hands Nepal, there are many elderly people who are feeling difficult to stay with their family and are taking shelters in elderly care and if not possible then even in streets.

## 5.2 Feeling like burden

According to Gorvin, L. and Brown, D, feeling like burden is the view that one's existence burdens family, friends, and/or society' (Joiner et al, 2009, p. 634.).

From both the group discussion and the individual interview, it seemed that the elderly people are not very welcomed in the family. The secondary data source also helps to clear that the elderly people were not wanted in the family. They were feeling very sad and lonely inside even living together with the family. The elderly people did not come to live in the old age home with happy heart as there were no choices left but to come and live in the old age home. Some of them chose to move voluntarily to old age home and some of them were forcefully abandoned. From the interview and the group discussion of the elderly



people, it points out that the elderly people feel that they were a burden for their family.

One of the interviewees in the organization told how he was brought in the elderly care without his awareness. The relation between the interviewee and the daughter in law was not working well and was abused verbally and emotionally and the son was not providing any emotional or moral support to the interviewee. It has been ten years he is living in the old age home.

*I was told that we are going to the temple to worship. The next thing I knew was that I was abandoned in this old age home. I am living here for almost ten years. (Interviewee 2)*

The young generations are drifting away from the hands of the elderly people. The dreams the elderly people have decorated in their eyes have washed away along with their tear flows. The change in concepts and thoughts between the young and old generation have created a big difference in the life of the elderly people.

‘The difficulty to accept change among elderly people and lack of understanding of needs of elderly among the young adults are the major barriers of a smooth family life. A survey depicts that there exists a considerable gap in generations in Nepal (Himal Magazine, 2005). The younger generation has ambitions of modernization and older generation wants to continue traditional norms and values. The gap is translated into family conflicts and migration of the member of younger generation towards urban centres or abroad.’ (Yadav, 2012 page 53)

One of the interviewee shares his feeling that he has escorted himself to this organization. He has three sons and all are living good life. A parent of three sons is living in the old age home where his two sons are living abroad and one in Kathmandu. There was no one to take care of him as the interviewee’s spouse has passed away and the children are living away from home and

hometown. He was neither taken in by any of the children nor was given any support.

*A friend of mine told me about this organization and I voluntarily move myself to come here. I have three sons, two living in Australia and India and one in Kathmandu. (Interviewee 1)*

There are many elderly parents who are abandoned in that way and when the elderly people gave all their hope up towards their children to come and take care of them, they decide to find the way to survive alone or take a shelter to the elderly care home. The young generations are moving away from their hometown to cities and abroad for education and employment to live a better life and leaving behind their elderly parents.

Nepal is rich in its culture and traditions and there are many festivals that come by throughout the seasons. Even in old age home, the festivals are celebrated among the staff members and the residents. Festivals are the time to celebrate with happiness and joys but to these elderly people, this is one of the nightmares which they wish would never appear in their lives again because it only brings back the sweet memories and the time they had spent with their families which is just like a dream for the moment.

According to the article of Adhikari (2014) in the Kathmandu post, one of the residents who have spent her three years in an elderly care home shares the feelings about the festival, Dashain, in this way:

*For people like me, who have been left by their family members to die, Dashain is just a normal day. Dashain used to be my best time of the year. I remember the food, the swings and the fun attached to the festivals.*

She expressed how the festivals used to be when she was with her family and wished that the festival would never come again.(Adhikari, 2014) Dashain is one of the biggest festivals of Nepal which is celebrated in joy and happiness together with the family.

During the occasions such as Father's Day and Mother's Day, many people make visit to make donations either by serving food and clothes or money to help the abandoned elderly people. Among those people, the elderly people try to search the known face wishing if their children are there to visit them. Sadly, they could not find the face of their relatives in the crowd of strangers and spent their life just with their sad memories of their children.

*I do not think they will ever come to get me back. They have not visited me even once in these ten years. To think that they will come to take me back home is just another illusion. (Interviewee 2)*

The elderly have lost the hope of seeing their children's face again and to live with them yet again is like a dream for them. All they are waiting is not for their children to come and take them home but to lie on the death bed.

### 5.3 Expectations of the elderly people

Everyone has some expectation in life, either from relationship or career. It is not unusual to expect something from your loved ones. Likewise, these elderly people also have their expectation from their children. Those expectations were not so high that could not be fulfilled, they were very simple if the children have tried to understand the feeling of their parents and shown the interest towards it.

*All I have ever wished was to live with my son and his family. I have hoped that I will take care of my grandchildren. I will teach them how to walk by holding their hands and will play with them. But it did not come true. (Interviewee 1)*

Usually, when the family lives together, the grandparent often take care of their grandchildren in the country.

