

GOLDEN YEARS, ACTIVE CHEERS: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ELDERLY RESIDENTS IN HEALTH AND WELLNESS PROGRAM

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Abstract

The rapid aging of the global population has intensified the need for effective health and wellness programs that support elderly individuals in maintaining physical, social, and emotional well-being. However, participation rates remain low due to multi-level barriers including limited accessibility, lack of awareness, transportation difficulties, and insufficient social support. This study sought to explore the lived experiences of elderly residents in San Fernando City, La Union, Philippines, regarding their participation and non-participation in community-based health and wellness programs. Using a descriptive qualitative phenomenological design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with elderly residents aged 65 above to capture their personal narratives, challenges, motivations, and perceived facilitators. Data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns that reflect the realities of aging in a community health context. The findings reveal that elderly participants face interconnected barriers such as health limitations, environmental inaccessibility, low program awareness, and diminished social connectedness, while facilitators include peer encouragement, perceived health benefits, and culturally relevant activities. Despite these challenges, many elderly individuals expressed willingness to engage when programs are meaningful and accessible. From these insights, the study proposes recommendations for program implementers, local government units, and the barangay health committee to develop more inclusive, age-friendly, and sustainable wellness initiatives.

Keywords: *Community Participation; Elderly; Health and Wellness; Healthy Aging; Programs*

1. Introduction

In the Philippines, many older adults still engage in healthy activities such as walking and stretching, but participation in organized wellness programs remains low due to barriers like transportation difficulties, health conditions, lack of awareness, and limited interest (Garcia et al., 2024, p. 3; Department of Health, 2023, pp. 5–7). Studies show that wellness programs improve physical health, emotional well-being, social participation, and independence among older adults (Santos & Reyes, 2022, pp. 10–12).

In San Fernando City, La Union, the local government has introduced programs such as fitness activities, nutrition programs, and the Barangay Active Aging Caravan to support healthy aging among senior citizens (City Government of San Fernando La Union, 2015, p. 8). However, barriers such as limited mobility, transportation issues, and lack of social support continue to affect participation (Benjamin, 2010, pp. 3–10). Due to the limited local literature on this topic, this study aims to explore the experiences and challenges of elderly individuals regarding community wellness programs in San Fernando City, La Union.

2. Objectives

The research aimed to describe the lived experiences, both positive and negative of elderly residents in San Fernando City, La Union in the health and wellness programs of the local government unit.

3. Materials and Methods

The study made use of a qualitative descriptive research design which involved a phenomenological approach for the purpose of investigating the experience of elderly individuals who are involved in health and wellness programs offered in the city of San Fernando, La Union. Qualitative descriptive research involves an in-depth description of the experience of participants in their natural setting. Specifically, the phenomenological approach was used for understanding the meaning and interpretation that participants give to their experiences related to community-based health and wellness programs.

The data were gathered from elderly residents of Barangays Pagudpud, Carlatan, and Lingsat in the City of San Fernando, La Union. These barangays were purposively selected due to their varying characteristics and accessibility to community-based health and wellness services. Barangay Carlatan was selected because of the availability of a health and wellness station, Barangay Pagudpud due to its coastal location, and Barangay Lingsat because of the distance between the barangay hall and the residences of elderly individuals.

To effectively minimize potential biases during data gathering, the researchers made sure that the interview guide used was evaluated by three licensed physical therapists in terms of its relevance, clarity, readability, organization, and appropriateness according to the goals of the study. In addition, the interview guide was translated to the Ilocano dialect through a licensed professional teacher to make sure that all of the participants have fully grasped the questions asked from them and that they can answer the said questions accurately and confidently. Lastly, the researchers made sure that the principles of confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were upheld.

This self-funded study has been submitted and approved by the College of Physical Therapy and Research Ethics Committee of LORMA Colleges before the actual conduct of the study. In the course of conducting the study, ethical considerations were strictly followed. The researchers were able to coordinate with the barangay officials and held face-to-face semi-structured interviews at a place where participants would feel comfortable, such as their homes and other available community areas. Interviewees underwent three sessions each and these sessions took place in succeeding days, with a duration of thirty (30) minutes each.

