

LIVING WITH AGED PARENTS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract

Population of ageing has been increasing in the modern world today because of the remarkable improvements in life expectancy over the past century. The increase in aged population has multiple implications nearly in all sectors of the society. This study was conducted to identify the challenges and opportunities of living with aged parents in the family. This study was conducted in Akkaraipattu Divisional Secretariat of Ampara district, Sri Lanka. Purposive sample method was used and same size is 40. Interview, focused group discussion and observation methods were used as primary data collection methods and books, magazines, journals, conference proceedings, and reliable web sites were used as the secondary data collection methods of the study. Qualitative data analysis method was used to analyse the data and presented in texts and figures. The study identified 78% of the aged parents are living with their daughters' family and 22% of the elderly parents are living with their sons' family. Difficulty in providing traditional family care, difficulty in adaptation, over dependence of aged parents, spending time with aged parents, difficulty in providing health care, financial difficulty, need a specific place with all facilities and difficulty in understanding and handling aged parents were the challenges of living with aged parents. Good source of companionship, good mediators and counsellors, good care takers of grandchildren, safety, help in household activities, religious credits and soul satisfaction and help to gain social respect were the opportunities of living with aged parents.

Keywords: *Aged parents, Challenges, Family, Opportunities*

I. Introduction

In recent years, the world is in the brink of a demographic transition where the elders outnumbered the children. Indeed the 21st century is named as "The Era of Population Ageing". Population of aging, which involves an increasing the share of older person in total population has been recognized as an emerging demographic challenge to both developed and developing nations. The remarkable improvements in life expectancy over the past century lead to the rapid demographic transition in many countries today which is a process of decreasing mortality and fertility rate of the population (World Population Ageing, 2017).

At present, 962 million people in the global population is aged 60 years or over which is more than twice as large in 1980 when there were only 382 million elderly people worldwide. This elderly population is

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expected to double again by 2050 which is predicted to reach nearly 2.1 billion. Also, the number of aged population over 80 years is expected to increase threefold in 2050 by rising 137 to 425 million in future (World Population Ageing, 2017). Compared with the developed nations in the world, the population of ageing is growing much faster in developing nations. Today, over two third of world's ageing population are living in the developing nations (Giddens & Sutton, 2013).

As one of the developing nations in the Asian region, Sri Lanka has the fastest ageing population among South Asian countries and also considered as one of the fastest ageing countries in the world too. The country is experiencing population ageing as a result of increase in the life expectancy and decrease of fertility rate (Menike, 2014). 12.4% of the total population are aged 60 or over which is 2.5 million of people. One in every seven Sri Lankan is aged 60 or over today, further it is predicted that one in every five Sri Lankan is aged 60 or over in 2030 and one in every three Sri Lankan is aged 60 or over in 2050 (Sri Lanka State of the Economy, 2017).

The increase in aged population has multiple implications nearly in all sectors of the society. They bring socio-economic challenges and opportunities to the place where they belong to. The consequences or impacts of ageing population are viewed in micro perspective level too. The aged people have become a controversial topic in the family environment recently. As one of the primary social institutions, family plays a significant role in providing shelter and secure environment for everyone. Aged parents are also a part of the family system with different experiences of the world of difficulties and challenging. Considerable amount of people in the South Asian culture live with their aged parents under the same room, sharing same house. Though, living with aged parents is not always viewed in positive perspective. Living with aged parents has become a challenge to many today. On the other hand, some agree that living with aged parents provides opportunities to them. Some have the thought of aged parents are burden and they have become a challenge to the family and some have the thought of aged parents are opportunities to the family.

