

Function of taking care of elderly people in Vietnamese families at present time

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Abstract

Although Vietnamese government stipulated a lot of policies for elderly people, but the public support that is currently available to the elderly is extremely limited. The state's inability to provide full support to elderly people so that the responsibility of taking care of them actually belongs to family. It is confirmed by the number of elderly people living with their children when they are old and a lot of policies required families take care of elderly people. The family undoubtedly continues to play a crucial role in providing older persons with care in Vietnam.

Keywords: Elderly people, Family, Vietnam

1. Introduction

The statistics from the 2009 Vietnam population and housing census as well as Vietnam Household Living Standard Survey in recent years show that the proportion of old people is rising sharply in almost countries all over the world. Vietnam is not an exception. The number of elderly people increased yearly. By the year 2008, with the elderly population of 11%, Vietnam population starts ageing.

Elderly people in many other Asia countries usually live with a spouse and a married child is the social norm for children to pay gratitude for elderly people. Is it true in Vietnam at the moment? The article tries to find the answer of this question. To do it, I will present an overview of elderly people and analyze the performance of taking care of elderly people in Vietnamese families nowadays.

2. Methodology

This article relies on the result of a lot of research: the statistics from the statistical agencies, especially from General Statistical Office, General Office for Population Family Planning. It provides an overview statistics about Vietnamese elderly people. Specifically, this article bases on the latest result of the 2009 Vietnam population and housing census survey. Literary works, both written (novels, short stories and so on) and oral ones (tales, folk songs, proverbs, and sayings, etc.) are used as well to understand the implementation of taking care of elderly people in Vietnamese families.

3. Results

3.1 Elderly people in Vietnamese society at present time

The elderly populations in many countries are growing and will continue to grow in the coming years, both in absolute numbers and as a percentage of the population. According to the medium-variant population projections of the United Nations (2004), there are about 610 million people aged 60 and over (or 10 percent of the world population in 2000). The number of elderly people reached 672 million in 2005 and this number is expected to grow to around 1.9 billion people (or 22 percent of the world population) in 2050. Vietnam is experiencing the changes just described.

In Vietnam, people aged from 60 years or above are defined as older persons or elderly people (Clause 1,

Chapter 1, The Ordinance on Elderly). In 1979, there were 3.71 million men and women age 60 and above, representing 6.9% of the total population, and in 1989 the total of elderly people estimated 4.64 million accounted for 7.2% of the total population. In 1999, the percentage of older people reached 8.2% or 6.19 million. According to the statistics from the 2008 Vietnam Household Living Standard Survey, the total of elderly people estimated 9.47 million accounted for 11% of the total population. By the year 2020, Vietnam is expected to have more than 12 million older persons. The importance of the issue becomes clearer when the projected increases in the numbers of elderly people are (i) compared with those in the past and (ii) seen within the context of the growth in the total population.

The number of elderly people increased by 5.76 million during 1979 - 2008. By the year 2008, with the elderly population of 11%, Vietnam population starts ageing.

As elderly people make effective contributions to their families and society, following fine Vietnamese traditions, the Vietnamese Communist Party, the State, citizens and society have always cared for elderly people and consider it a matter of national ethics, respect, and responsibility. One of the objectives of the National Action Program on elderly people (2005 - 2010) is to improve physical and mental health of aged people.

Basically, Vietnam has had the following policies in place to protect and take care of elderly people:

- *Ordinance of the Communist Party of Vietnam*
- *Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam*
- *Marriage and Family Law*
- *Civilian Law*
- *Labor Code*
- *Public Health Care Law*
- *Law of Crime*
- *Laws on Social Insurance*
- *Laws of Legal Aid*
- *Ordinance of special treatment of people with meritorious services to revolutions*
- *Ordinance of Veteran*
- *Ordinance of Disabled People*
- *The Ordinance of Ageing People and the Guidance to implement some items of this Ordinance*

Although Vietnamese government stipulated a lot of policies for elderly people as mentioned above, but the public support that is currently available to the elderly is extremely limited. The state's inability to provide full support to elderly people so that the responsibility of taking care of them actually belongs to family. It is confirmed by the number of elderly people living with their children when they are old and a lot of policies required families take care of elderly people. The family undoubtedly continues to play a crucial role in providing older persons with care in Vietnam. This conclusion will be clarified in the next part.

