

Elderly in the UAE: A Policy-Oriented Study

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Abstract:

This research aims to identify the main pillars of social policy for the elderly in the UAE, as well as to examine the existence and availability of necessary laws and services to protect the rights of the elderly and ensure the fulfillment of their needs. The study employed a descriptive method, with researchers accessing available data related to elderly policy in the UAE to conduct an intensive review of national legislation, laws, services, and programs related to the policy. The results revealed that the policy is based on seven pillars: healthcare, community involvement, effective civic participation, housing and infrastructure, financial stability, safety and security, and quality of future life. It was also found that the UAE government is highly committed to ensuring the rights of the elderly by issuing several legislations and laws, especially Federal Law No. 9 of 2019 on the Rights of Senior Emiratis, which was tailored for senior citizens in the UAE. Additionally, the results showed that the government has allocated significant resources to support the provision of comprehensive services for the elderly in various sectors, particularly health, protection, integration, rehabilitation, education, mobility, and financial support services. However, the research indicated that improvements are needed in the field of elderly empowerment, access to the digital world, technology integration, and effective participation from all stakeholders. Several corrective measures were proposed by the researchers to improve the policy in the country, the most prominent of which is the establishment of a national database for the elderly and conducting further quantitative and qualitative research, in addition to ensuring the elimination of technological illiteracy and promoting the active participation of the elderly in policy-making and all aspects of life.

Keywords: Elderly protection, elderly policy, elderly rights, senior citizens in UAE.

***The authors has signed the consent form and ethical approval**

Introduction:

Population ageing is a global phenomenon as every country in the world is experiencing growth in the size and percentage of older persons in their population. Therefore, population ageing has been recognized as one of the four global demographic "megatrends," alongside population growth, international migration, and urbanization. The percentage of elderly people aged 60 years and above in the population is increasing. According to the World Health Organization, in 2019, the number of elderly individuals was 1 billion, and this number is expected to increase to 1.4 billion by 2030 and to 2.1 billion by 2050. This acceleration is predicted to continue in the coming decades, particularly in developing countries, where the proportion of the world's population over 60 years will nearly double from 12% to 22% between 2015 and 2050. This means that the number of people aged 60 years and older will outnumber children younger than 5 years (WHO, 2021).

Furthermore, according to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, by 2050, 1 in 6 people in the world will be over the age of 65, compared to 1 in 11 in 2019. The Division also mentioned that older people accounted for more than one-fifth of the population in 17 countries in 2019. However, at the current pace, this will be the case for 155 countries by 2100, with the elderly covering a majority (61%) of the world's population (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019). It is crucial to understand that population ageing is a human success story, as the increase in life expectancy rates can be attributed to improvements in public health, medical progress against critical diseases, and reduced early deaths that historically limited human lifespans, alongside economic and social development in general.

Dealing with such an increase in the percentage of elderly requires a comprehensive cross-sectoral social policy that can address the issue of healthy ageing for the elderly and promote their well-being.

Research Questions

The social policy for the elderly in the UAE has not been scientifically examined through research, leading to an inaccurate evaluation of elderly laws, services, and programs. Therefore, this research aims to conduct a scientific situational analysis to identify the main pillars of the elderly policy in the country, in addition to examining the existence of necessary laws and the availability and accessibility of elderly services.

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

- What are the main pillars of the National Policy for Senior Emiratis?
- What are the laws and legislations that ensure elderly rights in the UAE?
- What are the available programs and services for the elderly in the UAE?

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to Identify the main pillars of the National Policy for Senior Emiratis, as well identifying the laws and legislations that exists in UAE to ensure elderly rights, in addition to recognizing the accessible programs and services for the elderly in the country.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study stems from several factors. Firstly, it represents the first national research in the UAE that scrutinizes the components of social policy for the elderly in the country and assesses the availability of necessary laws and services. This endeavor contributes to understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the current policy, thereby enriching the body of knowledge in the country regarding elderly care. Furthermore, the findings and recommendations of this study can guide decision-makers in modifying and improving the existing policy or developing new policies. This is essential to ensure the dignity, safety, participation, and inclusion of the elderly in UAE society more effectively.

Research Methodology

This descriptive analytical study employed the available data method, chosen for its relevance to the study's subject and objectives. The researchers accessed and reviewed data related to elderly policy in the UAE, conducting an in-depth analysis of national reports, laws, services, and research on the policy in the country.

To identify relevant laws, research studies, statistics, and reports, the researchers utilized various academic databases, organizational websites, and judicial databases. The search included several terms such as elderly policy, elderly rights, elderly protection, and elderly services and laws.

The methodology employed in this study facilitated a scientific situational analysis of the elderly policy in the country. This analysis was instrumental in comprehending the pillars, laws, and services of the policy, as well as identifying its strengths and weaknesses. As a result, the study was able to propose corrective measures aimed at addressing gaps and reinforcing good practices within the policy framework.

Data Analysis

The information and data reviewed from the sources were analyzed and organized through using a narrative synthesis approach, where the researchers organized the findings into thematic sections that reflect three main areas which are elderly's policy pillars, legislations, and laws, in addition to elderly's services, based on that, that the researchers summarized the key strengths and weaknesses related to those areas in the discussion part.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

● Elderly and healthy aging: definition and an overview

There is no global agreement between different regions and sectors on how to define old person, some look into the biological aspect of the person and others focus on person social functioning. However, conventionally, elderly have been defined world-wide based on the person chronological age, as the term elderly means by UN's definition the people who are at or above the age of 60 years old (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019).

UN reports showed that there is a historically significant change in the global elderly population which requires adaptation to the way societies are structured and functioned across all sectors. This change put a financial pressure on old-age support systems in all countries due to several reasons, especially the reduction of general health of elderly due to biological factors since most of them suffer from common health conditions including hearing loss, cataracts, and refractive errors, back and neck pain, osteoarthritis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes, depression, and dementia. Due to these conditions, most of the countries currently are facing critical challenges to ensure that their health and social systems are ready to deal with these challenges and to make the most of this demographic shift (WHO, 2021).

Due to population ageing, it is very important to establish social protection programmes that can be sustained over long term to prevent poverty, reduce inequality, and promote social inclusion among elderly (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019). Also, preparing for the economic and social shifts associated with the growth of elderly population is essential to ensure progress towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as ageing population is relevant to many goals like goal number (1) on eradicating poverty, goal number (3) of ensuring healthy lives and well-being at all ages and the goal number (11) of making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (United Nations Development Programme, 2017).

To help the countries to change their perspective and action toward elderly, On 14 December 1990, the United Nations General Assembly designated October 1 as the "International Day of Older Persons", it also declared (2021–2030) the "Decade of Healthy Ageing". The WHO respond to such declaration by launching a global collaboration which brings together governments, private sector, civil society, international agencies, academia, and others to build the WHO global strategy and action plan on ageing which seeks to reduce health inequities and improve the lives of older people, their families and communities through collective action in four areas which are "changing how we think, feel and act towards age and ageism, developing communities in ways that foster the abilities of older people, delivering person-centered integrated care and primary health services responsive to older people, and providing older people who need it with access to quality long-term care" (WHO, 2021).

The above strategy became the road map and guiding principles for all the countries in the world which aim at enhancing elderly conditions in their national context including UAE.