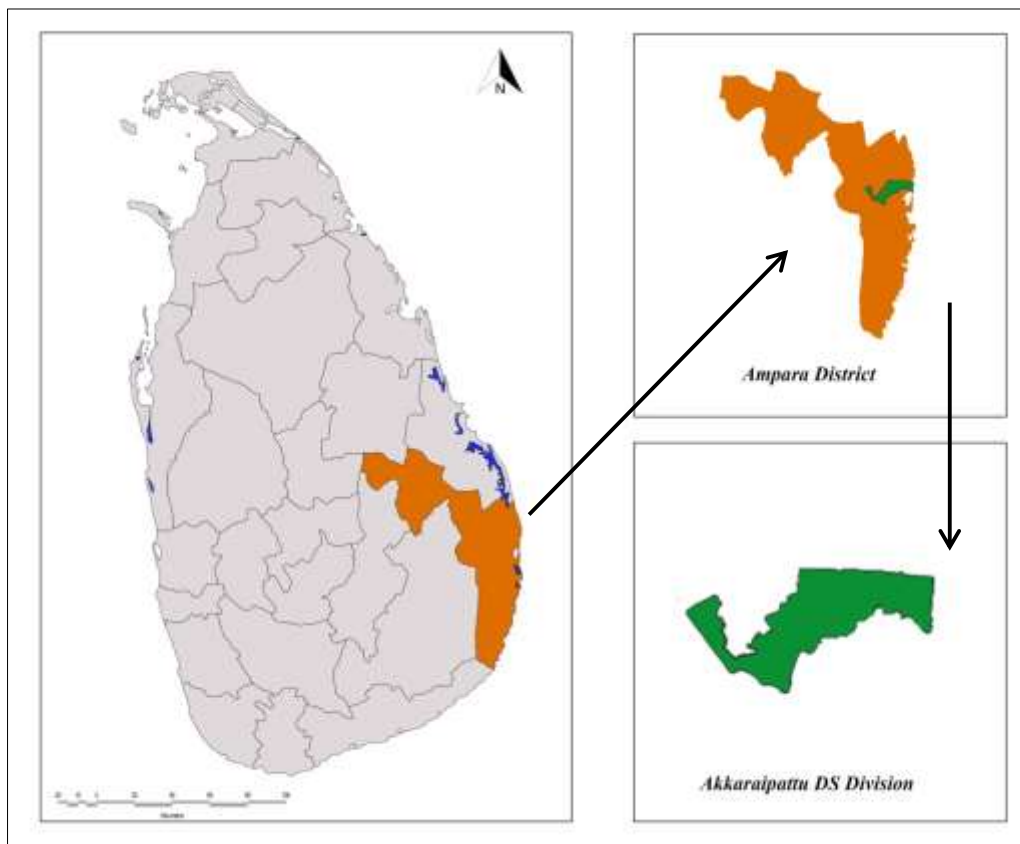
Studies had been conducted in the field of geriatric. Meltem Ince Yenilmez conducted a study on Economic and Social Consequences of Population Aging the Dilemmas and Opportunities in the Twenty-First Century in 2014. The study pointed out that elderly people affects all aspects of the society including health, social security, education, socio-cultural activities, family life and the labour market. Mitchell A. Kaplan and Marian M. Inguanzo did a study on the Social, Economic, and Public health consequences of Global Population of Aging in 2017 which focused on the key social, economic and public health costs and consequences of ageing and it examines the social challenges of aging that global societies will face in future. Kallol Kumar Bhattacharyya (2017) did a study on health and associated social problems of elderly population in India. The result of the study showed that health problem has a significant relation with increasing age in human beings.

It is identified that most of the studies focused on the challenges and opportunities of aged parents in their perspective and in common view. Also limited numbers of researches focused solely on challenges and opportunities of living with aged parents in the family. In this respect, this study focuses on the challenges and opportunities of living with aged parents in the family adhering with the slogan "No one will be left behind" of the Sustainable development goals of 2030.

II. Research Methodology

This study was conducted in Akkaraipattu Divisional Secretariat division located in the Ampara district in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. Akkaraipattu DS division comprises of 9 small villages and 28 GN divisions. Akkaraipattu DS division includes Akkaraipattu Municipal Council area with 23 Girama Niladari Divisions and 5 Girama Niladari Divisions from the Pradeshiya Sabha area. The study area is located at the latitude and longitude coordinates' of 7°13'06.02" in North and 81°50'58.91 in East. There are 13,604 families residing in the study area and total population is 46,807 (Male -51% and Female - 49%). Majority of the population is Muslims (99%) who dwell here for the last several decades peacefully (Resource Profile and Statistical Report of Akkaraipattu DS Division, 2017). The following figure 1 visualises the study location.

