

# Senior Citizens and Their Roles in Family and Household

S. M. Ayoob<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Head/ Department of Sociology, Senior Lecturer in Sociology, South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka

Correspondence: S. M. Ayoob, Department of Sociology, South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka.  
E-mail: ayoobsm@seu.ac.lk; ayoobsm2004@gmail.com

Received: March 2, 2020

Accepted: May 1, 2020

Online Published: May 15, 2020

doi:10.5539/jpl.v13n2p32

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/jpl.v13n2p32>

## Abstract

The family is considered as the most important and outstanding primary group in the society. The extended family type is diminishing in the modern era due to multiple and unavoidable reasons. However in some countries, people give their support to preserve extended family system at least keeping their senior citizens in the same household. Senior citizens also play active roles by supporting the family members in numerous ways. This study was conducted to identify the living arrangements, roles played by the senior citizens in family and household and the reasons behind the active role taking behavior among senior citizens. Out of 20 Divisional Secretariat Divisions in Ampara district, 08 Divisional Secretariat Divisions where Muslims predominantly live have been selected as the study area using simple random sampling method. The sample size is 392. The primary data was collected from key informant interviews, case studies and focus group discussions. The study highlighted that 95% of the senior citizens in the study area are living with their family members. Maintaining household activities, guiding the family members, providing counselling, providing security, socialization, mediating, providing monetary support and mobile role are the major roles played by senior citizens. The reasons for this active role taking behaviour are physical fitness and healthy lifestyle of senior citizens, disaster situation, economic condition, loneliness and isolation, lack of organizational structure and social recognition in study area. Beyond their old age, the contribution of senior citizens to the family is immeasurable.

**Keywords:** family, household, role, senior citizens

## 1. Introduction

The family is the most first and immediate social environment where the child started to develop its basic attitudes. Robert Bierstedt defines family as the most important of any other social groups which is with us always or we are with it. He further mentioned that family is the most permanent and most universal of all social institutions and all societies have some form of families. M.F. Nimkoff defines "Family is a more or less durable association of husband and wife with or without a child, or of a man or woman alone, with children". Most commonly, a family consists of an adult and his or her offspring is divided into two types as nuclear family and extended or joint family. Nuclear family consists of husband, wife and their children usually living in a private and separate dwelling where else extended family or joint family consists of at least three generation members like husband, wife, their married and unmarried children and their married and unmarried grandchildren in the same household (Rao, 2007).

The extended or joint family type is diminishing in the modern era due to multiple and unavoidable reasons among the people. In the past, people often lived together with their married and unmarried children and married and unmarried grandchildren under the same roof with caring and sharing. After the industrialization and modernization, people started to move towards economic oriented lifestyle which led them to choose the members who should remain with them. These conditions helped to create a lifestyle of nuclear family system forcefully and willingly. Most of the people in the developed countries often live separately in their own space by forming nuclear family system which includes a husband, wife, and children and even they include a pet too. So, the parents and grandparents were more likely to be eliminated from the traditional family structure and live separately. However, this situation is different in most of the countries in the developing nations where they still preserve some culture and tradition. People give their support to preserve the extended family system at least keeping their senior citizens in the household. On the other hand while receiving the services provided by the family members, senior citizens also play some active roles and support their family members to firm their

existence in the society.

It is appropriate to define who is considered as a senior citizen in this part. Traditionally, the term “senior citizen” refers to people who have reached certain age chronically. According to Abeykoon and Ruwanthi (2008), people over 60 years of age are considered old. World Health Organisation (WHO) categorised people who are of 60 years and above as the elderly or aged. In the United States of America, the term elderly refers to those who are 65 years and above of age as aged. In India, age limit for the elderly varies from 55 years to 65 years (Nasreen, 2009). In Sri Lanka, age 60 and above is considered as the demarcation age in identifying the elderly population (Siddhisena, 2004).

The dedication and contribution of each and every member in the family are essential for the cordial function of a family. Some people consider being with senior citizens and looking after them are a burden to them and some consider it as an opportunity to enrich their life with the experience and guidance of senior citizens. Number of studies have already been done by researchers and experts in the geriatric field about senior citizens. Johnsi (2015) talked about the psychological problem among elderly people and found out in what extent they receive emotional support from their family members, Audinarayana in 2012 conducted a study among elderly person about emotional support they were receiving from their other family members, Maruthakutti (2011) in his study talked about the difficulties faced by the caregivers to elders, Bansod (2011) discussed about the care and support to the elderly from the caregivers’ perspective, Bjomberg and Ekbrand (2008) did a study and explained about the factors in determining the emotional support giving to elderly, Perera and his colleagues in 2015 explored the views of Sri Lankan older people about successful ageing, Silva (2004) emphasized about the family support for the elders and its related intergenerational arrangements in Sri Lanka and Perera discussed about the way of caring elders and the associated problems in urban context of Sri Lanka in 2004.

Most of the studies on senior citizens which were conducted previously talked about the problems faced by them and support needed by them whether it would be emotional support or care from their family members and how others could help senior citizens in the family, nursing home and society. Nearly, none of the studies focused on the different roles played and support given by the senior citizens to their family and the household where they live. It is obvious that senior citizens play crucial roles and continue to be active members in the family. Their dedication and contribution help in numerous ways to enrich the familial life in every household.