- **Social policy's definition and importance**

Social policy plays a prominent role in the establishment and continuity of the welfare state, which is keen to provide care for its citizens while ensuring their ability to secure their basic needs of various kinds. Social policy represents one of the manifestations of the success of the welfare state in playing the caring role and the role of the mother state that embraces and protects its citizens, and seeks to secure their needs and well-being, and thus social policy plays a decisive role in achieving community integration and cohesion, and supporting a sense of security, justice and national belonging (Al-Bali, 2013).

The concept of social policy began to appear in the nineteenth century with the industrial revolution and the emergence of capitalist society, which increased the gap between the poor and the rich, and led to the spread of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and many social problems. These problems worsened after World War II, which led to the emergence of many calls at the global level for the necessity of adopting rational social policies that confront and address the problems resulting from war, and regulate the procedures for individuals' access to health, education, housing, employment, assistance, social protection, etc., in addition to protecting their rights and preserving their dignity in an environment of justice and equality (Aladdin, 2021).

Social policy is part of the public policy of the state, and it represents organized, binding directions to achieve social goals and determining the methods and tools that will be used to achieve the desired goals (Abu Zant, 2011). It is one of the tools and means that are developed, formulated and designed within the framework of an executive plan to achieve social development goals (Al-Harbi, 2020). This policy expresses a set of laws, legislation, measures, direct and indirect interventions by the government aimed at organizing and improving social conditions in various fields such as education, housing, health, social care, employment, social security, and other fields to insure the fulfillments of needs of the individuals, developing their capabilities, and expanding their choices (Al-Sarouji et al., 2007).

Social policy should consider four main elements when developing it, which are the prevailing ideology in society, such as the ideas and beliefs that guide society and determine the behavior of its members, the general strategic goals that society seeks to achieve and achieve, in addition to the areas of social work and its various fields, and the general trends and principles that regulate social work. Therefore, it can be said that policy development depends on a group of factors represented by the prevailing culture in society, the reality of society and its social, economic, and political conditions and the extent of their connection with the rest of the policies, especially economic ones, in addition to the stage of development that society is going through and the degree of its progress (Hamza, 2014).

The great interest of countries around the world in social policies did not come out of nowhere, but rather stemmed from the importance of making these policies and the important functions they perform. Making social policy on a thoughtful scientific basis avoids the decision-maker and society catastrophic consequences that may result from poor planning, randomness, and confusion in work. Also, following a scientific, evidence-based approach to policymaking leads to achieving the long-term strategic goals that society seeks to achieve to ensure the well-being of its members. In addition, it can be said that the strength and importance of social policies lies in their ability to prepare realistic plans that are implementable on the ground, given that they are based on realistic data drawn from the field and in cooperation with all concerned parties, and were designed by the various segments of society and its multiple sectors in a manner Participatory, this ensures the required coordination and cooperation between the state and its various institutions and sectors, whether in the public, private or private sector, which reduces the level of

resistance and duplication in work, and thus increases the chances of the policy's success in achieving its goals, especially in light of its being based on the foundations and standards of sound evaluation (Aladdin , 2021).

● Main Sociological Theory

There are many sociological theories that can be used to explain and analyze the social policy for elderly, however and for the purpose of this research, the researchers will focus two main theories which are the operational theory in analyzing social policy and the social-ecological theory.

The first theory is the operational theory which assumes that policy is developed through a series of steps or stages, and that many agencies and stakeholders play a role in making it. The operational model of policy making begins with the stage of defining the problem and putting the problem on the government's agenda, then the stage of developing alternatives, suggestions, and solutions to the policy issue through an interactive, participatory process from all the stakeholders, and after that comes the stage of choosing the most appropriate alternative, adopting it, legislating, implementing, and evaluating the policy (Democracy in the Middle East Project, 2016). In that sense, the researchers believe that the social policy for elderly must be evaluated and analyzed based on those steps to assure its effectiveness on real life. As it is crucial to understand first the elderly's needs and raise them to the government and based on that a brainstorming session must be done with all the stakeholders to come up with creative and efficient solutions to solve them, after that those selected solutions must be approved and supported and implemented by different entities, and finally the policy must be evaluated continually to assure its efficiency.

The second theory is the social-ecological theory, as over the past decades, researchers in the ecological school have focused on studying the interactions between social dynamics and environmental processes and have produced a set of concepts that aim to develop a framework for analyzing and properly understanding these social and environmental dynamics in order to rely on them in developing and implementing the necessary interventions (Bousquet, et al., 2015). Based on social-ecological theory, different models and frameworks have been developed to examine many phenomena, and elderly's rights is one of them. The social-ecological framework attributes violation of elderly's rights to a group of factors at multiple analytical levels, represented by five levels which are individual, personal, societal, organizational, and policy levels.

The first level represents the individual, where the focus is on studying the characteristics of the elderly's behavior, knowledge, attitudes, self-efficacy, gender, economic status, literacy, stigma, and others. The second level is the personal level, which refers to the interactions between elderly and their families, formal and informal social networks, and their social support system. In addition to the third level, which is the organizational level, which refers to the factors related to the relations between organizations and institutions from different sectors that provides services for elderly , while the fourth level, which is society, focuses on the current and historical relationships of members of society and the extent of cohesion that exists, in addition to the last level, which is the policy level that focuses on laws, legislation, and government services related to elderly and the extent to which the necessary resources are allocated to them ensuring their access to the required services (Oetzel & Duran, 2004). In short, social-ecological theory explain elderly rights violation to a gap in any of those levels and suggests that the policy must cover them all.

After reviewing those theories, the researchers decided to build this research around those two theories, since it is obvious that we cannot ensure elderly's rights without promoting family cohesion and increasing old person capabilities to perform his/her role in an effective manner. In addition to improving elderly's accessibility to protection, care and rehabilitation, medical, financial, and legal services which can play a critical role in empowering them.

Literature Review

In this section the researchers reviewed the findings of some international, regional and national research regarding elderly to have a clear view of what other researchers have done in that field, and then build a perspective on what need to do in the field of elderly in the UAE.

Since elderly's issues, problems, challenges, and needs are a global concern, lots of international research have been conducted concerning elderly in different regions. Trends in the health of the elderly was investigated in one research, with a focus on the most dimensions that were improved during the last two decades. Results showed that mortality has continued to decrease, and disability and functioning loss are less common now than in the past. Nevertheless, the prevalence of the most common diseases has increased among elderly like diabetes, respiratory, Alzheimer, obesity, and heart diseases. The research concluded that elderly survive longer but with

carrying diseases, however those diseases appear to be less disabling than in the past (Crimmins, 2004).

In the matter of elderly abuse, World Health Organization study reported that around 1 out of 6 old people in the world experienced some form of abuse (WHO, 2021), similar results were found in many research, for instance, a recent study in Nepal reached to a similar result, where the prevalence of elderly abuse was found to be 54.5%, and the most common form of abuse was neglect (23.1%), psychological abuse (20.6%), physical abuse (6.5%), financial abuse (2.4%), and sexual abuse (1.9%). Also, it was found that elderly females were significantly more likely to experience physical and psychological abuse (Acharya, Suman, Pahari, Shin, & Moon, 2021). This result was supported by another research in Sri Lanka, where it was found that the most prevalent type of abuse was neglect within interfamily relationship followed by emotional abuse, financial abuse and physical abuse respectively (Munasingharachchi & Siddhisena, 2020).