Figure 1: Akkaraipattu Divisional Secretariat division of Ampara District, Sri Lanka



Source: Survey General Department of Sri Lanka, Digital Data, 1:50 000 (2019)

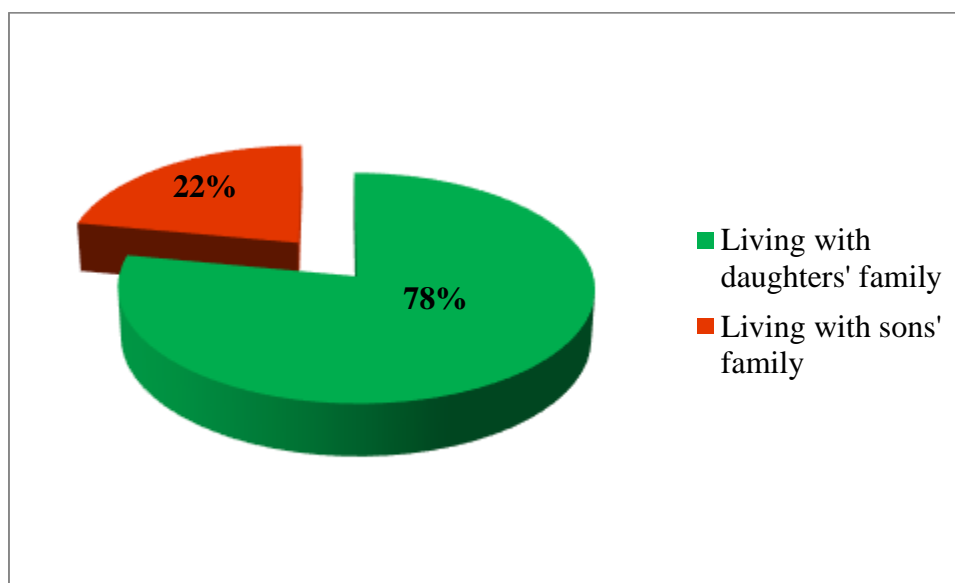
Purposive sample method was used for this study under the non-probability sampling techniques. According to the content of the study, this study was conducted among the adults (children of aged parents) in 20 selected families. 40 individuals were selected (20 men and 20 women) those who are living with their aged parents for more than 5 years. Both primary and secondary data collection methods were applied to this study. Interview, focused group discussion and observation methods were used to collect primary data of the study. Books, magazines, journals, conference proceedings, and reliable web sites were used as the secondary data for this study. Qualitative data analysis method was used to analyse the data because the study dealt mainly with

unstructured text-based data, like interview transcripts and audio clips. The analysed data were summarized and presented in texts and figures.

III. Results and Discussions

Ageing population is accepted as both positive and negative development where most of the aged people rely on someone's support to lead their rest of life. Majority of the aged parents live with their daughters in the study area and only few live with their sons. The study identified 78% of the aged parents are living with their daughters' family and 22% of the elderly parents are living with their sons' family. The following figure 2 portrays the living arrangements of the aged parents as follows.

Figure 2: Living arrangements of elderly parents



Challenges of Living with Aged Parents

The study found out the challenges of living with aged parents by the family members under the same roof. The challenges are discussed as follows.

A. Difficulty in Providing Traditional Family Care

The children have the responsibility of caring their aged parents. The children and grandchildren were readily available to help their aged parents and providing the family care for them in the past period of simple family system. Caring for the aged parents in the family has become difficult today where complex systems have been raised in the families due to the modernization and modern lifestyle. Young people are not interested in providing traditional family care which was previously given by the other members of the family. It has become a challenge to the family members because of the work loads and cultural shift. Almost 96% of the respondents reported that providing family traditional family care for their aged parents has become difficult and it is challenging for them.

B. Difficulty in Adaptation

Ageing is always associated with physical and psychological problems and it leads to social problems too. As people begin to grow older, they started to lose the ability to behave in the same manner that they behaved when they were young. The elderly people are highly prone to some sort of dementia or other debilitating illness which make them to behave like children in their old age. Cognitive health problem is quite common among the elders, they gradually loss their ability to think, learn and remember. In this circumstance, the children have found difficulty in adaptation to this situation and the behaviours of their aged parents. 46% of the respondents emphasised that they face challenges in handling their aged parents who are behaving like children and who express immature behaviour. And also, some respondents mentioned that their children do not like the behaviours of their grandparents and often criticise and complaint about it. Therefore, the children of the aged parents pointed out that they face difficulties in adapting the new behaviour pattern of their aged parents.