3.2 Filial piety - a decisive factor for the care for ageing people in Vietnamese families

3.2.1 What is filial piety?

Filial piety is a concept originating with Confucianism. In somewhat general terms, filial piety means to be good to one's parents; to take care of one's parents; to engage in good conduct not just towards parents but also outside the home so as to bring a good name to one's parents and ancestors; to perform the duties of one's job well so as to obtain the material means to support parents as well as carry out sacrifices to the ancestors; not be rebellious; show love, respect and support; display courtesy; ensure male heirs, uphold fraternity among

brothers; wisely advise one's parents, including sorrow for their sickness and death; and carry out sacrifices after their death. But a core ideal of filial piety is the fulfillment of child's obligations to the parent.

Filial piety is a social norm that parents should love their children and that children in turn should love and respect their parents (Lew, 1995) to repay the comfort and aid received: "*Children were made to feel keenly that they owed parents a moral debt so immense as to be unpayable. A child was supposed to try to please his or her parents all the time and in every way, to increase their comfort, to accede to all their wishes, to fulfill their aspirations, to lighten their burden of work and of worry, and to comply with their wishes in all matters, great and small*" (Jamieson, 1993:17).

From that, we could define the filial piety is the responsibility of each person to respect their parents, obey them, take care of them as they age, advise parents, and of course to love them.

3.2.2 The practice of filial piety in taking care of elderly people in Vietnamese families

Filial piety in families is defined: "*Filial piety is respect, taking good care of parents wholeheartedly*". Parents' love and sacrifice to give birth, foster and educate their children is so great which can never be compensated, higher than sky and deeper than sea: "*Parents' love and sacrifice to give birth, foster and educate children / Never forget all day and night/ Higher than sky and deeper than sea*".

Children must show gratitude to their parents by performing specific action. When parents are alive, children must wholeheartedly support, always take care of, visit them; if unfortunately to live a beggarly life, hungry with only maize or manioc, children must try to provide parents with food and drink, give what more delicious, better for parents, desiring parents to live longer to receive repayment: "*Old mother lives in a thatched hut/ Only visiting her day and night makes children's mind easy*". The family education of feudal system of Vietnam highlighted: "*Parents are the most respectable ones/ Providing them with support and requital when they are old/ Never forget parents' grace/ Children must repay their parents*". Parents give birth, foster and bring up children, sacrificing their youth for their children's maturity, success. When children grow up, their parents are old, bad health, need good care from children. So many children are aware of this and repay their parents. They always pay attention, take care and encourage their parents, making them feel pleasant with their old age. There are the children who are very busy with their works but they have saved time to visit, to live with their parents, shared weal and woe with their old parents, learnt about their inmost feelings and expectation and repaid their parents.

In material term, when parents are old, children must serve their parents wholeheartedly. As a child, he/ she has to know their parents' meal taste, depending on his/ her financial capacity, to cook what their parents want to eat. There are something to be noted that the elderly, with weak teeth and stomach, so children should prepare for them soft, easily digestive meal which is nutritious and suitable to parents' taste. About clothing, elderly are easily affected by weather so children must prepare suitable clothing for their parents, wool clothing in winter, silk clothing in summer, help them feel strong enough to resist changeable weather. Special attention should be paid to parents' sleep, it is very difficult for the elderly to have good sleep and easily awake by noise, children must prepare appropriate bedding for their parents' good sleep, quiet during their sleep, go to bed after and get up before their parents.

Everyone has to go through birth, aging, disease, and death. When parents are sick, children must take care of them conscientiously, invite doctor, buy medicine for parents. Some elderly suffer from hemiplegia, cannot take care of themselves, have meal and relieve themselves at the same place. The children who have parents like that should not be fearful of serving their parents, should remember that when we were a small child, our parents were not fearful of serving us.