In this regard, this study was conducted to emphasize the living arrangements of senior citizens, to identify the roles played by the senior citizens in the family and household and to explore the reasons behind the activeness in performing the roles by senior citizens by considering the lack of studies based on the active role taking behaviour and contribution of senior citizens to the family and household.

## 2. Methodology

Ampara district is one among the 25 districts of Sri Lanka. Ampara district includes four electoral divisions, they are Pottuvil, Sammanthurai, Ampara and Kalmunai and 20 Divisional Secretariat Divisions, 503 Grama Niladhary Divisions and 614 villages including 02 Municipal Council, 01 Urban Council and 17 Pradeshiya Sabhas. The total land extent of Ampara district is 444,539.10 hectares and populated land extent is 154 square kilometers. This district enriches with 115 km extent of seashore, hill and flat land, rivers and lake, paddy land and wild life. Ampara district comprises all major ethnic cultures of the country. Based on the census report of Sri Lanka-2017, the total population of the district is 719,462 and there are 205,211 families which cover 44% of Muslim, 38.4% of Sinhala, 17.1% of Tamil and 0.5% of other community people are living together. People engage in paddy cultivation, sugarcane cultivation, crop cultivation, animal husbandry and fishing as their livelihood activities (District Secretariat: Ampara, 2018).

Ampara district is selected to conduct the study. Out of 20 Divisional Secretariat Divisions in Ampara district, 08 Divisional Secretariat Divisions where Muslims predominantly live have been selected namely Addalaichenai, Sammanthurai, Kalmunai, Akkaraipattu, Pottuvil, Sainthamaruthu, Ninthavur and Irakkamam using simple random sampling method. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used to conduct this research. The primary data was collected through questionnaires survey from 392 young elderly (60 years to 75 years) respondents based on simple random sampling methods. Scientific mathematic formula ( $n = N / (1 + N (e)^2)$ ) of Taro Yamene was applied to calculate the sample size for the research. Since the total sample size is fixed as 392 based on the formula, the sample size for each Divisional Secretariat has been obtained proportionately (refer table 01). The respondents are selected at a random using the table of random numbers.

Table 1. Selection of sample size

Selected Divisional Secretariats	Total number of elders	Selected sample size
Akkaraipattu	3327	$(3327 \times 392) / 22427 = 58$
Addalaichenai	2878	$(2878 \times 392) / 22427 = 50$
Sammanthurai	4232	$(4232 \times 392) / 22427 = 74$
Kalmunai	3832	$(3832 \times 392) / 22427 = 67$
Pottuvil	2211	$(2211 \times 392) / 22427 = 38$
Sainthamaruthu	2328	$(2328 \times 392) / 22427 = 41$
Ninthavur	2672	$(2672 \times 392) / 22427 = 47$
Irakkamam	944	$(944 \times 392) / 22427 = 17$
<b>Total</b>	<b>22427</b>	<b>392</b>

Source: District Secretariat: Ampara, 2018

The primary data was collected from 10 Key Informant Interviews and 04 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). In order to collect more in-depth qualitative information 03 case studies were also used in this study. Divisional Secretariat handbooks, NGOs records, official records, published books, journal articles, online archives and other relevant documents were used as the secondary data to get needed information. The results of the study were presented and discussed in both qualitative and quantitative methods accordingly.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Living Arrangements of Senior Citizens

The family is the simplest and the most important primary group in the society which is the most basic of all social groupings. Family is considered as the most first and most immediate social environment to which a child exposed. It is an outstanding primary group where a child develops its basic attitudes. From the moment of birth to the moment of death the family exerts a continual influence. The family is the first group in which we find ourselves. It provides for the most enduring relationship in one form or other. Every one of us grows up in a family and every one of us too will be a member of one family or other (Rao, 2007).

Though, most of the advanced societies do not give more importance to its senior citizens, in the sense the senior citizens are segregated from the family and are left at the mercy of the elder's home. On the other hand most of the senior citizens in the developing nations are treated as the one of the important persons in the family and they live at home with other family members. Unlike in highly advanced societies where segregation of senior citizens as well as offspring, that is making them live away from the family, are very common, it is rare among the cultured and traditional societies. Number of studies have mentioned that senior citizens mostly prefer to live with their family members in their last period of life and they wanted to give their support and guide to make their own family in the proper path.

The study focused on the living arrangements of senior citizens in the study area. The Muslims in the eastern region of Sri Lanka give their almost all the properties to their daughters after the marriage. The parents build houses for their daughters and the groom live with their daughter in the same household provided by them after their marriage which are contrasted to the other parts of Sri Lankan Muslims where parents provide their assets to their son and they live with son and daughter-in-law. In this respect, the household survey identified that 39% of senior citizens live with their daughter and son-in-law in the same household. On the other hand, there are men who build houses for them live with their wife and parents in the eastern province of Sri Lanka. The study found out 20% of the senior citizens in the study area live with their son and daughter-in-law in the same household.