C. Over Dependence of Aged Parents

Another challenge of living with aged parents at home is over dependence. The dependence on others is commonly seen among the elders everywhere. The aged parents have become weakened due to their ageing which brings about unique health issues. Especially, the ageing associated with the slowness and gradualness among the elders. In this time, the aged parents start to ask for help from others at home which is essential for them to do their daily activities. However, asking help and overly dependent on others for every tasks have become a challenge to the family members. 76% of the respondents' highlighted that the dependency of their aged parents has become a challenge to them. Here, the children further emphasised that, their aged parents have some abilities of doing their own work, but they get help from anyone in the family even for a simple task. This over dependence has grown up among the aged parents because they used to get help from others. This over dependence for every simple task has created a conflict environment where the particular person has urgent matter to attend at that time.

D. Spending time with Aged Parents

The changes in the lifestyle and busy working environment have made the people to rarely find time for caring everyone in the family. 92% of the respondents reported that spending time with their aged parents has become another challenge to them. The busy working schedule and household chores of family members have made difficulty to find time for other recreational activities and spending time with the aged parents. Respondents further emphasised that their time of the day is only enough to look after their works, family matters. On the other hand, the aged parents also expect to spend more with their children and grandchildren. The aged parents in the family also request their children, relatives and others to sit around them and concentrate on their stories every time. So, the children of the aged parents have found this as another challenge of living with them in the family. Finding time and spending with aged parents is another challenge here.

E. Difficulty in Providing Health Care

The study found out that providing adequate health care for the aged parents is another challenge to the children of them. The 45% of the respondents openly emphasised that they have found difficulties in giving health care and looking after their aged parents. Especially, bed ridden aged parents are considered as a burden

to the family members. Arranging special care for them is expensive and it is difficult to find a responsible and experienced person to look after their aged parents. Therefore, along with other works and household activities providing health care, nutritious foods on time, bathing the elders, keeping them and their living place of the elders clean have become huge challenges to family members. Mostly, female children of the elders have the responsibility of looking after their aged parents. The female children complain that they found difficulties to look after their children, husband and their aged parents at the same time and all the time every day. Providing health care for the aged parents is a challenging job for them.

F. Financial difficulty

Financial difficulty is found to be another challenge face by the family members due to the costs of medication of the aged parents. Generally, the ageing people are prone to different health related issues and they need to check their health condition at least once a month in order to avoid some incurable disease. In this sense, the costs of visiting the doctor, buying medicine and related expenses such as traveling, giving nutritious food and drinks have become a challenge for the family members where they need to consider the family expenses. 48% of the respondents clearly mentioned that they do not have sufficient money to look after their aged parents properly as they wish to be. One of the respondent claimed that his mother do not take food that is given by them and she has become very slim. Therefore, he is buying a kind of milk powder recommended by the doctor that costs LKR 2000. This has become a problem for him where they have already in a poor financial condition. Caring for bed ridden aged parents is also demanded huge money. Especially, some respondents reported that they cannot afford the expenses of looking after their aged parents who have chronic diseases. These chronic diseases are incurable and every time and it requires regular check-ups. Therefore, financial difficulty is found to be a challenge of living with aged parents.

G. Need a specific place with all facilities

The ageing population have special requirements and their living place should possess with some specific facilities. Commonly, elderly people fall in physical problems due to their ageing. The situation of ageing population requires a living space with essential facilities. The need a separate room with attached bathroom and toilet facilities. The room should be quite spacious with good ventilation which would help them to live peacefully. The room should have a separate door for moving out and help their visitors to enter. However, it is found to be quite difficult to arrange a living room with all mentioned above facilities for the aged parents. 67% of the respondents mentioned that there are no any such rooms for their elderly parents and mostly the grandchildren share their room with grandparents. Therefore, providing a specific room with all adequate facilities for the aged parents is a challenge here.