Another study targeted elderly living in elderly care homes in India, aimed to know the nature and the extent of abuse, in addition to the reasons that forced them to join the elderly homes. It was found that most respondents faced physical, psychological, emotional abuse from their family members, furthermore, it revealed that poverty, and economic dependence were the main reasons of abuse (Deka & Patir, 2018). Furthermore, one of the research projects investigated the elderly abuse issue inside the nursing homes, results showed that emotional demands and poor-quality relationships with colleagues and the team supervisor were the most predictive variables for caregiver burnout, neglect, and abusive behaviors against the elderly (Andela, Truchot, & Huguenotte, 2021).

During COVID-19 pandemic, several research were done to investigate the pandemic effect on elderly. For example, one study investigated the respiratory rehabilitation in elderly patients with COVID-19, where different degrees of disorders were found to be reported in respiratory function, physical function and psychological function in patients with Corona virus disease (Liua, Zhang, Yang, Zhang, & Chen, 2020).

In the Arab and Golf region, several studies have been conducted as well. For example, in Egypt, one study aimed to assess the social, health and recreational needs of the elderly as an approach to improve their quality of life. Its most prominent results were that elderly need to participate in decision-making and participate in activities and events, in addition to paying attention to sports activity and providing

recreational places suitable for their needs (Balih, 2018). In Palestine, Zughayer (2017) investigated the problem of feeling isolated from social life by elderly, the study reached to a set of results, the most important of which is that elderly feel socially isolated at different levels, due to the weak care and interest of the family in them, in addition to the disruption of their social and professional relationships, besides their own fears and feeling of negativity and social anxiety. In Saudi Arabia, one of the studies aimed to identify the most important problems facing the elderly in the city of Riyadh. Results showed that the order of the problems was as follows: cognitive problems, health/physical problems, psychological problems, and the social problems (Ziada, Alsubheen, & Alqudah, 2014).

On the national level in the UAE, several research and studies have been conducted to tackle different aspects or angles of elderly issues. The newest is the elderly's study launched by the Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Public Policy Research in Ras Al Khaimah. This study investigated different aspects of elderly's life in the country and was carried out by the Foundation through collecting the opinions of 2,375 people, including 2,074 Emiratis and 661 non-Emiratis. Many important results have been found, for example more than 75% of the Emiratis surveyed agreed that senior citizens play an important role in adding value to society through their knowledge and experience, also it was revealed that more than 41% of the elderly Emiratis surveyed mentioned that they still actively participate in the community activities or volunteer in many sectors. Moreover, 50% agreed that the family, followed by the government, is primarily responsible for financial support for elderly family members. In addition, it was found that nearly 40% of respondents believe that young Emiratis face high financial costs and may be unable to provide financial support to the elderly in their families in the future, since the high standards of living are creating material, social and medical pressures in the lives of Emirati families. The study also revealed that senior Emiratis can access a range of services through the competent local authority in the emirate in which they live, and less than a third of the people surveyed (32%) indicated that they know a senior citizen who lives in a facility or hospital that take care of them, compared to 62 % of those who know an elderly person receiving support at home (Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research, 2021). Another recent research studied the role-of social welfare services in spreading the culture of tolerance towards the most vulnerable in society by focusing on the elderly and childhood from the university student perspectives. The findings of the research were that social

welfare laws in the UAE play an important role in spreading a culture of social tolerance towards the elderly and childhood, and that social tolerance towards the most vulnerable in society contributes to the achievement of social security, and that one of the indicators of social tolerance towards the elderly is their active participation in social life (Ahmad, 2020).

The reality of the elderly in the UAE country was the focus of another study where the researchers distributed a questionnaire among a random sample of 488 elderly in the country, and it included different parts related to the interaction of the elderly with the community surrounding them, health aspects and the nature of the activities they practice in the community as well as their religious values and their fear of death. The study revealed many critical findings, one of them was that placing the elderly in nursing homes may lead to suffering from many problems and diseases like fear, loneliness and depression. The study also demonstrated the effectiveness of the home care model and its positive effect on the elderly and assuring their integration into society. Furthermore, it was found that 8.25% of the elderly do not have their own monthly income, and that 3.19% of the respondents have a monthly income of less than 4000 dirhams, also 9.37% of them receive pension salaries from the state, and 3.63 % receive aid from social security. Besides those results, the study showed that more than half of the respondents (57%) do not have specific spaces allocated to them in the house, while those who have specific spaces in the house of their own are generally small. The health characteristic was one of the most prominent items covered by the study, as it was found that 5.30% of the respondents suffer from poor eyesight, 27% suffer from interrupted sleep, 20% from difficulty breathing, 27 % have difficulty breathing. The study also found that only 2% practice sports always, compared to 47% who never exercise, therefore the respondents indicated that they suffer as well from high blood pressure, suffering when climbing stairs, difficulty moving, poor vision and diabetes. Regarding fear of death as an idea that might controls the elderly, the study showed that 23% expect death from time to time, 18% do not like conversations related to death, and that 5.14% of the respondents the death fear dominates their thinking. Also, it was found that 16.6% always was afraid and anxiety about the future, and that 1.4 % did not get along with their family members, and that 11.5% of them suffer from boredom and emptiness, 8.8% suffer from sadness and depression, while 9.1% feel isolated and lonely. Regarding elderly's social interaction, the study revealed that their interaction was strong

with both married sons, married daughters, grandchildren and granddaughters. The study also revealed that the performance of religious rituals ranked first among the activities practiced by the elderly (Alomosh, 2011). Alomosh study supported the findings of another study that was conducted on the elderly residing in care homes in the United Arab Emirates and aimed to identify the reasons that lead to the transfer of the elderly to care homes. The study concluded with a set of results, the most important of which is that the inability of the elderly to serve themselves is the strongest reason for their transfer to care homes, and that psychological and social problems and the depression caused by thinking about their grandchildren, missing them, losing their place in the family and the social isolation were the biggest problems they faced (Darweesh, 2003).

In addition, Zayed Center for Coordination and Follow-up did a study about the elderly's psychological, economic, and social problems in the UAE which indicated that psychological problems were related to the problems of not adapting to the new situation of the elderly, and the psychological and moral effects become clear in light of the increase in free time and the subjective feeling of worthlessness and uselessness, isolation and psychological loneliness. The study revealed that the percentage of the elderly who apply for economic assistance is constantly increasing because the elderly suffers from a lack of financial resources because of compulsory retirement. The study as well confirmed that the true Islamic religion has protected the family and form its human view in cases of elderly (Zayed Center for Coordination and Follow Up, 2001).

Other research studied the believes and the attitudes of elderly or their families about certain issues. For example, Health beliefs of elderly in the UAE was an issue tackled by the researchers through interviewing elderly in the community, result identified three common themes labeled as 'Health is what you eat', 'Health was better in the past', and 'Health is from God' which indicated the importance of raising awareness among elderly about health issue (Campell, 2015). On the other hand, another study researched in attitudes of elderly's families who have elderly patients in the hospitals residing there from (5-25) years. Results showed that (36%) percent of the families reported many problems dealing with elderly, and they had negative impression about their patients, on the other hand there were (73%) of the patients' families with positive attitude and they were more cooperative (Khair Elzad, 2012).