20% of the senior citizens in the study area live with their grandchildren's house. This is found to be common in the rural set up. Though, they reside with grandchildren, their children often visit them at least twice a week. The offspring considers that providing care and maintenance of the senior citizens are the responsibilities of them. 10% of the senior citizens be inherent in a separate household with their spouse in the study area. Here, the children of the senior citizens move to a new house in the same location or near area and parents of them live in the old house where they used to and like to spend their rest of the life peacefully. This does not mean that they show

any animosity towards their children. Even if they live separately from their children, there is much support given by their offspring to them. Further the household survey showed 06% of senior citizens live with other family members like relatives' houses where their sons and daughters refrain to live with them. The study highlighted that togetherness with other family members is also enjoyed by the senior citizens throughout their life in the study area. Only 5% of senior citizens among the surveyed people are residing alone in a different household without any care and support from their family members. The following figure 01 illustrates the living arrangements of senior citizens.

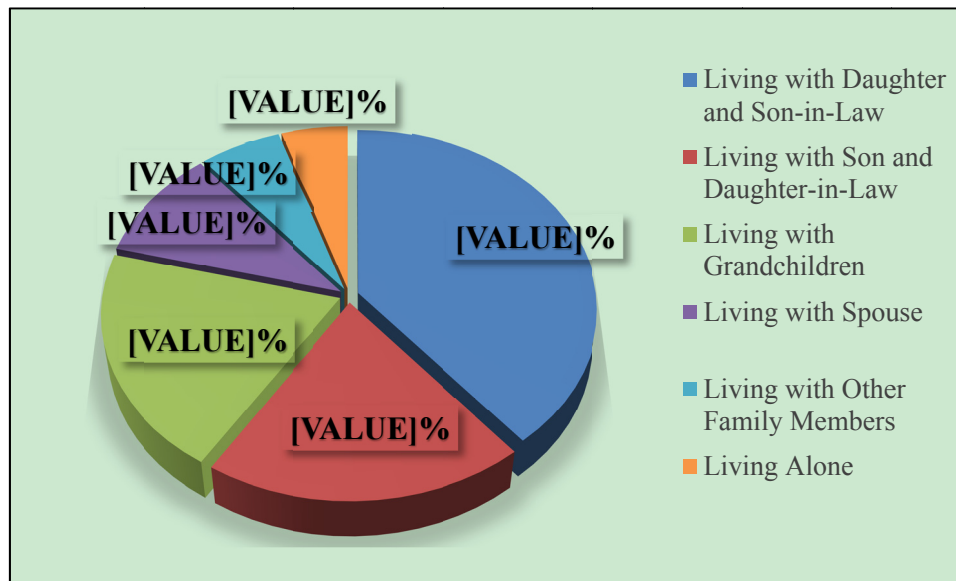


Figure 1. Living arrangements of senior citizens

### 3.2 Roles of Senior Citizens in Family and Household

Each and every person in the family contributes in numerous and different ways to build and continue the familial life whether it may be the youngest one or the eldest one in the family. Senior citizens play a very significant role in the social fabric of our society. The nation, society, family and every individual needs their support and guidance to build a strong and sustain future. The roles of senior citizens particularly in the family are very imperative and essential. The conducive culture and circumstances in most of the Eastern nations enable the senior citizens to play very prevailing and decisive roles in the family and household. The senior citizens play different roles in contributing much benefits to the enrichment of the family. The following figure 02 clearly portrays the percentage of senior citizens' roles in the family and household.