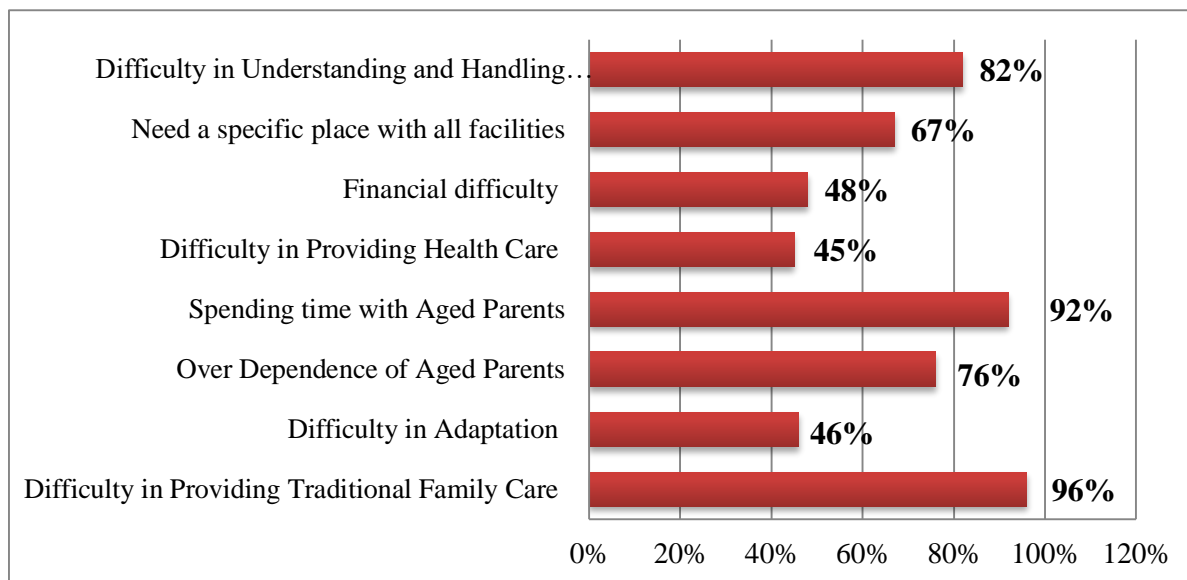
H. Difficulty in Understanding and Handling Aged Parents

The study found out that understanding and handling the aged parents is another challenge for family members. Because of the ageing, most of the parents behave like children and immature. On the other hand, aged parents easily get stress, depression, frustration and angry. These behavioural changes and cognitive problems among the aged parents create difficulties of understanding them and it has become difficult to handle them without proper understanding. 82% of the respondents mentioned that they sometimes get confusion because of the poor understanding of their aged parents. Even the anger and frustration of the aged

parents get worse because of this poor understanding and responding of the family members towards the aged parents. Therefore, difficulty in understanding and handling the aged parents is also a challenge for the family members.

The following figure 3 portrays the challenges of living with aged parents in the family.

Figure 3: Challenges of living with aged parents



3.1 Opportunities of Living with Aged Parents

The study not only found out the challenges of living with aged parents, but also the opportunities of living with them in the same family. Though, the respondents emphasised about the challenges they have been facing because of their aged parents, they do not mention that living with aged parents only brings problems to them. The respondents enthusiastically put forward the opportunities or what are the benefits of living with aged parents in the same family. It is discussed one by one as follows.

A. Good source of Companionship

Aged parents are viewed as a good source of companionship by everyone in the family. Aged parents are the in the family who have the respect and love of everyone. Most of the time, aged parents in the family are considered as the second god with blessing to the family members. On the other hand, they also share their love and affection without any discrimination towards anyone in the family. This unconditional love between the aged parents and family members and close ties among them create an environment of coordination between aged parents and other family members. The aged parents in the family are not addicted to smart phones or social media which would make strong bonding between them and the family members. These reasons have influenced on forming good companionship between aged parents and other family members. 92% of the respondents mentioned that their aged parents have become good source of companionship for the family members. The companionship between the daughters and their elderly mothers and sons and fathers, even with the daughter-in-law and father-in-law and son-in-law and mother-in-law have brought favourable atmosphere in the family. As well as, the companionship among the grandchildren and grandparents is inevitable in the family

too. Simply, the aged parents started to treat their grandchildren as their favourite in home. Therefore, living with aged parents in the family is considered as good source of companionship.