The negative attitude from some elderly families revealed in the previous research led us to shade a light on another important study that has been done in UAE by Al Ali (2013) about aging and facilities for the elderly, in which the respondents were asked to identify the causes of neglect and elderly abuse. Results showed that the majority of the people that were interviewed linked elderly abuse and neglect with poor economic conditions which make the families unable to take care of the elderly because of the high cost of rehabilitation, medication and medical equipment. In addition to the family working conditions which sometimes force them to leave the elderly alone in the house, the participants also indicated that the pace of life became faster than before and that the elderly find it difficult to adapt to these changes, especially when family members are not around as often as necessary. Financial abuse of the elderly was showed to be the most common between families, while physical neglect was the least common. In regard to elderly services and facilities, the respondents during the interviews confirmed the importance of healthcare professionals continuous training since some hospitals lack having specialized and experience professionals, also some of the country's hospitals suffer from long stay of elderly because there are no other facilities dedicated to them in their local Emirates. Participants also stressed that the lack of awareness among families and the elderly themselves is another reason behind abuse, where the elderly and their families are not aware of the effects caused by the aging process, diseases, mental illness, and drug complications, which leaves them vulnerable and being mistreated because of their ignorance and inability to report such violations and cases of negligence. Lack of appropriate statistics and studies about the elderly and their issues in the country was another weakness found by the researchers, where the sectors do not cooperate in the collection and processing of statistical data, as well as the lack of social research on aging (Al Ali, 2013).

Regarding integrating smart technologies to improve elderly's live, one of the researchers analyzed the preferences and needs of smart home technologies to understand the behaviors of UAE elderly users, and the factors affecting the acceptance of technology. It was statistically proven that the elderly users want automatic fall detection in their living room (39.0%) and bedroom (25.7%). Lifestyle monitoring also was requested by them in their living room (44.7%) and bedroom (18.1%). They also requested life assistance in their living room (36.2%), as well as environmental control (50.5%), health and biometric monitoring (49.5%), and video conferencing (82.9%). In regard to sensors, elderly preferred motion detecting sensors

(42.9%), video cameras (56.2%), and voice recognition (50.5%) (Arar, Jung, Awad, & Chohan, 2021).

Results and Discussion

The results of the study were presented and discussed according to the questions addressed by the researchers regarding the social policy for elderly in the UAE, all questions were answered as follows: Q1: What are the main pillars of the National Policy for Senior Emiratis?

In the United Arab Emirates, the size and the proportion of elderly is considered small in comparison to other countries. The country's population was estimated at 9,282,410 million in 2020, with an annual growth rate of 1.2% compared to [2019](#). The average life expectancy in country in 2020 was 78.1 years which is very high and reflect good health, social, and economic services. As per age groups, it was indicated that 14.45% of the total population is under the age of fifteen, while 75.97% of the total population falls in the age group 15-54, and 7.68% is between 55 and 64 years old, and only 1.9% of the population is 65 years and above, those statistics reflect both Emiratis and non-Emiratis who stay in the country (Fanak, 2020). As per the Emiratis, the Ministry of Community Development stated that senior Emiratis (aged 60 and above) currently represent around 7% of the citizens, however, it is predicted that the percentage will increase to 11% in 2032, and to 29% in 2050 (Albayan, 2016), which push the country toward the development of clear policy and strategy regarding elderly.

Although elderly population size is not currently big, the United Arab Emirates Government believes that every person in the country regardless of his/her age is a valuable resource, and that he/she must have equal rights and opportunities. The Government also believes that the age factor must not become a barrier for elderly to fully and actively participate or engage in their society. Therefore in 2018, the government replaced the term 'elderly Emiratis' with 'Senior Emiratis' to avoid any age stigmatization, and to correlate this stage of life with positive meaning. This replacement was well received by the community as it reflects great amount of respect to this segment.

After this change, the government gave the Ministry of Community Development (MOCD) the responsibility of developing The National Policy for Senior Emiratis which was approved on October 2018. The vision of the policy is to "have an individual who enjoy a quality life and actively participate in a safe and cohesive society", and its mission is to "improve the quality of social services in the country to achieve elderly well-being and happiness beyond the

age of sixty". The policy's goals are focusing on preventive measures that guarantee the safety and rights of elderly in the community, encouraging shared effort and work to provide competitive services in all related fields, forming innovative channels to transfer knowledge and share experiences among generations, and promoting a supporting environment that encourage active life of elderly in the community. To assure successful policy implementation in a real life, the policy was based on seven pillars which are:

- **Healthcare:** This pillar focusses on the preventive measures that assure senior citizens health and encourage competitiveness between several entities to provide best health care services.
- **Community Involvement and Active Life:** The objective of this pillar is to increase the active engagement of the senior citizens in their communities, as well as improving the communication between different generations to assure the exchange of knowledge and experiences.
- **Senior Citizens Effective Civic Participation:** This pillar aims at sustaining senior citizen active participation and contributions even after the retirement, to invest in them since they are valuable resources.
- **Housing and Infrastructure:** This pillar intention is to enhance the housing services and the public utilities to fit the senior citizens' needs, in addition to the development of the "Environmental Specifications and Standards Manual" to assure that every building, facility or entity is "elderly friendly" in a sense that it will fit their health or medical conditions and needs.
- **Financial Stability:** This pillar focuses on raising awareness among senior citizens about financial management through giving them workshops about how to protect their money from exploitation, as well as encouraging them to start their own business to increase their income which will lead eventually to a better living condition.
- **Safety and Security:** The objective of this pillar is to protect the senior citizens from all forms of abuse and violence through issuing a senior citizens rights law and enhancing the provision of protection services in the country.
- **Quality of Future Life:** This pillar focuses on quality of life that the senior citizens will have in the future, and how to build cities and communities that fulfill their future needs (Ministry of Community Development, 2021).

It is obvious from what was mentioned above that the UAE government understands the importance of having a cross sectional policy when it comes to senior Emiratis, to assure the satisfaction of their different needs and the protection of their rights. However, the implementation of those pillars is not an easy task, therefore, in the following paragraphs the researchers will reveal the actual laws and services that were issued and delivered for elderly in the country to help us understand the real situation in comparison to this policy in a better way.

Q2: What are the laws and legislations that insure elderly rights in the UAE?

Any country's constitution is consisted of basic principles and laws of the nation that determine the powers and duties of the government and rights of its people, it is perceived as the supreme law of the country. Therefore, when we discuss UAE legislations and laws on the rights of senior citizens, we must start with the constitution of the UAE since it paid great attention to the senior citizens' rights. This can be seen in several articles in part two of the constitution that covers the fundamental social and economic bases of the union. For example, it was stated in article (14) that "equality, social justice, the provision of safety and security and equal opportunity for all citizens shall be the bases of the community. Mutual co-operation and respect shall be a firm bond between them". Also, it was mentioned in article (16) that "society shall be responsible for protecting childhood and motherhood and shall protect minors and others unable to look after themselves for any reason, such as illness or incapacity or old age or forced unemployment" (Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, 2021).

The above articles showed that senior citizens' rights, safety and security are protected by the constitution. Based on that, it becomes the UAE government priority to take necessary measures to translate those articles into actions through issuing laws and regulations regarding elderly. There are several federal laws that are concerned with elderly issues in the UAE, in this section, the researchers will do a historical review of those laws starting from the law No. (3) of 1987 Concerning the Penal Code, and ending with the latest [Federal Law No. 9 of 2019 on the Rights of Senior Emiratis](#).