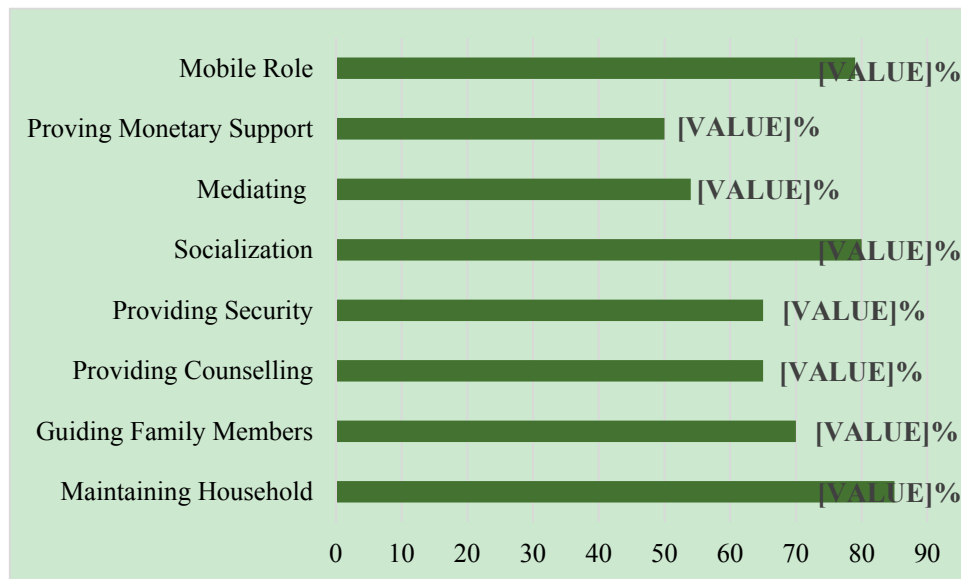


Figure 2. Roles of senior citizens in the family and household

### 3.2.1 Maintaining Household Activities

The major contribution of senior citizens is the involvement in maintaining household activities. 85% of the senior citizens in the study area involves in maintaining household activities. The study found that senior citizens often engage in cooking, feeding kids and bringing grandchildren to school. Small grandchildren also wish to sleep with them and are interested in listening the folk stories from their grandmother and grandfather. Senior citizens provide unique kind of love, affection and care to all family members via maintaining household activities. The senior citizens often work as the primary caregivers or care takers by looking after the grandchildren when the parents of them have to go out for their jobs and other works. Comparatively, the involvement of female senior citizens (75%) is higher than male senior citizens (25%) in maintaining household activities. In this regard, the study found that the role played by the female senior citizens at household level are more valuable and indispensable than the male senior citizens because more often male senior citizens were found to be away from engaging in household activities on variety of the important undertakings. The FGDs indicated that the complete involvements of female senior citizens in the culinary activities are highly preferred by the grandchildren.

### 3.2.2 Guiding the Family Members

Guiding the family members is one of the major roles played by the senior citizens. They are in a position to guide and advice on spiritual and moral aspects which could gain benefits to the family. Senior citizens have an immense ocean of experience where they can actively participate and give moral support to their family members. Though the senior citizens may be weak in physically, their strength of experience can act as a lighthouse for other family members who lack in experiences. 70% of the senior citizens in the study area involve in guiding the family members. This activity is majorly carried out by male senior citizens (60%) than the female senior citizens (40%), because the society considers that the men have more ability and experience in guiding family members than the women. The senior citizens are also considered as the suitable persons in important decision making process related to the family disorganization. The youngsters give priority to the senior citizens while taking important decisions and the valuable suggestions and guidance of the senior citizens are heard and accepted by other family members.

### 3.2.3 Providing Counselling

65% of the senior citizens in the study area engage in counselling related activities in the family. The people in the study area were impacted by war, natural disaster and existing poverty. The effects of these events are still carried out by the breadwinners of the family. The youngsters and middle aged members in families often get frustration and depression while facing problems related with money and their working environment. And due to the temperament of the youngsters, they often engage in some sort of domestic violence such as beating and scolding the wife and children and the disaster victims who often traumatise because of their loss of dear ones and properties. In these occasions, the senior citizens play an important role as counselling providers to their

family members to overcome and control the emotions and family problems in a critical condition. They help the youngsters in the family to overcome mental agony they faced due to the financial burden, poverty and how to handle with their children tactfully, even the do counselling for the disaster victims who lose their parents and dear ones and advise them to start a new life. Senior citizens in the family always encourage the family members to be patient and cheerful and do not suffer over the losses. And they make younger generation to believe in bright future and strive to achieve it persistently. Senior citizens educate the family members about the ways and means of living. The involvement of male senior citizens (55%) is higher than female senior citizens (45%) in providing counselling.

#### 3.2.4 Providing Security

Providing security is another particular role played by the senior citizens. 65% of the senior citizens in the study area provide security to their family members. The senior citizens are trusted by their children and they have been given the responsibility of looking after their grandchildren. The grandchildren often sleep with their grandparents in most of the families here, the male and female senior citizens in the household often go with grandchildren to their school and tuition classes and again return home with them. If grandchildren make fights and quarrel with peers, the grandparents visit the school and related parties to inquire about the problems and try to save their grandchildren from conflicts and arguments. Also senior citizens preserve the belongings and properties of the family and transmit to their children and grandchildren for their betterment. This role has deepened especially after the disaster situation in the study area. The senior citizens found themselves as security provider to those who lost their parents in the family in maintaining their social relationship in the existing environment too. The involvement of male senior citizens (65%) is higher than female senior citizens (35%) in providing security in the study area.

#### 3.2.5 Socialization

Socialisation is a process which induces individuals into the social world. It is a process how a man was born into the natural environment and turned into a social being in the social environment. Human beings learn the habits, attitudes, values and beliefs through repeated interactions with their social group where they have born. Socialization is a continuous process in the life of an individual and it continues from generation to generation (Rao, 2007). This process is essential not only for sociability but also for personality development too. Senior citizens play crucial role in the socialization process even if there are other members in the family because they have been viewed as the role models by the all family members whom they follow. The study found out that 80% of the senior citizens involve in socialization process in the family. The study found through the focus group discussion that senior citizens teach and train their family members on how to face and escape from the disaster situation and make every family members to understand the ways of living securely. Also senior citizens use storytelling as an effective method which includes their previous experiences to teach their children and grandchildren. Considerable number of both male and female senior citizens involved in socialization process. The involvement of male senior citizens (57%) is higher than female senior citizens (43%) in this role.