The subjects were notified by the means of an informed consent form which outlined the goals and significance of the study. It was made clear to the respondents that participating in the research study is strictly voluntary and that they can pull out of the research whenever they want without any consequences on their relationship with the researchers or any service they may have received from the barangay. Additionally, all information collected from the respondents was to be kept completely confidential and anonymous. The respondents were not referred to by name and were given code names. The only individuals who had access to the data collected were the researchers themselves.

In this research study, participation from the elderly respondents proved to be a source of great insight into the experiences, issues faced and opinions of these senior citizens towards health and wellness programs. The findings in the study could help in improving wellness programs for the senior citizens of the City of San Fernando, La Union. Data collected in this study will be archived for future research and will later be disposed of appropriately.

These data were then transcribed, sorted, analyzed, interpreted, and stored by the researchers themselves. The technique of thematic analysis was applied in analyzing the qualitative data that was collected from the interviews. Data familiarization, coding, categorizing, theme development, and thematic interpretations were employed by the researchers in order to find out any themes and subthemes from the narratives of the participants. The researchers also made use of relevant quotations made by the participants in the study.

4. Results

The thematic analysis of the 14 participant interviews revealed three major themes, each with several subthemes, as illustrated in the conceptual model (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The Pathways to Aging, Health, Wellness, and Hope

Upon analysis, the researchers were able to formulate 3 major themes along with their respective subthemes. (1) Hands that Heal, Hands that Reach, with the subthemes: (a) Voices that Carry the News, (b) Wellness as a Path to Healthy Aging, (c) Answering the Call to Participate; (2) Carrying Life's Weight Through Fading Strength, with the subthemes: (a) Fading Awareness Behind Closed Doors, (b) Livelihood Before Health, (c) Burden of Daily Responsibilities, (d) Silent Walls of Membership, (d) Under The Sun, The Journey Continues; and (3) Hoping for Better Tomorrows, with the subtheme: (a) Strength in Shared Gatherings

The results and discussions derived from the interviews conducted with 14 elderly residents in City of San Fernando, La Union are mainly based on their narratives that provided valuable insights into the realities of participating in barangay health and wellness programs,

revealing both the barriers and facilitators that shape their engagement. The qualitative approach employed here emphasizes the voices of the participants, allowing their lived experiences to guide the interpretation of results.

Table 1: Hands that Heal, Hands that Reach

Theme	Sub Themes	Participant Code	Significant Statements
HANDS THAT HEAL, HANDS THAT REACH	Voices that Carry News	P4	➤ Daras a maammuanmi no adda umay a taga barangay hall a mangipakaammo kadakami, wenno no maikaykaysa ti meeting (<i>We usually find out when someone from the barangay hall comes to inform us, or sometimes after a meeting</i>)
		P6	➤ Nalalaman namin kung may mga flayers na naka paskil (<i>We usually find out through flyers that are posted</i>)
		P14	➤ Nalalaman namin through social media at pag may meeting (<i>We find out about these through social media and during meetings</i>)
	Wellness or Path of Healthy Aging	P2	➤ Adda dagiti libre a medical mission ken adda met dagiti programa para kadagiti senior citizen kas iti zumba ken libre a nasustansia a makan (<i>Some free medical missions and have programs for seniors like Zumba, free healthy foods</i>)
		P6	➤ Dagiayay medical mission, like mga free check up free medicine (<i>Those medical missions, like free check-ups and free medicines</i>)
		P14	➤ Yung free medical check up, clean and green activities tapos senior program like zumba

			<i>(The free medical check-up, clean and green activities, and senior programs like zumba)</i>
Answering the Call to Participate	P2	➤	Saanakon nga umattend no saan a mangayab ti barangay no adda programa <i>(I don't go anymore unless the barangay calls when there's a program)</i>
	P4	➤	No adda mangayab kaniak (... <i>when someone invites me to go</i>)
	P5	➤	Ngem nu adda mang-ayab kinyak nga taga ditoy ayan mi mapanak met (... <i>but if someone from our place invites me, I go along</i>)

Source: Data collected from the study (*Golden Years, Active Cheers: Lived Experiences of Elderly Residents in Health and Wellness Programs*).