The Penal Code was the first law in the country that emphasized on the protection of everyone rights in the country, including elderly. This was mentioned through several articles and was clearly stated on article number (339) which said that "If anyone physically assaults another person in any manner and the assault leads to illness or the inability to perform his personal work for a period of twenty days, he

shall be punished by detention and by a fine". Although this law emphasized on the importance of protection of rights, there were no specific elaborations on the elderly rights (Ministry of Justice, 2020). After that, the UAE issued Federal Law No. (7) of 1999 Concerning Pensions and Social Security and its amendments, this law insured receiving pension for every Emirati employee working in the government sector and the private sector. The law indicated that the contributions for the insured include the monthly contributions borne by the insured, which are deducted at the rate of (5%) from the salary of the subscription account, in addition to the monthly contributions paid by the employer at the rate of (15%) of the salary of the subscription account for the insured working for him, as per the employer in the private sector, the government bears the rate of (2.5%). The law also guarantees the pension upon retirement, and many other cases to assure decent life for the elderly after the retirement. Also, since 2012, the minimum retirement salary for a citizen has been 10,000 dirhams, taking into account the high cost of living in the country (General Pensions and Social Security Authority, 2015). Afterward, the U.A.E government issued Law No. (2) of 2001 Concerning Social Security, and it was clearly mentioned that all elderly citizens who do not have income or a sufficient income are eligible of receiving social assistance even if they live among a family to assure family cohesion and to reduce the burden of expenses on the family members' shoulders. Also, based on the Cabinet Resolution No. (25) of 2009 regarding determining the value of social assistance, the amount of the monthly assistance depends on the elderly situation however it will not be less than (4400 Dirhams) per person (Ministry of Community Development, 2020).

[Federal Law No. 28 of 2005 on Personal Status](#) and its amendments also tackled family issues related to elderly since it aims to organize family matters related to marriage, divorce, material rights, custody, guardianship, capacity as well as inheritance, where as any old person can reach to family guidance departments in any court in the country and request help and support to mediate any family conflicts or to protect his rights related to the above-mentioned matters. Also, this law protects the elderly rights in managing his own money and properties to avoid any exploitation or manipulation from the family members, as article (174) specified capacity impediments in three factors only which are insanity, prodigality, illness leading to death, and does not consider aging as a factor that will affect an old person capacity unless it is companied with one of those factors (Dubai Judicial Institute, 2020). Furthermore, to assure decent housing

for the elderly, [Federal Law No. 10 of 2009 Concerning Sheikh Zayed Housing Program](#) and its Amendments was issued. The law specified Sheikh Zayed Housing Program tasks as it is a federal agency which aims to serve citizens and meet their needs through providing adequate housing and providing grants and housing loans (without interest) for building, completing or performing necessary maintenance and making extensions. Articles number (10) and (11) of the law granted the elderly the right to apply for a housing grant or loan based on their income and financial situation to help them sustain a stable life with preserving their dignity through the provision of an independent house (Sheikh Zayed Housing Programme, 2021).

The most important elderly legislation that was issued is the Federal Law No. 9 of 2019 on the Rights of Senior Emiratis. This law considered the first holistic and comprehensive law that was tailored and customized for senior citizens in the UAE. The law defines Senior Emiratis as " individuals holding the UAE Nationality and are 60 years old or above". The law has six objectives which are ensuring that all senior Emiratis enjoy their fundamental rights, ensuring that they have access to all related information and services, enabling them for effective participation in the community, and contribution in the development, design and implementation of policies, providing care as well as psychological, social and health services for the senior Emiratis, supporting their stay in their families, and the continuousness of their familial and social relationships, also, enhancing the status of the Senior Emiratis in the community and appreciating their social roles. The Federal Law on the Rights of Senior Emiratis guarantees the elderly the following rights:

- The right to independence and privacy, which request the concerned entities to take the necessary measures to enable the senior Emiratis to manage their own lives independently, and to make their own decisions related to their properties, financial affairs, or their residence.
- The right of protection from all forms of abuse, where the Ministry of Community Development and the competent entities were asked to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of senior Emiratis from violence and abuse, and to take immediate actions to stop any act of violence or abuse toward them. This includes the establishment of elderly protection units to receive the violence reports, or temporary shelters, or putting the senior citizens in alternative families to take care of them when the natural family is not trusted to do so. Furthermore, the law requested any person who witness such violation to immediately

inform the ministry or the competent entities without disclosing their identities.

- The right to an enabling environment, housing, education and work, which means that the Ministry and the competent entities must take the necessary procedures to enable the senior Emiratis to access to all services through a secure environment and get a housing that is adequate to their needs. In addition to providing them with opportunities to participate in continuous education programs, adult education, voluntary works, training, and adequate job opportunities.
- The right to social care, which includes several social services like the establishment of elderly foundations, social clubs, and mobile units for services and care.
- The right to medical care, where the Ministry, in coordination with the concerned federal and local governmental entities, shall provide preventive health services, and health insurance to the senior Emiratis which covers home nursing and the supporting necessary equipment, in addition to qualifying and training the house-sitters on the skills of dealing with senior Emiratis in order to maintain their health and capacities.
- The right to preferential treatment with respect to government transactions, facilities, first aid, medical services, housing, transportation, social assistance, and other things. In addition to the right of exemption or reduction of fees of the administrative services provided by the local and federal governmental entities.

The law as well includes articles that specify the penalties and punishments which include jail, fines or both to elderly care givers who abuse them or neglect their needs and to elderly care institutions that violate the law (Ministry of Community Development, 2020).

Q3: What are the available programs and services for elderly in the UAE?

The federal and the local governments work together to assure the provision of comprehensive services for senior citizens in the UAE. In this part, the researchers reviewed first the federal services, then the local services, and highlighted the federal and local authorities and entities which are responsible for elderly service delivery.

Federal Services

At the beginning, it is very important to mention that the federal services are being led by the Ministry of Community Development (MOCD) which plays the role of policy maker, implementor, and at the same time the coordinator with other ministries and entities.

Therefore, the UAE government gave the MOCD the responsibility of delivering the following:

- **Protection From Abuse Services:** The Ministry of Community Development launched a hotline (800623) to receive all the reports and complains about any domestic violence toward senior citizens. The hotline deals with all forms of abuse (physical, verbal, emotional, financial ...etc.), and then assign a social worker to do further investigation. Based on the social intake and the result of investigation the ministry itself or through the cornered entities will take the needed action to stop the violence and protect the senior citizen.
- **Shelters and Elderly Care Center:** when senior citizens are being abandoned by their family members, or do not have any person to take care of him/her in a proper way, the Ministry of Community Development provides a short and long stay option in the elderly care center located in Ajman. The center provides primary health care, social, psychological, cultural, recreational services, and physiotherapy for the senior Emiratis from all emirates. The ministry named this centre the Customer's Happiness Center for Senior Emiratis to create a positive impact and avoid any stigmatization. In addition to this center the ministry as well coordinated with the Ministry of Health and Prevention to allocate Um Al Quwain Federal hospital for sheltering of Senior Emiratis as well to expand the geographic span of the sheltering service.
- **Social Assistance Services:** Based on the Law No. (2) of 2001 Concerning Social Security, the Ministry of Community Development provide monthly assistance for in-need senior citizens who do not have the sufficient income that helps them live a decent life in a welfare country, the amount of the monthly assistance depends on the elderly situation however it will not be less than (4400 Dirhams) per person. The Ministry as well issues "FAZAA" card for elderly to help them get discounts in many stores. In addition to the financial assistance given to elderly by the Zakat Fund, which is a federal entity that was established in 2003 by the Federal Law No. 4 of 2003. The Fund coordinate with elderly care centers and Emirates Red Crescent Authority to distribute zakat donations among needy elderly (Zakat Fund, 2016).
- **Mobile Units Service:** This service is run as well by the Ministry of Community Development, those mobile units provide primary health care, social, psychological and physiotherapy for the senior Emiratis in their homes to assure high level of privacy and to

increase their happiness level (Ministry of Community Development, 2021).