#### 3.2.6 Mediating

The study found that decisive role is also successfully played by the senior citizens in the study area. 54% of the senior citizens in the study area engage in mediating activity among the family members. Senior citizens accomplish a major part in solving disputes and conflicts among the family members. This brings harmonious solutions to most of the problems and quarrels occur among the family members. Senior citizens are trusted to have very impartiality in dealing with family problems and they have well known the backup reasons for the conflicts. The family members find difficulties in order to hide the facts and they cannot exaggerate the problems to the senior citizens in the dispute situations. This great effort of mediation helps the family members to prevent from exaggerating the disputes and seeking legal solutions for family problems. This timely action of senior citizens through mediating preserves the family bonds and relations without resulting in prolonged wrangle among the family members. Male senior citizens (68%) involvement is higher than female senior citizens (32%) due to the nature and societal acceptance.

#### 3.2.7 Proving Monetary Support

Proving Monetary Support to the family members is another role played by the senior citizens in the study area. 50% of the senior citizens in the study area provide monetary support to their family members. Here, senior citizens function as providers of food and shelter for the direct dependents by engaging themselves in gainful employment to fund these necessities. The most of the male senior citizens engage in paddy cultivation and other farming activities to support their children and grandchildren. Some of them have gone abroad as drivers and labourers with the aim of helping their own families. The male senior citizens' involvement (60%) is higher than female

senior citizens (40%) in providing monetary support to their family. The study also found that the senior citizens not only look after their direct family members but also they act as charitable members in the family too. Charities are often closely linked with senior citizens than younger ones in the family where the elderly lead the way in helping the poor. Majority of the senior citizens in the study area are willing to help the needy and poor in their surroundings too with whatever they have in their hands more than the young earners in their family.

### 3.2.8 Mobile Role

Mobile role is found out to be another major role played by the senior citizens in the study area. 79% of the senior citizens are engaged in mobile role in the family. The senior citizens go out from their home to settle electricity, water and other bills, go on shopping to buy provisions and household needs, even they go markets to buy groceries, government offices to obtain the samurdhi card and relief application forms to support their family members. And also, the senior citizens do not remain at home by considering their physical condition which has become weak, they often visit relatives' house and friends' house with or without their children and grandchildren. The involvement of male senior citizens (79%) is higher than female senior citizens (21%) in mobile role. The male senior citizens travel distance places than female senior citizens in order to fulfil their needs and family needs. The following figure 03 clearly shows the percentage of senior citizens' gender proportion of role taking behaviour.

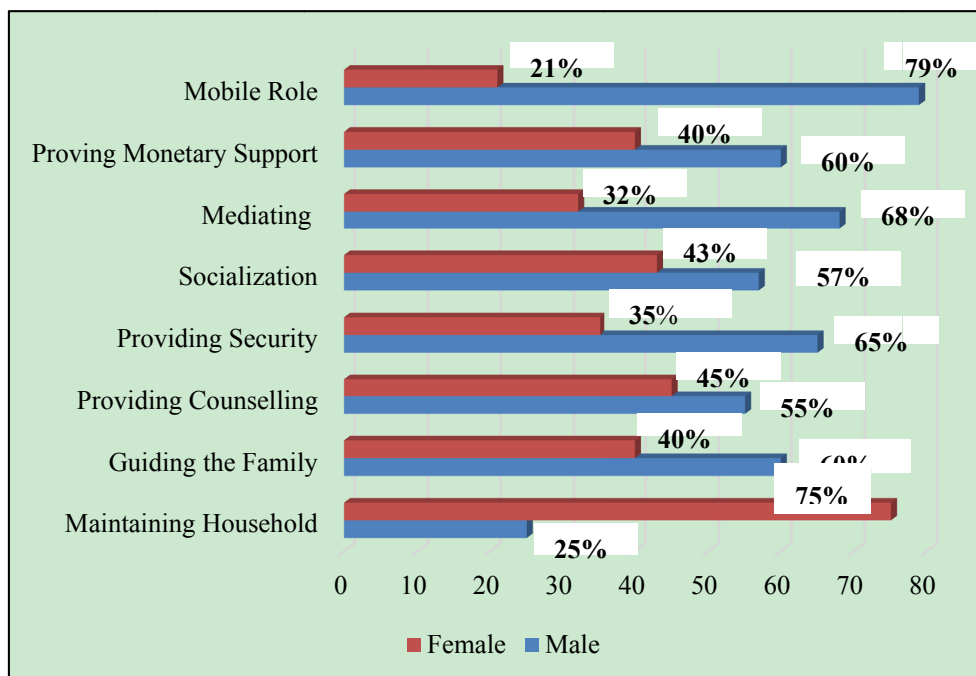


Figure 3. Gender proportion of role taking behavior

### 3.3 Reasons behind the Active Roles of Senior Citizens

As people age, it is unavoidable that they begin to slow down, but this does not mean that they stop to be an active member in the family and society. Senior citizens play significant roles in order to help their family members and wanted to be active people in the society rather than welfare recipients. This study mentioned about the multiple roles played by the senior citizens in the study area. In the sense, this part of the study explored the reasons behind the activeness on taking different roles by senior citizens in the given society one by one as follows.