B. Good Mediators and Counsellors

Aged parents in the family play the role of good mediators and counsellors where disputes, conflict and problems arise in the family or among the family members. Family is a place where conflicts and arguments occur most of the time. Disputes between the husband and wife have become a huge problem today, where domestic violence has been destroying the family life. As well as, the conflicts and argument between children and grandchildren also exist in the family. In these circumstances, the aged parents play the role of mediators among the parties and try their best to mitigate the problems. This mediation is highly essential to prevent the destruction of family life. And, the aged parents serve as the good counsellors in the family too. The aged parents have sound knowledge and great experience in the family life; they share their ideas, give valuable advices and help to correct the mistakes of the family members by themselves. This role of counsellors is also needed thing in the modern family life today. 78% of the respondents mentioned that living with the aged parents is an opportunity where the aged parents help them in numerous ways in reducing the conflicts and disputes in the family and their advices are highly required. The family members can learn a lot from the aged parents at any time.

C. Good care takers of Grandchildren

Aged parents are good care takers of grandchildren in the family. 98% of the respondents accepted and mentioned that their aged parents are the best care takers for their children compare to them. Elderly people wish to be with their grandchildren, they often tell stories, share their experiences and interesting matters with their grandchildren. The elderly grandparents often help the grandchildren in bathing, eating, cleaning and dressing. Even, they accompanied their grandchildren to the school too. They have the nature of supporting their grandchildren and also they provide moral support too. The children also like their grandparents and wish to be with them. The grandparents teach how to behave and respect the elders and be kind with everyone as well they teach disciplines too. Both working parents leave their children under the responsibility of their aged parents with hope. Therefore, aged parents are opportunity for the family as they are the good care takers of grandchildren.

D. Safety

Living with aged parents is found to be an opportunity for the family members where they feel safety under the supervision of them. Safety is not only related with the environmental or physical conditions but also related with psychological acceptance. This mental preparation of accepting the safety of outer environment is highly connected with the inner safety of the family conditions. Here, the 52% of the respondents mentioned that they feel safety when they live with their aged parents. The aged parents give moral support to the family members to feel secure and safety. As well as, the working husbands leave the wife and children under the trust of their aged parents and go for work. There the wife and children sense the safety of living under the supervision of the aged parents who are brave and fearless.

E. Help in Household activities

The one of the opportunities of living with aged parents is their help in household activities. The support of an additional person in household activities is a great thing in the modern world of work today. In this regard, 80% of the respondents mentioned that their aged parents are still helping them in cooking, cleaning the kitchen, cleaning house and sweeping the yards. Particularly helping in cooking breakfast and lunch is very useful to them in. And also, the respondents mentioned that the help of the aged parents in buying things for cooking and other purposes in near shops and groceries is also very supportive in the urgent situation. Even though, the children refuse or feel reluctant to get help from their aged parents, the aged parents willing to help their children in every activity. They are the people with kind heart of helping the children and grandchildren. Some respondents pointed out that, their aged mothers' cooking is the best and they fond of it. These helps in household activities from the aged parents are found to be another opportunity for the family members.