Besides the above-mentioned services provided by the MOCD, there are other services delivered for elderly by other federal entities. The [Ministry of Health and Prevention for example delivers several health and medical services](#) and launches initiatives for the benefit of senior citizens. One of these initiatives is to create a database to monitor the life expectancy of older persons in the country. In addition to expanding the healthcare services especially home care programs. The Ministry as well provides [mobile clinic services](#) in remote areas in some emirates like Fujairah and Ras Al Khaimah, those mobile clinics provide medical care, rehabilitation, physiotherapy, dental, optical, dermatological and diabetes treatments. Furthermore, the Ministry applied fundamental amendments to the structure of work in its hospitals to create friendly hospitals for senior citizens, the Ministry also established a specialized hospital for senior citizens, and changed the hospital name from Obaidullah Hospital for Elderly and Geriatric Diseases to Obaidullah Senior Citizens Hospital which provides comprehensive specialized services for the elderly like diagnostic services, medical consultations and elderly transportation services. Another initiative launched by the Ministry is "Onek" initiative which assures giving priority for the elderly in all services including booking appointments, dispensing medicines at all pharmacies, ensuring the availability of their medications, assuring that their medications are labeled with drug instructions and drug delivery services.

Community awareness program is another service being delivered for elderly by both the Ministry of Community Development and the Ministry of Health and Prevention as they conduct many awareness campaigns, events, seminars, media broadcast to increase the community awareness about senior citizens' rights, services, and laws. The concerned ministries always mark and activate the International Day of Older Persons which falls on October 1 through organizing a variety of events engaging elderly and their families (Ministry of Health and Prevention, 2021).

In regard to educational services, UAE constitution guaranteed the right of education for all the citizens including the elderly; therefore, the Ministry of Education offers free general and technical education for them through the elderly learning centres. As per housing services dedicated for elderly, Sheikh Zayed Housing Program works in federal level to provide housing grants and loans (without interest) for building, completing or performing necessary

maintenance and making additional extensions, as their law of establishment granted the elderly the right to apply for a housing grant or loan based on their income and financial situation to help them sustain a stable life with the provision of an independent decent house (Sheikh Zayed Housing Programme, 2017).

To assure the easiness of the services for elderly, the Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship, Customs & Port Security Services exempt elderly from urgent service fees, also, no fingerprints will be taken when renewing their IDs. In addition, no delay fines for elderly will be taken for those who are unable to visit customer happiness centers (Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship, Customs & Port Security, 2017). Besides giving the elderly essay access to all services and preferential treatment, the Ministry of Interior launched an initiative for senior citizens named "Your home, your responsibility" " where The General Directorate of Civil Defence has implemented an awareness campaign for senior citizens and their caregivers or domestic workers to spread preventive awareness and introduce safety principles while facing accidents or disasters at home, roads, and public places like fire incident. The Civil Defence as well installed smoke detectors for free in elderly homes and connected those devices to the alarm system in the government entities to enable them to response quickly in cases of crises (Ministry of Interior, 2021).

Retirement and pension services were also covered for elderly in the country, where all senior citizens who are working in any sector (government, private, semi-government, non-government organizations) are requested to register in the platform of General Pensions and Social Security Authority, so upon retirement the authority will assure and guarantee the pension, the pension amount varies based on the last years' salary for the applicant, however since 2012, the minimum retirement salary for a citizen has been 10,000 dirhams, taking into account the high cost of living in the country (General Pensions and Social Security Authority, 2015).

Local Services

Besides the federal services mentioned above, the local authorities and entities in some emirates deliver some additional services to enhance the availability and the accessibility of the services for the elderly.

There are several services deliver for elderly in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, social services are one of them. In 2018 the government of Abu Dhabi established the Department of Community Development which was assigned with several tasks related to elderly

like providing counselling and family mediation services for elderly when there is a family dispute, and the like providing interactive training workshops for elderly with the aim of easing the life of elderly people and their families in the Emirate. The second authority is Abu Dhabi Social Support Authority which provides financial support to entitled Emirati persons including the elderly to avoid any needs' deprivation or neglect, in addition to Abu Dhabi Shelter and Humanitarian Care Centre which receive all the family violence reports and complain through their hotline (8007283), and then collaborate with the medical and legal entity to protect the elderly from violence (Department of Community Development, 2020).

Besides those main services the researchers want to highlight some smaller scale initiatives like "Darb", which is a toll gate system in Abu Dhabi, Darb exempted one senior citizen vehicle from the fees while passing on Dard gates as an apparition for their valuable efforts in building the society. Also, Abu Dhabi Integrated Transport Centre offers 50% discount on taxi fare for Emirati senior citizens, in addition to free "Ojra Pass" initiative by the Department of Transport which offers senior citizens from all nationalities free "Ojra" passes and grant them free, unlimited, lifetime travel on all public buses in Abu Dhabi (Integrated Transport Center, 2021).

To increase elderly access to services in Abu Dhabi, Al Ain City Municipality launched in 2010 a mobile service initiative to provide all services to the elderly at their homes. The service is provided through a vehicle equipped with all electronic equipment needed to process the transactions. Abu Dhabi Police as well launched the "Hope Planter Initiative" which offers police services at the houses of people of determination and the elderly who are unable to visit different departments of the police. In addition, Tamm Government Services Center has launched a program called "Your Right" for elderly which offers them some government services over the phone when the service does require their physical presence, the center as well dedicated a hall to assist elderly customers, where employees will be available to complete all procedures on behalf of the them (TAMM, 2020).

Furthermore, to help elderly live in a decent way, employment after retirement service was approved according to Law No. (2) of 2000 on Civil Pensions and Benefits in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, where when any old person wants to work after retirement, he/she can do so after taking the approval of the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (Abu Dhabi Retirement Pensions & Benefits Fund, 2020).

In regard to the Emirate of Dubai, there are several services delivered for elderly by the Community Development Authority (CDA) and other authorities including the following:

- **Elderly Hotline Services:** The CDA has a unified hotline for the vulnerable groups including elderly which is (800988), the hotline receives abuse and violence reports and complains against elderly. The received reports will be then sent to elderly department in the authority to reposed and provide the needed protection for the victim.
- **Social and Legal services:** The CDA provides social and legal counseling for the elderly to protect their rights and to solve any family conflicts.
- **"Thukher" Card:** To honor Dubai senior citizens, the CDA in collaboration with several government authorities and private companies has issued "Thukher Card" which give elderly preferential treatment and discounts in many sectors. This card considered an official document that proves that the holder is a senior citizen, and by that he/she become eligible of receiving a special and priority treatment in all government entities and have discount in wide range of retail stores. For example, the holder of the card will have priority in finalizing transactions, free parking, fast passage at the airports, exemption from law filing fees, and unlimited discounts on their purchase or invoice in different stores. The holders of the card are a part of Thukher Social Club, this club was opened on 2014, which provides a variety of activities, events and daily programmes that meet the needs of the senior citizens, whether it is cultural, social, recreational or health activity, with ultimate end of promoting the senior citizens' integration into public life.
- **Home Care Program "Weleef":** Weleef is a program aims to improve the quality of life of senior Emiratis who live alone in Dubai without their relatives, it includes home visits by social workers and other professionals to provide services like social, cultural, rehabilitation, self-care and recreational services, as well as following-up on their needs.
- **Safety Services:** the CDA launched an alarm system which was developed by the General Department of Smart Services of Dubai Police to ensure a rapid response to any incident or risk that might threaten the life or safety of a senior citizens, where the elderly can click on a button to ask for help and the police or ambulance will respond within minutes.