#### 3.3.1 Physical Fitness and Healthy Lifestyle

What people do to make a living is important to them in all societies. Work and livelihood activities provide economic benefits and social recognition to the people. However, most of the people have been out of work due to their age which is related with health issues whether it may be an own decision or forced (Sullivan, 2016). There is a myth that senior citizens are less likely to work in their old age due to the slowdown in their physical condition. Though, most of the senior citizens are less likely to remain at home or else in the

institutional care. In this regard, the study identified that senior citizens have become active due to their physical fitness and healthy lifestyle in the study area. Majority of the respondents reported that they are physically and mentally leading a healthy life because of their livelihood activities and their environment. The senior citizens in the study area are predominantly farmers. They have been engaging in farming since their childhood. Works, environment and its related nutritious food behaviours helped them to be strong in any conditions. The senior citizens of this study area were once hard workers and depends mostly on homely made nutritious food. This conditions created a healthy life among senior citizens and still they are continuing to be active members in the family by playing multiple roles. The following case study 01 emphasise how the physical fitness and healthy lifestyle help a senior citizen to be an active member in the family.

#### Case Study 01

Sameem is 65 years old, a retired teacher who lives with his wife and children in the same household. Sameem is a hard worker since childhood. His family engaged in paddy cultivation and minor crop cultivation. While he was studying in the school he engaged in farming activities with his parents. Sameem helped his parents after schooling in farming. He has engaged in farming activities even after became a teacher. Though he served as a government worker, he did not withdraw the thirst and willingness of farming as a part time work in the evenings and weekends.

Sameem and his family have consumed nutritious food mostly produced in their own farm and neighbours' farm which are fresh and unpoisoned since childhood. Sameem stated that even the fast food and luxurious life have become common and inevitable among the people, still he and his family members prefer healthy and nutritious food. After the retirement also Sameem has been engaging in farming related activities such as doing paddy cultivation in his own land and continuing crop cultivation, fetching water from the canal and well and cleaning the bushes, etc. Sameem expressed with a smile that the hard work and healthy lifestyle have made him to work in his late 60s and still has the potential to support his family.

#### 3.3.2 Disaster Situation

Disaster is considered as another reason behind the active role of senior citizens of this study area. The people faced both manmade and natural disasters which induced many drastic changes in their everyday life and the environment in the study area. They lost their loved ones, property and belongings. The impact of the disaster was reflected on the individuals who suffered adversely during the disaster. These changes were very much felt through the individuals adopting new styles of living and finding more creative openings in place of the situation that prevailed prior to the disaster. In this respect, senior citizens of the study area have become more dynamic and play active roles to support their family members without being in an emotional state. Senior citizens reported that they become more active after the disaster because they sensed they are the people who need to support their family members and relatives. They have started to pay more attention to the roles like security provider, decision maker, provider of shelter and food and mobile roles after the disaster occurred. The following case study 02 designates how the disaster situation leads a senior citizen to be an active member to look after her family beyond her old age.



## Case Study 02

Mubitha Umma, 61 years old is a widow. She has only one daughter who got married before her father's death. Mubitha Umma's husband died in 1995 due to the war prevailed at that time in Sri Lanka. After her husband's death Mubitha Umma came to her daughter's house as a dependent. Her son-in-law who went for a business disappeared and has not returned yet. Her daughter a disabled person by birth was left husbandless as a result who has two children. This unfortunate situation of her and her daughter pushed Mubitha Umma to work hard for the family. Mubitha Umma returned back from the passive life to dynamic life. The responsibility of looking after her disabled widowed daughter and her children has fallen on her. Now Mubitha Umma runs a small retail shop in the corner of her daughter's house and earn about Rs. 700.00 per day. Mubitha Umma engage in preparing meals, keeping the surrounding tidy, washing clothes for the school going grandchildren and bringing the grandchildren from school. The small grandchildren also wish to sleep by listening her folk stories.

### 3.3.3 Loneliness and Isolation

Loneliness and isolation have become important factors which lead to negative health outcomes and mental decline among the people, especially this condition severely influenced the senior citizens. The final stage in the life of elderly people is usually filled with isolation and loneliness (Ayoob, 2019). Senior citizens who are isolated are more likely to need long term care as they age. The senior citizens in the study area mentioned that they engaged in some activities in order to tackle with their spare time. As they have mentioned, by engaging in leisurely activities like culinary activities, storytelling and involving in household activities senior citizens have an opportunity to be active. They have also pointed out that engaging this kind of physical activities is especially good for them as they age. They kill their loneliness and isolation by engaging in these kinds of activities with their children and grandchildren make them active and encourage them to play more roles in the family to be active members in the family. Senior citizens expressed that by doing these activities they have become healthier, can express their emotions and reduce anxiety.

### 3.3.4 Lack of Organizational Structure

Lack of organizational structure is another reason behind the active participation of taking different role by senior citizens of the study are. After the retirement from work, most of the senior citizens forcefully or willingly resides in elderly homes or nursing homes in many countries (Sullivan, 2016). Senior citizens often move or are moved to the institutional care because they don't have anyone to look after them and look after by them. On the other hand, most senior citizens have not lived in institutional set up or other extended-care facilities in some societies yet. And the senior citizens have the fearful thoughts if they do not support to the family and household activities, their children and grandchildren will not allow them to live with them and will chase them from home. Though, the respondents of the study reported that the lack of institutional set up for the senior citizens in the region make them to remain and play different roles in the family and society. The following case study 03 describes how lack of organizational structure helps a senior citizen to live as an active member with her daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren.