There are many things that can be learnt from the elderly people due to the fact that they are elders and have seen and experienced the life more than the youngsters. Unfortunately, the younger generations are forgetting the values of the elderly parents that our ancestors have shown and following the culture of

westernization and being modernized day by day. The current generations are not paying attention how much of the modernization thoughts are affecting the life and the feelings of the elderly people. From an article spotlight Nepal, an elderly shares her expectation from her children in this way:

*I had always remained a loving and caring mother. By my nurturing, I expected, my children would be with me in my old age. But my expectations were ruined the day my daughter sent me to an old age home, calling me a relative aunt. (Sharma, 2014)*

The elderly people living in the elderly care home are keeping their dreams in their heart and suffering inside by the pains that are given by their own children which they never would have thought of. The expectation that they had from their children has turned into their despair.

*I have just wanted to be with my children. I would not have care even if they were not able to feed me well or give me proper clothes, all I have wanted was their love and to see their smiling face. I am like a setting sun now; I do not have any wish for myself. If they are doing well, then I am fine too. (Interviewee 2)*

The elderly people in this elderly care home are living a simple life. They wake up in the morning, pray to Lord and spent the rest of the day together with other residents. With calm face they said that they are waiting for the time to leave this world.

In the end of the interview, the elderly parents were asked one final question. The question was if they have anything to say to their children who have abandoned them. With sad expression, every elderly parent who was asked this question gave almost the same answers.

*There is not anything special that I can give them now. The only thing I wish is their success and happy life with their family. This is the only blessing that I have left for them to give. (Group Discussion)*

Even after the abandonment by their own family and children, the elderly people instead of having hate towards their children, they wish for their happy and suc-

cess life. No parents in the world, as I believe, wish for the harm to their children. Everyone can evaluate the hard works and efforts of the parents that they have done to raise their children. But still, their feelings are not reaching to the children whom they have brought to this world.

## 6. DISCUSSION

This thesis is written mainly from the perspective of the elderly people who are abandoned by their family and are living in the elderly care home. The thesis is not trying to show that all the parents who are living in Nepal are abandoned or ignored by the family. There are many fortunate elderly parents who are living happily with their children and family. However, what this thesis is trying to claim is that like those fortunate elderly people, there are many unfortunate elderly parents too, who are abandoned by their own children and the family, and it can be proven by both the primary and the secondary data sources as mentioned above. From the research, it is also shown that the numbers of abandoned elderly parents are increasing every year along with increased number of elderly care home compared to past years.

The aim of the thesis is to find out the feelings of the elderly people who are abandoned, the reasons and the thoughts about the abandonment and the expectations from their children.

The finding about the feelings of the elderly people shows that the elderly people who are abandoned by their children are very sad about their situation. They never have thought that they would be abandoned by their own children to whom they have loved and cared with all their might.

The second finding about the reasons of their abandonment shows that the elderly people are ignored and neglected by their children and family. The elderly parents were neither getting moral, emotional and financial support nor having a good environment to live together. So, desperately, some chose to move voluntarily to elderly care home, some struggle to live alone and some are abandoned forcefully. The elderly people said that they must have been a burden for their family members that is why are abandoned by them. In Nepal, the elderly parents depend on their children, mainly on sons for the old age support. (Chalise & Brightman, 2006, 202) Furthermore, due to breakdown of traditional way of

living in Nepal, the traditional family supports for the elderly parents are eroding as well. The elderly parents who have kept their hopes towards their children, mainly sons, are taking their parents as a burden rather than their moral obligation. (Dhakal, 2012, 15.)

The third finding of the research shows about the expectation of the elderly people from their children. They think that they did not get the love and the care that they were expecting from their children. The elderly parents have wished that their children will be their old age stick and will take care of them till their last breath but they are very disappointed with the current situation. According to Dhakal (2012, 15.) all the elderly people no matter from what class or ethnic group they are, want love, affection, care and protection. Every elderly would like to live with their families. The elderly people living in elderly care home have timely food, health care, freedom and other facilities but still they are suffering from psychological depression. This shows elderly parents are not wishing to live with their children just to cover their basic needs which they can get even from the elderly care home, their deep desire is to get the love and affection from their children and family which is not possible to get in the elderly care home.

The young people are moving away from their hometown due to several reasons such as quality education and good job opportunities. Similarly, the rise of modernization, urbanization, influence of western culture and the increased participation of women in outside work are changing the concept of the young people and are migrating to towns and cities for better opportunities. Due to change in the way of living and thinking, the elderly people are left behind alone and are the most neglected group in Nepalese society. (Chalise & Brightman, 2006, 203.)