Table 1 shows that elderly residents viewed barangay health and wellness programs as valuable but learned about them primarily through interpersonal networks rather than formal announcements. The participants highly valued free medical services, yet their participation was often reactive, triggered by direct personal invitations rather than self-initiated action.

Table 2: *Carrying Life's Weight Through Strength*

Theme	Sub Themes	Participant Code	Significant Statements
BETWEEN DUTY AND DECLINING STRENGTH	Fading Awareness Behind Closed Doors	P5	➤ Haan ak nga rumrumwar su nga haan ko ammo <i>(I am not going out, that is why I don't know)</i>
		P9	➤ Haan ko met laeng

	P12	<p>maexperience ta haanak met nga mapan ken haan ak nga interesado (<i>I will not experience since I do not join and I'm not interested</i>)</p> <p>➤ Hindi pa talaga ako nakakapunta diyan, pero may naririnig ako (<i>I haven't been to one, but I heard about it</i>)</p>
Livelihood Before Health	P1	➤ Adda tindaan a banbantayak (<i>I have a store to watch out for</i>)
	P2	➤ Masapulak a mapan agtrabaho ayanti palengke ta aghilhilot ak (<i>I have to go to work in the market/town because I am a masseuse</i>)
	P3	➤ Adda negosyo a masapul a bantayak (<i>I have a business to look out for</i>)
Burden of Daily Responsibilities	P5	➤ Nu malem met agdaldalos ak (<i>During the afternoon, I am doing house chores</i>)
	P5	➤ No adda ak iti balay, abalaak iti panaglaba (<i>When I'm at house, I'm busy doing the laundry</i>)
	P13	➤ Walang nagbabantay dito sa bahay (<i>There's no one to watch over the house</i>)
Silent Walls of Membership	P1	➤ Saan kami a miyembro iti daytoy a barangay (<i>We are not members, that's why we are not attending</i>)
	P7	➤ Ta no senior citizen ka, mairaman ka met laeng iti programa da (<i>because if you are a senior citizen, you are really included in their program</i>)
	P2	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Agpokusak iti mabalin nga maipateg nga kontribusyon kadagiti kapariak a lallaki ken babbai a senior (<i>I focus on what I can contribute to my fellow elderly men and women, and how we can support one another as seniors</i>)
Under the Sun, The Journey Continues	P4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Jay kinapudot ti panawen na (<i>It's because of the hot weather</i>)
	P5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Narigat met apan ta napudot (<i>It's difficult to go because it's hot</i>)
	P12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Saanak nga kayat nga agkanayon nga umay gappo ta napudot (<i>I do not like to go because it is hot</i>)

Source: Data collected from the study (*Golden Years, Active Cheers: Lived Experiences of Elderly Residents in Health and Wellness Programs*).

Table 2 illustrates that elderly participants remained burdened by economic, domestic, and informational challenges despite their weakening physical strength. Aging was experienced not as withdrawal from laborious life but as its continuation due to lack of alternatives.

Table 3: Hoping for Better Tomorrows

Theme	Sub	Participan	Significant Statements
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Themes		t Code	
HOPING FOR BETTER TOMORROWS	Strength in Shared Gatherings	P9	➤ Kayat ko makichismis kin dagijay kakadwak ditoy ah babaket, apanak siguro (<i>I want to socialize with other elderly in my area, then I will go</i>)
		P12	➤ Gusto ko lang makihalubilo sa mga tao para marami akong makasocialize (<i>I just want to meet with other people, so that I can gain a lot, socially</i>)
		P14	➤ Para makipag halubilo kami sa ibang matatanda para may mga bago kaming kakilala (<i>It also gives us a chance to socialize and meet new people</i>)

Source: Data collected from the study (*Golden Years, Active Cheers: Lived Experiences of Elderly Residents in Health and Wellness Programs*).