### Case Study 03

Sithi Beevi, 68 years old is a widow. She has three daughters and a son. All her children are married and living with their family members. Sithi Beevi is now living with her last daughter. Her last daughter's husband is a teacher who works in a distance place and she has three children who are schooling. Sithi Beevi gets up early in the morning and helps her daughter in cooking breakfast and lunch. Cutting vegetables and cleaning the dishes, sweeping the floor are often done by Sithi Beevi. She also helps the grandchildren to bath, wear dresses, feed foods and bring them to school too. Sithi Beevi is also going to grocery shops to buy needed items for cooking and households because, her son-in-law is working in a distance place which makes him to refrain from these works.

Sithi Beevi does all household activities and culinary activities whether she is healthy or unhealthy without caring her tiredness due to the workload because of the afraid that she holds in her daughter. If Sithi Beevi does not do all these household chores and provides her support to her daughter, her daughter scolds and maintains a distance relationship with her. Sithi Beevi has a fear that her daughter would chase her out if she does not do these tasks. Sithi Beevi is playing active roles in the family and household to continue peaceful living in her rest of life with her daughter and family without moving to a separate organizational structure.

#### 3.3.5 Economic Condition

Another reason behind the active role taking by the senior citizen is the current economic situation of them and their family. Most of the senior citizens and their family members are poor farmers and daily wage labourers. This condition of economic hardship created a situation of working more beyond the age. Senior citizens of the area realised the importance of generating income for them and their family members. And they emphasised that remaining at home without doing any works make them to be sick. Therefore, the family situation of expecting an additional income and the willingness of the senior citizens in earning income to look after them and their family have made them to be active members in the society.

#### 3.3.6 Social Recognition

Social recognition has also become one of the reasons behind the active role played by the senior citizens. Number of evidence shows that social recognition considers as a motive for many people's behaviour which produces social and symbolic boundaries and different lifestyles (Rottiers, 2010). In this regard, senior citizens elaborated that social recognition is also a reason behind the involvement of different activities in the family and playing different roles by them. Senior citizens emphasise, if they do different kind of tasks and taking roles like caregivers, decision makers, mobile role, socialising the family members and providing food, security and shelter that bring a social recognition and identification to them. This expectation of achieving social recognition changed the passiveness of the senior citizens of the study area and help them to take different roles in the family and household. Senior citizens do not want to make others to view them as a passive recipients of care, services and welfare. This social recognition is also hindered the senior citizens to be active members in the household and let them to play essential and multiple roles in families.

### 4. Conclusion

A family is the most important of any other social institutions in the society. Most of the individuals prefer to lead a life with their spouse and children in a private and separate dwelling in many countries, however extended family system is also still prevailing in the world which comprises at least three generation including senior citizens. Totally, 95% of the senior citizens in the study area are living with their family members. This living arrangement of being with family members enables the senior citizens to take multiple roles in the family which make them to be active members in the society in their old age. Maintaining household activities, guiding the family members, providing counselling, providing security, socialization, mediating, providing monetary support and mobile role are the major roles played by senior citizens. The male senior citizens were found to have acquired more new roles in the family and household while more females are found to engage themselves only in some roles. This is due to they are comparatively younger and having less privilege in the society than male senior citizens and by virtue of their temperament and flexibility more suitable to perform these roles. As people

age, it is unavoidable that they begin to slow down, but this does not mean that they remain as passive member in the family and society. Physical fitness and healthy lifestyle, disaster situation, economic condition, loneliness and isolation, lack of organizational structure and social recognition were found as the reasons behind the active role taking behaviour among the senior citizens. The study ultimately concludes that the society will become more stable when all members of the family worked together willingly and harmoniously. Senior citizens who are still energetic and dynamic are the treasure of the family and society who have numerous experiences.