- **Training Senior Citizens Caregivers:** It aims at improving the efficiency of caregivers and train them on the best manners to deal with the senior citizens, this includes training and educating domestic workers who provide care services to the senior citizens about their social and health needs, as well as providing guidance on how to help the elderly spend their time effectively, and how to make the environment safe for them. In addition to educating the caregivers on how to use prescription drugs, personal hygiene, possible setbacks, how to contact authorities when needed.
- **Intergenerational Communication Program:** The program was launched to transfer the senior citizens knowledge and experiences to students at schools and universities in cooperation with educational institutions through lectures throughout the year. The lectures cover different topics like craftworks in the past and the future, honoring parents, customs and traditions of the Emirati society, and giving advice on how to preserve the heritage and traditions of the country (Community Development Authority, 2016).
- **Health Services:** the CDA coordinates with Seniors' Happiness Center which follows under Dubai Health Authority to provide 24/7 services for senior citizens in Dubai including sheltering, medical, social, rehabilitation, nutritional, cultural, and recreational services. The center does not aim to replace the natural family, but it provides the option of temporary stay for Emirati elderly in cases of family negligence or some other medical conditions (Seniors' Happiness Centre, 2020).
- **Safety Services:** The CDA and Dubai Police have launched the "Secure Together" service that offers fast services to senior citizens and residents across Dubai. The service priorities calls made by seniors to The Command-and-Control Centre at Dubai Police requesting support and services like medical aids, food supplies, disinfection, and sanitation services at their residences. Also, the Dubai Police in cooperation with CDA invited senior citizens and residents to register their addresses at Dubai Police website to update database regarding the place of residence of the elderly to improve authorities' responses in urgent matters or emergencies (Community Development Authority, 2020).
- **Municipal Services:** Dubai Municipality has launched its community initiative "Senior Citizen Gardens" in which they are committed to create and build home gardens for senior citizens, the initiative aims to create a positive impact on the health of

senior citizens since it will keep them busy and motivate them to move and be productive (Emirates News Agency, 2019).

- Courts and Prosecution Services: Dubai Courts created a mobile court unit to reach to elderly homes when they need to request any services, the court as well created a virtual hearing room to listen to elderly testimony without requesting their presence at the court building. As per Dubai Prosecution, they launched "Al Dar" initiative where the public prosecutor does the investigation with the elderly at their homes (Dubai Public Prosecution, 2021).
- Transportation services: Senior Citizens receive 50% discount on "Nol Card" which is the card issues by the Road and Transportation Authority (RTA) to pay different public transportations fees like bus, tram, metro...etc. Also, RTA allocated specific parking for elderly, and released them from all parking fees (RTA, 2021).

Regarding the Emirate of Sharjah, there are several services provided for senior Emiratis by the Social Services Department (SSSD) and other authorities as it is detailed below:

- Elderly Care Home Services: It was established in 1986, to provide care home services for elderly who don't have any family members to take care of them and cannot manage their own affairs, or suffering from family violence, or have medical conditions that required an intensive care. The care home provides shelter, care, rehabilitation, health, social and psychological services for elderly in the Emirate of Sharjah.
- Protection Services: The SSSD provides several services like a 24/7 hotline (800700) to receive reports and complaints about elderly violence, with an immediate intervention based on the cases situations. Those reports will be then classified and handled by a highly qualified teams from different back grounds (legal, social, psychological...etc.) to assure their safety and to develop effective solutions and rehabilitation program.
- Social Assistance: Based on Decision No. (3) of 2018 Concerning the System of Disbursing Benefits and Social Assistance, the department distributes social assistance for elderly if they do not have income or if their income is below the minimum earning line which is 5000 per a person, the amount of the monthly assistance will be 1000 dirhams as a minimum and it will be increased based on the number of the family members the applicant is supporting (Sharjah Social Services Department, 2021).
- Transportation and Parking Services: Sharjah Municipality provides free parking for all elderly in the Emirate, furthermore

Sharjah newly established Public Transport system "Mowasalat" offers the elderly free rides when they use any public transportation (Mowasalat, 2021).

- Sharjah Age Friendly City Initiative Efforts: Sharjah succeed in 2016 to join the Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities. As a result, The Initiative played an active role in enhancing lots of services in the Emirate like working with Sharjah Municipality to modify all the government buildings in the Emirate and all the public places and facilities to insure its suitability to elderly's needs. In addition to providing special transport services for the bedridden elderly through allocating suitable private transportation to take them from their homes to medical units in the city or outside and providing special benefits and discounts for the elderly by private health companies that provide treatment, medicines and other health services. Furthermore, the initiative aims at collaborating with sport clubs in the Emirate to deliver variety of sports and cultural activities for elderly, and at establishing and opening more suburban councils (Majlis) to cover larger numbers of people and to strength relations and social communication, in addition to forming a volunteer team under the name of the "Good and Blessing Team", which conduct various programs, activities and events that can benefit the elderly and activate their role in public life (Sharjah Age Friendly City, 2021).

As per the remaining emirates (Ajman, Fujairah, Ras Al Khaimah, Umm Al Quwain) they do not have an additional local service tailored for their elderly, since the elderly residing in those emirates are receiving federal services only.

It is also important in that regard to mention that there are some additional services provided for elderly by the civil society and non-government organizations (NGOs) in the country, like the social assistance and donations provided for elderly people in need by the [Red Crescent Authority](#) which offers financial assistance and in-kind donations for the elderly and implement many programs for them and coordinates with the elderly care centers to organize several activities in many accusations. The Authority as well formed a team of caregivers and trained them to achieve its humanitarian mission in the elderly care field. As per the role of associations the researchers found one association the tackle directly the issue of elderly in the country which is The Emirates Association for Senior Citizens' Friends which is a public benefit association declared by Ministerial Decree No. (1062) of 2015 to work on empowering the elderly, developing programs and action plans to assist senior citizens to reach active

aging, and to support them in taking care of their physical, psychological and social health, as well as enhancing the environment, while cooperating with several government and private entities (Emirates News Agency, 2021).

After conducting a thorough review of all legislations and services related to the elderly in the UAE using the situational analysis approach, the researchers gained insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the social policy for the elderly. Regarding strengths, it became evident to the researchers that despite the relatively small size and proportion of the elderly population compared to other countries (1.9% among the entire UAE population and 7% among Emiratis), the government has made significant efforts to ensure the provision of comprehensive services for the elderly.

These services include social services such as protection hotlines, shelters, counseling, awareness programs, social assistance, housing, pension, and retirement services. Additionally, high-quality healthcare services are provided, including free treatment in government hospitals, the establishment of elderly care centers, mobile clinics, and home care services. Furthermore, the government offers educational services for the elderly through elderly learning centers and numerous municipality services aimed at enhancing the environment to meet the needs of the elderly.

