



Problems of the aged persons in urban area and role of familial relations

D. Murahari Naik

Department of Anthropology, Karnatak University, Dharwad – 580003. Karnataka.

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ABSTRACT

The need of social gerontological studies is increasing due to rapid changes in life styles especially in urban area. With increasing facilities available in urban environment, the aged people can live without much support of other family members to certain extent. But after certain age and after some period of isolation, they feel dejected and this feeling of dejection leads to many physiological and psychological problems. While economically well to do aged ones are not having economic problems but they have other problems common to poorer people. A survey of the aged persons in Hubli-Dharwad Corporation Area including samples across different religious and economic groups is proposed to be undertaken. The proposed study will follow questionnaire method. It has been observed that the aged males feel more insecure about their future than the female counterparts, especially in getting help from children in their day-to-day life. There appears to be sex-wise difference in the economic impact, as females do not face much of problems as do the males. The married ones face less age related problems than the single ones. The role of family relations in solving the age-related problems has been discussed.

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Introduction

Population of elderly has been rising from 20 million to 57 million during the period of 1951 to 1991. It has been estimated that about 324 million elderly person were present in the population with about 7.7% consisting those aged above 60 years of age certainly provides the fact that there is considerable decrease in fertility and mortality rates. Decrease in fertility and mortality rates can be attributed to increase in availability of better health care services. But the fact that most of these elderly persons are poor and not getting proper attention actually needed calls for the immediate attention. Most of the diseases common to human population harbor in these elders, thus this population acts as pool to the germs of common diseases. If these diseases are partially treated there are chances of increase in germ population which are resistant to present drugs used. Neglected elders living in slums of urban atmosphere contribute to such incidents.

According to recent statistics related to elderly people in India in the year 2001, it was observed that as many as 75% of elderly persons were living in rural areas. About 48.2% of elderly persons were women, out of whom 55% were widows. A total of 73% of elderly persons were illiterate and depend on physical labour. It has been estimated that about 66% of older persons were in a vulnerable situation without adequate food, clothing or shelter.

Increased number of male elders than female elders indicates those females are more prone to mortality than males, apart from the fact that there is general sexual ratio which favours males. However, it has been observed that about 75% of economically dependent elderly are supported by their children and grand children. In urban area more number of female elderly dependents are found than males. This could be due to the fact that female dependents are more cooperative in urban household by extending their assistance to run the household.

Urbanization and problem of elders

Urbanization supports mostly nuclear type of families resulting in reduction of inter-personal attachment in families. Residential facilities in urban areas are available according to the capacity of spending money to get these facilities. Thus social interaction at basic need providing area is lacking in urban areas, lack of familial interaction and social interaction in urban area support the people who are capable of getting basic needs by paying money to exist. Being social animal unavoidably aged in a urban atmosphere men and women in urban atmosphere face several problems, among them most of the psychological problems appear to be related to urbanization of life styles. Most of the problems faced by elderly people in urban areas seem to be related to urban atmosphere with specific socio-cultural practices.

In India, there are various strata of socio-economic conditions which provide opportunity to study their impact on human development. In similar way there are cities and villagers which have various stages of impact by urbanization. There are opportunities to study long impact of urbanization in cities like Mumbai, Bangalore, Kolkotta, Madras, etc., There are some cities which have only 30-40 years of urbanization. Out of these 30-40 years of urbanization much of the early years are dominated by interaction of people from suburban and villages surrounding these developing cities. Recent support of computers and communication technology brought sudden changes in these developing cities. Socio-cultural changes which were taking place with slow pace were suddenly gained the momentum.

Sudden changes in socio-cultural practices brought out by changes in life styles allowed no opportunity to maturation of changes needed to existing society (which was slowly progressing with time testing the changes). Thus, under new order of society which is getting urbanized, only those capable

of earning money and capable of using atmosphere were given prominence. Elders with lack of money and capacity to cope up with urban atmosphere were gradually considered as members of neglected section. These elders of neo-urban area are those who were not expecting these sudden changes. Whereas in some established cosmopolitan cities people who are expecting this isolation and neglecting attitude by others are well prepared and have their ways to cope up certain problems.