The elderly parents think that their strengths have gone in the hard works for raising their children and providing them good environment for their proper growth and development that they feel very weak and lonely. The only hope they have thought were their children for love and support during their old age

which is remained as a hope only. The elderly people who have spent many years of their life in the elderly care home say that they are waiting for the time to come and lay on deathbed.

One of the wish or the aim of this thesis is also to shed some light on the abandonment issues of elderly people and to increase the awareness to the current generation. If the own children and family could not be in the need of the elderly people then who else could be there to take care of them during their old age. The Senior Citizen Act 2063 (2007) of Nepal has clearly mentioned to take care and give good nurture to old people is the responsibility of the family and the relatives. (Sharma, 2014)

The changing trend and the perspective of young generation are taking a different trail compared to the trail followed by our ancestors. Looking at the situation, I think the government should also play important role to support the elderly people of the country. With current provision from the government which is enough to have a cup of tea per day, the elderly who are living alone and homeless could not fulfill their daily basic needs. Therefore, in my point of view, the government should focus on how to provide better facility to secure the life of elderly people so that they do not need to worry about their old age.

### 6.1 Professional development

While doing my course in the University, there are many things that I learnt and also put in practice. Among them, I have learnt that patience and empathy play key role to understand the target group. I thought in these three years working in different placement place with different target groups in multicultural environment, I am good enough to work with the target groups with sad history and background. Working with the abandoned elderly people in an elderly care home, I came to know how wrong I was. There even was a time while conducting my research, I could not control my emotions and have to stop the conversation due to my interference which is not a good sign of a good social worker.



Working with these people, I found myself that I am still far behind the real understanding of these two big words 'patience' and 'empathy' which carry very heavy meaning.

Nonetheless, the thesis itself is a big achievement for me. There were many challenges which I had to face while conducting the research. The topic and the research questions were very sensitive that simple carelessness could affect the whole research. While making the research, I understood that there were many skills which I lack to bring out the best result. But, on the other hand, it also makes me realize that the flaws and the mistakes help human being to move forward in their life.

## 6.2 Suggestion for future research

During the process of my research, I already have felt that there is lack of methods that can be used to conduct the research in this topic. As I am not well experienced and have conducted my very first research, there are many flaws that can be corrected in future research. Probably due to lack of my experience, I was not able to convince the estimated number of elderly people for the interview. Similarly, I could not use the tape recorder to have the same and exact words from the interviewee for data collection due to which I might have lost some important information for the research.

Moreover, there were not many researches that have been done related to the same topic. The researches were mainly done in loneliness of elderly people, health and the day to day life in elderly care. Besides the news articles, there were not many research conducted to explore the family bond and the abandonment of the elderly people in Nepal. So, the future research could be done in same or similar topic with better methodology. The research that I have made is not sufficient to claim fully that the elderly parents are unwanted or burden in the family. There were not sufficient number of interviewees according to the plan for the interview and also resources from articles were not enough. There-

fore, I think the future research is necessary to cover the missing part and flaws of my research.

In addition, as this thesis is written from the perspective of elderly people, I would like to suggest that the future research could also be done from the perspective of children. I hope it would help to clear the family relationship of elderly people and the children from both perspectives.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The main theme of this thesis was to find out the relationship of the elderly parents with their children and the family. And, from the research that is obtained from both primary and secondary data sources, it showed that the elderly parents are not happy with the children and they are either abandoned by the family or neglected or ignored in their own residence without any support and care. The research also pointed out that the elderly parents are like a burden in the family.

Therefore, I think that the values and the culture of showing respect to the elderly parents have alleviated from the country. Also, due to increase in number of abandoned elderly people and elderly care home, it shows that the elderly people are resembled as a burden in the family that is why they are abandoned and ignored by the family members.

What I would like to say in the end of my thesis is that the elderly people who have worked their whole life just to take care of their children and support them, do they really deserved to be abandoned by the same children for whom they have supported with all their might. Even though children are not able to be with them all the time, would it be the only solution left for the children to abandon or ignore their elderly parents? Or could there be a way to help and support them without abandonment?

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## 9 APPENDIX

- ❖ How are the elderly parents taken care in the family?
  - Why did you come to live in the old age home?
  - How was your relationship with your family?
  - What kind of behavior/attitude did you get from your children?
  - How did you come to this elderly care home?
  - Has anyone ever visited you since your abandonment?
  
- ❖ What are the feelings of elderly people towards their children?
  - How do you feel about your children after the abandonment?
  - Do you want to go back if they ever come to take you home?
  
- ❖ What are the expectations of the elderly parents?
  - What kind of expectation did you have from your children?
  - Did your children meet the expectation that you have?
  - Would you like to say something to your children?