## References

- Abeykoon, A. T. P. L., & Ruwanthi, E. (2008). Emerging social issues of population ageing in Sri Lanka. *Economic Review*, 34, 7-9.
- Amarabandu, W. P. (2004). Elderly population and social security in Sri Lanka. In *Ageing population in Sri Lanka: Issues and future prospects* (pp.77-122). Colombo, Sri Lanka: United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA) & Population Association of Sri Lanka (PASL).
- Audinarayana, N. (2012). *Urban elderly in India: Care and support*. Delhi: B.R. Publishing Cooperation.
- Ayoob, S. M. (2019). *Pious life of elderly people in Ampara District of Sri Lanka*. Retrieved from <http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/jpl/article/view/0/41431>
- Bansod, D. W. (2011). Care and support during twilight years: Perception of descendants by their elderly in rural Maharashtra. *Indian Journal of Gerontology*, 25(2), 249-269.
- Bjomberg, U., & Hams, E. (2008). Financial and practical kin support in Sweden: Normative guidelines and practice. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 39(1), 73-95. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jcfs.39.1.73>
- Chadha, N. K. (1997). *Ageing and the Aged: Challenges before Indian Gerontology*. Delhi: Friends Publications.
- Chappell, N. L., & Karen, K. (2007). The gendered nature of filial piety: A study among Chinese Canadians. *Journal of Cross-cultural Gerontology*, 22, 29-45. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10823-006-9011-5>
- De Silva, I., Kumudika, B., & Manjula, R. (2008). Ageing population and social security in Sri Lanka. *Economic Review*, 34, 2-6.
- De Silva, W. I., & Samarasekara, D. (1999). Population ageing: Emerging issues in Sri Lanka. *Economic Review*, 34, 12-15.
- District Secretariat. (2018). *Annual Performance Report & Accounts-2018*. Ampara, Sri Lanka: District Secretariat.
- Haralambos, M., & Heald, R. M. (2004). *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*. London: Harper Collins Publishers Limited.
- Johnsi, J. (2015). Receiving emotional support by the elderly and its determinants in selected villages in Tamil Nadu state. In N. Audinarayana & J. Johnsi (Eds.), *The ageing: Health and care* (pp.22-32). Chennai: T R Publications.
- Kaplan, D., & Berkman, B. (2019, May 20). *Religion and Spirituality in Older Adults*. Retrieved from <https://www.msmanuals.com/professional/geriatrics/social-issues-in-older-adults/religion-and-spirituality-in-older-adults>
- Maruthakutti, R. (2011). Filial responsibility and problems of the caregivers in the family setting. *Indian Journal of Gerontology*, 25(2), 177-188.
- Nasreen, A. (2009). *Urban elderly: Coping strategies and social responses*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.
- Perera, M. W., Ostbye, T., Rajapakse, H., Ranabahu, S., & Maselko, J. (2015). Perceptions of successful ageing in Sri Lankan older people: A qualitative study. *Asian J Gerontol Geriatr*, 10, 22-30.
- Perera, R. (2004). *A sociological study on elderly care in an urban community in Sri Lanka*. Proceedings of the Second Academic Sessions. Retrieved from [http://www.ruh.ac.lk/research/academic\\_sessions/2004\\_mergepdf/142-146.PDF](http://www.ruh.ac.lk/research/academic_sessions/2004_mergepdf/142-146.PDF)
- Rao, S. (2002). *Sociology: Primary Principles*. New Delhi: S.Chand and Company Ltd.
- Rottiers, S. (2010). The Sociology of Social Recognition: Competition in Social Recognition Games. CSB Working Paper, Heman Deleeck Center of Social Policy, University of Antwerp. Retrieved from <https://ideas.repec.org/p/hdl/wpaper/1004.html>

- Sanderatne, N. (2004). Socioeconomic Implications of ageing. In *Ageing population in Sri Lanka: Issues and future prospects* (pp. 204-224). Colombo, Sri Lanka: United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA) & Population Association of Sri Lanka (PASL).
- Seneviratne and Rohini. (2004). Ageing and Health in Sri Lanka. In *Ageing Population in Sri Lanka: Issues and Future Prospects* (pp. 225-254). Colombo, Sri Lanka: United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA) & Population Association of Sri Lanka (PASL).
- Sharma, Y. K. (2007). *Indian society: Issues and problems*. Agra: Lakshmi: Narain Agarwal Publication.
- Siddhisena, K. A. P. (2004a). Demography of ageing in Sri Lanka. In *Ageing population in Sri Lanka: Issues and future prospects* (pp.08-42). Colombo, Sri Lanka: United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA) & Population Association of Sri Lanka (PASL).
- Siddhisena, K. A. P. (2004b). *Socio-economic implications of ageing in Sri Lanka: An overview* (Working paper No. WP 105). Sri Lanka: Oxford institute of ageing working papers.
- Siddhisena, K. A. P., & Ratnayake, K. (1998). Ageing of population and elderly care in Sri Lanka. *Sri Lanka Journal of Population Studies*, 1(1), 35-55.
- Silva, K. T. (2004). Elderly population, family support and intergenerational arrangements. In *Ageing population in Sri Lanka: Issues and future prospects* (pp. 45-76). Colombo, Sri Lanka: United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA) & Population Association of Sri Lanka (PASL).
- Sullivan, T. J. (2016). *Introduction to social problems*. New York: Pearson.
- Tarani, C. (2013). Ageing and the life course. In J. Gabe, & L. F. Monaghan (Eds.), *Key Concepts in medical Sociology* (pp. 87-90). London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Thane P. (1989). History and the sociology of ageing. *Social History of Medicine*, 2(1), 93-96. <https://doi.org/10.1093/shm/2.1.93>
- Tibittis, C. (1960). *Handbook of social gerontology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wijewantha, N. W. E. (2004). The Role of NGOs and Institutional Arrangements for the Ageing in Sri Lanka. In *Ageing Population in Sri Lanka: Issues and Future Prospects* (pp. 277-302). Colombo, Sri Lanka: United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA) & Population Association of Sri Lanka (PASL).

### Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).