Table 3 illustrates that despite the numerous challenges they face, elderly participants expressed a strong desire to remain socially connected, physically active, and emotionally fulfilled. Wellness programs were perceived not merely as barangay activities but as meaningful opportunities for companionship, support, and continued purpose in life.

5. Conclusions & Recommendations

The following conclusions are derived from the study: (1) Elderly participation in wellness programs is heavily dependent on personal invitations and social networks rather than formal announcements. (2) Significant economic and caregiving responsibilities often take precedence over health-related activities. (3) Environmental barriers, such as distance and extreme heat, are major deterrents to participation. (4) Administrative barriers, like membership lists, can lead to the social exclusion of eligible elderly residents. (5) Despite these challenges, elderly residents have a strong desire for social interaction and view wellness programs as a valuable opportunity for both health maintenance and community connection.

Recommendations

1. Barangay officials and health professionals should strengthen information dissemination through house-to-house visits and improve program accessibility by adjusting schedules and locations during extreme weather.
2. Local government units and program administrators should develop flexible and senior-friendly wellness programs that consider the elderly's responsibilities,

caregiving duties, and physical limitations while creating more engaging activities to encourage participation.

3. Health and wellness programs should continue providing free and accessible healthcare services within local communities to make services more reachable for older adults.

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8. Appendices

APPENDIX A: Letter of LC-REC Approval



LC-REC Form #024
APPROVAL LETTER

REC Reference #: 2026-098

February 23, 2026

To: **Jim Victor Concepcion, Jaymark Lucero, Ivan Jonnel Magpayo and Mary Jane Banayat**
LORMA Colleges, College of Physical Therapy

Subject: Approval of the Research Study – “GOLDEN YEARS, ACTIVE CHEERS: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ELDERLY RESIDENTS IN HEALTH AND WELLNESS PROGRAMS” – by the Research Ethics Committee (REC).

Dear Researcher/s,

The Research Ethics Committee (REC) has reviewed your application to conduct the above-mentioned research study in the City of San Fernando, La Union with you as the Principal Investigators within a duration of February 23, 2026 to February 23, 2027.

The Following documents have been reviewed and approved:


1. Endorsement of the Research Coordinator
2. Title and Statement of the Problem/Objective
3. Literature Review
4. Methods and Procedures
5. Population and Locale
6. Exclusion/Inclusion Criteria
7. Data Analysis
8. Ethical Considerations

We approve the study to be conducted in the presented form provided the following are integrated in the final research protocol:

1. In the Informed Consent Form’s Reimbursements section, remove “lost time.”

The institutional REC expects to be informed about the progress of the study, any revision in the protocol before implementation and participants’/respondents’ information/informed consent. Likewise, you are required to provide the Board a copy of the final report.

Yours Sincerely,



JEROME P. VERA, LPT
Chairman, LC-REC

APPENDIX B: Letter of Consent

CERTIFICATE OF CONSENT:

I have read the information stated herein or it was properly explained to me. I was provided with a chance to ask questions relative to it. All questions I asked were answered properly; therefore, I consent and voluntarily participate in this study.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Statement from the Researcher/Person Obtaining the Consent

All information pertaining to this study was explained to the possible participant and made sure that he/she fully understood what she/he has to do in the research.

Similarly, I affirm that the potential participant was given a chance to ask questions which I have answered accurately to the best of my ability.

Likewise, I affirm that the participant was not coerced or forced in giving consent. That he/she has voluntarily provided the consent.

Accomplished by: JIM VICTOR L. CONCEPCION Date Submitted: January 20, 2026
(Signature over Printed Name)