F. Religious credits and Soul satisfaction

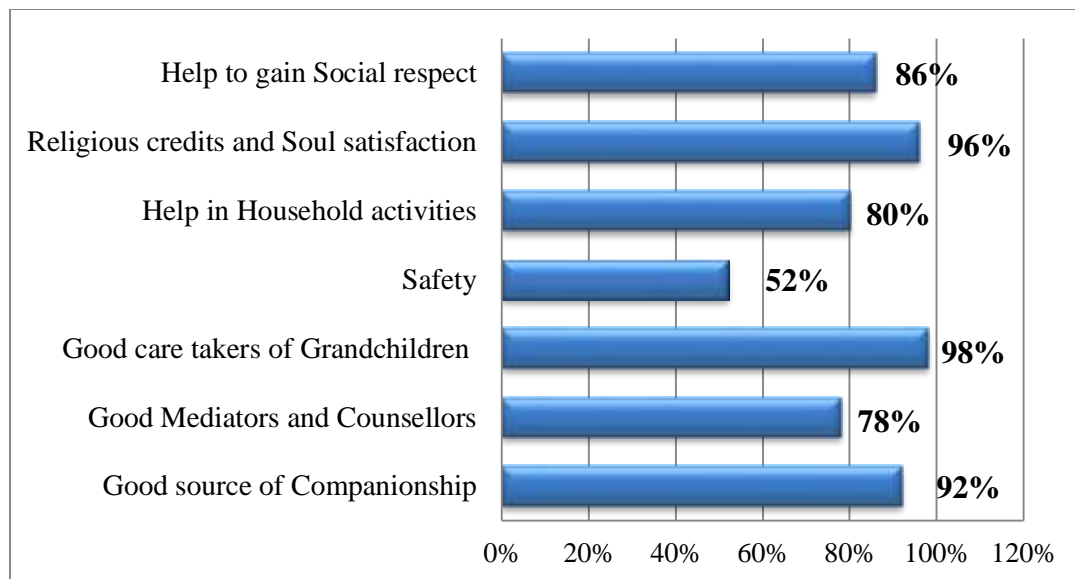
Living with elderly parents brings religious credits and soul satisfaction to the family members. 96% of the respondents mentioned that parents are the important people who bring religious credits and soul satisfaction to them. The respondents of the study are Muslims and it is compulsory for every Muslim to look after their parents with care and respect. Not only in Islamic religion but every religion highly emphasises the importance of looking after the aged parents. Islamic religious sayings give more priority to these kinds of activities. The religion has taught the youngsters about the benefits of looking after the aged parents with love and respect; it said in the religion that the heaven would be provided only to the person who looks after their parents until their death. And also, the prayers and the blessings of the aged parents have more power which could give more blessing to their children from the god too. Considering about the importance given by the religion, people view and trust that living with aged parents and looking after them would bring more religious credits from the God 'Allah' which was promised in 'Al-Quran and Al-Hadhees'. And also the respondents mentioned that living with aged parents gives soul satisfaction and happiness to them. It is like returning back the care of their parents once they were got in their childhood and the feeling of living with the aged parents provides soul satisfaction to the people with pure heart and good intention towards their aged parents.

G. Help to gain Social respect

Living with aged parents under the same roof with happiness and respect helps to gain social respect in the society. 86% of the respondents mentioned that social respect and social attention is another opportunity of living with aged parents with care. The society has some rules and regulation on how to live as social beings. The moral and values of a community or a society is based on living together without discrimination and marginalization of anyone in the society. No one should be left behind without care and proper living conditions. The integrity is an essential component to construct a community and continue the living as a member of the same community. The society does not give social respect to the people who eliminate or discriminate or marginalise or exclude any member in the family without having proper reasons. In this regards, social respect is gained though the well-being of the all family members in the society. Society or a community is constructed through the basic units call the family. Society gives the social respect and the family members would recognised through the care they provide to the aged parents. Therefore, looking after the aged parents and living with them definitely bring social respect and dignity to people. So, living with elderly parents is also an opportunity to gain social respect and live with social recognition.

The following figure 4 portrays the opportunities of living with aged parents in the family.

Figure 4: Opportunities of living with aged parents



IV. Conclusion

The remarkable improvements in life expectancy over the past century lead to the rapid demographic transition where ageing population has increased and the elders outnumbered the children today. The increase in aged population has brought socio-economic challenges and opportunities to the place where they live in. The study identified 78% of the aged parents are living with their daughters' family and 22% of the elderly parents are living with their sons' family. This study focused on the challenges and opportunities of living with aged parents. Difficulty in providing traditional family care, difficulty in adaptation, over dependence of aged parents, spending time with aged parents, difficulty in providing health care, financial difficulty, need a specific place with all facilities and difficulty in understanding and handling aged parents were the challenges of living with aged parents. Good source of companionship, good mediators and counsellors, good care takers of grandchildren, safety, help in household activities, religious credits and soul satisfaction and help to gain social respect were the opportunities of living with aged parents. The study concluded that living aged parents carries both challenges and opportunities. Overcoming the challenges of living with aged parents is indeed necessary to experience the fruitful opportunities of living with aged parents in the modern world today.

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