In the old days, it is said that filial duty a child must: "*fan parents when it is hot, warm up when it is cold, visit them day and night*". Fan means in hot summer, children must stay up all night to fan their parents; warm up means in frosty winter, bedding is cold so children must lie down in bed to warm it up for their parents to have good sleep; visit day and night as the elderly are not as strong as young people. They may be in good health in the evening but may be ill the following morning; their health is changeable so children must visit their parents

in the morning and in the evening to know their condition of health, to give them medicine in timely manner. Above is material repayment and about spiritual aspect, children must repay with all their heart. We have to understand that elderly always feel inferiority complex, self-pity when their children do not give them due attention. Therefore, children must conscientiously take care of sick parents and always talk with them. If children live far from parents, sometimes children must call to know their parents' condition of health because if we don't do so when our parents alive, we will have no more opportunity when they passed away.

Another reason, the elderly are always fear of sorrow and do not want nuisance to happen because it is very difficult for them to forget, to move such sorrow out of their heart once it happened. Therefore, children must try their best not to do wrong thing, which might cause their parents' sadness.

It is said that: "*Grass grows on soil, bad habit in elderly*", parents at old age always feel aches and pains, pull-brained, unpleasant, sometimes they scold their children not for justified cause or even they have just been fed but said that they have not been fed, etc. Children must understand and sympathize with parents every time they changes their mood, not bear a grudge against parents. Filial piety, firstly, children must be always observe parents' intention and must not make them feel sad and worried.

Children must try best to live a moral life and studious, make parents feel pleasant because elderly are always happy when their children are dutiful and successful. Moral life and success of children are always invaluable gift for their parents, are happiness and pride for their parents at old age.

Children should respect their parents' pleasures and hobbies because young people have their own pleasures and elderly also have their own pleasures. For example, if the parents who settled down far from their homeland want to come back to their native land, children must save money, provide them with favorable condition, to satisfy their expectation. This means as a child, he or she must respect parents' hobbies and expectation and try best to meet their needs to make parents happy.

4. Conclusion

The society is "*aging*" meanwhile population in each family has rapidly decreased (originated from guideline "*each married couple should have only one or two children*"). That means the number of people who shoulder the family affairs such as support grandparents and parents has been rapidly decreased also. In such context, it is supposed that the caring for the elderly cannot be fully taken by each individual family but it must be included as an important social policy. Thus, in Vietnam, paying attention to and caring for grandparents, parents and the elderly aiming at improving and promoting the elderly in Vietnam currently have become a significant and consistent policy of the Party and the State, responsibility of the whole political system, and obligation of each family, community as well as society. It is very necessary to issue the Law on elderly to form legal corridor for organization of the association, serve the lofty cause of caring of the elderly and make contribution to realize filial piety in the new context.

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Table 1. Elderly people in some countries (in:%)

	1950	1975	2000	2025	2050
Japan	7.7	11.7	23.2	35.1	42.3
Singapore	3.7	6.7	10.6	30.0	35.0
Thailand	5.0	5.0	8.1	17.1	27.1
USA	12.5	14.8	16.1	24.8	26.9
China	7.5	6.9	10.1	19.5	29.9
Laos	4.6	4.6	5.6	7.0	13.3

Source: Van, P.T., Tram, B.T.H. (2007). *The role of social networks in health care for elderly people in Vietnam*, pp. 5.

Table 2. Vietnam' elderly people by number and percentage

Year	Population (Million)	Elderly people (Million)	Elderly people in total population (in:%)
1979	53.74	3.71	6.9
1989	64.41	4.64	7.2
1999	76.32	6.19	8.2
2002	79.73	7.37	9.24
2004	82.03	8.12	9.9
2006	84.14	8.75	10.4
2008	86.21	9.47	11

Source: - Authors' calculation using National Committee for Population, Families and Children, Country Report, December 2002

- 2008 Vietnam Household Living Standard Survey and Statistical Yearbook of Vietnam 2008

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