Moreover, the government has issued the National Policy for Senior Emiratis and supported its enforcement with strong legal frameworks, particularly Federal Law No. 9 of 2019 on the Rights of Senior Emiratis. Additionally, various entities have conducted extensive research efforts to understand the current conditions and issues faced by the elderly population.

The situational analysis revealed several gaps that need to be addressed in the elderly policy in the UAE. One of these gaps is the absence of a unified elderly database at the national level. This absence is critical as it hinders the understanding of the characteristics of the elderly population in the UAE, including both Emiratis and non-Emiratis. Scientific statistics are crucial for policy development, as they form the basis for the development of programs and initiatives. Without such data, policy development may be negatively impacted.

Another gap identified is the lack of quantitative research and scientific qualitative social research. While quantitative research, such as surveys using questionnaires, has its benefits, there is also a need for qualitative research to gather in-depth information from the elderly, their caregivers, and practitioners. Qualitative research can provide insights into their feelings, beliefs, perspectives, and

recommendations for improving elderly issues in the country. However, the researchers noted that most research efforts were conducted by medical entities, with fewer contributions from social and academic entities. Moreover, there were no research efforts from federal ministerial bodies, indicating a potential lack of governmental funding dedicated to research in this field. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing a more comprehensive and effective elderly policy in the UAE.

Additionally, the situational analysis highlighted several other gaps in the elderly policy in the UAE. One major gap is the lack of technology integration in the daily functions of the elderly. Many elderly individuals suffer from technological illiteracy, which hinders their active engagement in a world increasingly reliant on smart applications and services. In contrast to some developed countries where vital facilities and elderly homes are equipped with smart technological machines to ease living and meet elderly needs, this area remains relatively vague in our country. Despite the UAE being a smart government, there is a need for further integration of technologies in elderly services and utilities.

Moreover, the lack of elderly participation in policy development is another weakness identified by the researchers. Elderly individuals are an important source of information, and their involvement, along with their families and other practitioners working with them, is crucial to ensure that policies consider a wide range of views. This inclusion also helps reduce rebellion and resistance toward policy implementation.

Furthermore, the situational analysis revealed a lack of health insurance in some emirates, which is a significant gap. Although the country provides free medical services for all elderly individuals in government hospitals, there is a need to expand the umbrella of medical insurance to cover all senior Emiratis. This expansion would enable them to access medical services in private sector hospitals as well, enhancing their overall healthcare options and quality of life.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study employed the available data methodology to gain insights into the components of social policy for the elderly in the UAE and to assess the existence and availability of necessary laws and services related to this critical population in society. The findings revealed significant progress and exceptional actions taken by the UAE government to ensure equal rights for its citizens, including senior individuals. The government's efforts to guarantee the provision of comprehensive services for the elderly, along with integrating them into various national laws and regulations, are indicative of a shift from a cost-centered approach to an investment-centered approach regarding aging and the elderly.

This change in perspective sends a clear message to the community about the value of elderly individuals and the opportunities that effective federal and local measures for dealing with aging can bring to the country. These measures contribute to the creation of a developed, decent, and inclusive society. However, there are still areas for improvement, particularly in the empowerment of the elderly, access to the digital world, technology integration, lifelong learning opportunities, and ensuring effective participation from all stakeholders, especially the elderly themselves.

Addressing these areas of improvement will not only enhance the well-being and quality of life for the elderly population but will also contribute to the overall development and inclusivity of society as a whole.

The following recommendations are proposed by the researchers to promote the policy strengths and improve its weaknesses:

- **Create a Unified Elderly Database:** Establish a national database to understand the characteristics of the elderly population in the UAE and develop programs based on this data.
- **Conduct Quantitative and Qualitative Research:** Conduct both quantitative and qualitative research to gather in-depth information about the conditions of the elderly in the country. Use these findings to enhance the current policy.
- **Enhance Elderly Participation in Policy Development:** Involve elderly individuals, along with their families and other stakeholders, in policy development to ensure a wide range of views are considered and to reduce resistance toward policy implementation.
- **Increase Accessibility to Specialized Elderly Centers and Programs:** Improve accessibility to specialized elderly centers and programs, especially in emirates where services are limited, to

ensure all elderly individuals can benefit from important initiatives.

- Expand Psychological and Mental Health Services: Expand specialized services for psychological and mental health issues among the elderly, as these issues are common and require focused attention.
- Expand Health Insurance Coverage: Increase health insurance coverage to include all elderly individuals, enabling them to access medical services in both private and government hospitals.
- Promote Technology Integration: Encourage the integration of technology into daily functions for the elderly to overcome technological illiteracy and enable active engagement in a world reliant on smart applications and services.

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كبار السن في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة: دراسة موجهة نحو السياسات

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باحثة لدرجة الدكتوراه في برنامج علم الاجتماع التطبيقي

جامعة الشارقة - كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية - الامارات العربية المتحدة

الأستاذ الدكتور. حسين محمد العثمان - أستاذ علم الاجتماع

جامعة الشارقة - كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية - الامارات العربية المتحدة

الملخص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على المحاور الأساسية المتعلقة بقضايا كبار السن في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة، من خلال تركيزها على مراجعة وتحليل القوانين والتشريعات الضامنة لحقوقهم، ودراسة الخدمات المتوفرة والمتاحة في المجتمع لضمان تلبية احتياجاتهم. حيث تم استخدام منهج البيانات المتوفرة لعمل مراجعة تفصيلية لمختلف الخدمات والتشريعات والمستندات والتقارير المتعلقة بكبار السن في الدولة. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن السياسة الاجتماعية للمسنين ارتكزت على سبع ركائز تتمحور حول الرعاية الصحية، التواصل المجتمعي والحياة النشطة، والمشاركة المدنية، والبنية التحتية والنقل، والاستقرار المالي، والسلامة والأمن إلى جانب جودة الحياة المستقبلية. كما كشفت النتائج أن حكومة دولة الإمارات ملتزمة بشكل كبير بكفالة حقوق المسنين، من خلال إصدار العديد من التشريعات والقوانين وخاصة القانون الاتحادي رقم 9 لسنة 2019 بشأن حقوق كبار المواطنين الذي تم تشريعه ليراعي احتياجات المسنين في الدولة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، أظهرت النتائج قيام الحكومة بتخصيص ما يلزم من موارد لضمان توافر وإتاحة خدمات شمولية لهم في العديد من القطاعات وخاصة في مجال الصحة، والحماية والإدماج والتأهيل والتعليم، وسهولة التنقل وتقديم الدعم المالي. إلى جانب ذلك، كشفت النتائج عن بروز الحاجة إلى عمل بعض التحسينات في مجال تمكين المسنين والحد من الأمية الرقمية، والمشاركة الفعالة من جميع أصحاب المصلحة. وعليه اقترح الباحثان اتخاذ العديد من الإجراءات التحسينية لتطوير السياسة الحالية، من أبرزها إنشاء قاعدة بيانات وطنية للمسنين، وإجراء المزيد من البحوث والدراسات الكمية والنوعية، بالإضافة إلى عمل ما يلزم للقضاء على الأمية الرقمية، وضمان المشاركة الفاعلة للمسنين في صنع السياسات وفي جميع مناحي الحياة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: حماية المسنين، سياسة كبار المواطنين، حقوق المسنين، كبار المواطنين في دولة الإمارات.

* وقع المؤلفون على نموذج الموافقة والموافقة الأخلاقية الخاصة بالمساهمة البشرية في البحث