Therefore problems of elders in cities which are recently developing with fast changes are more severe than those of elders belonging to cities which are having long history of adjusted city life.

Urban family relations with elders

Urbanization if it is sudden and with speed, then chances of adjustment is less. Elders find it very difficult to understand interaction they are getting from the younger ones. Younger ones in cities are more eager to grab the opportunities by concentrating on competitions. Younger ones are not finding time and opportunity to interact with elders.

New younger generation which never gets an opportunity to live with their grandparents in their life time is increasing in numbers due to nuclear family systems. Thus a society which is not interested in elders results in urban atmosphere due to increase of households with husband-wife-child/children without grandparents.

Husband-wife-children family without grandparent interaction or with very little grandparent interaction provides very little opportunity for the developing child to get an introduction to life of elders. Further, when this child matures into adult, the parents who are entering the elder's life style fail to erase their image of young parents existing in children due to very long and slow process which brings about the changes in both parents and children. Adult son or daughter always feels his or her father and mother as very strong and capable of everything as it was so from the beginning. Thus even if their external modifications, and changes arising out of aging are felt by the aging parents their children fail to understand since they were having long interaction with their parents with consideration that they are strong and potential.

Isolated nuclear families thus provide little interaction with elders for any individual during his/her life time in city life. Generation gap needed to understand the problems of elders in familial relations is getting short in urbanization. Developing individual is left with only his or her parents to understand the problems of elders. But due to long standing image of parents as potential providers and guardians, accepting them as weak and incapable is not easy for the individual since problems of these parents due to aging are slow and gradual.

Further the children of these parents in nuclear families usually get proper attention, education and general facilities to establish themselves as adult individuals are very busy in establishing of themselves, find very little time to concentrate on problems of their aging parents. Economic independence on the part of children sometimes provides opportunities to move away from the parents. Thus physical distance from aging parents becomes order of life in some cases. This adds to the list of factors which prevent understanding of aged people especially within familial relations. Children in this nuclear families once attaining capacity to earn were interested in having household of their own. They wish to have freedom to make and take decisions. Earning ability provides an opportunity to long

suppressed desire to head the family of their own. During this course parents who are aged were left to remain on their own.

Since these aged parents were not living hand to mouth but having sufficient financial arrangements to take care of their basic needs, urban elders will not arise any sense of guilty in younger ones about leaving elders without financial support under certain situations. Financially supported elders show very little interest in compromising with younger ones since they are not supposed to depend on younger ones for their financial needs. These factors aggravate the deterioration of relations.

Health related problems of elders

Psychological problems involving depression are consequences of loneliness. Sometimes even the partner's non presence due to death or due to separate living adds to the problems already existing due to loneliness. Among the wife and husband one who is more ready to adjust with younger children rather than the others, leaves the partner alone and starts living with children. Under these conditions elderly person suffers from deceitful act of partner. Sudden departure of life partner either from death or from separate living has adverse effect on elder persons.

Problems of health in elders, especially those who are living in cities can be managed to some extent by certain common measures. Regular check-up and regular treatment can provide solutions to common problems of aged ones. If finance is not the limiting factors most of the elders can maintain good physical health with modern facilities available in urban atmosphere. But, regular attention towards health needs closely related person/persons to supervise them while attending to health. Living alone without the vicinity of closely related one brings out the reduction in hopes and aspiration to improve health. Thus, medical facilities though present were not used or used without needed precision. This results in negligence of health by the aged individual despite the capacity and opportunity.

Urban atmosphere needs both husband and wife to earn to meet the demands of living in urban conditions. These conditions leave very little attention by either parent towards their children belonging to these working parents are always eager to have attention giving soul mate. Marriage still remains assumed way to live safely with soul mate, if partners are capable of supporting demands of married relation, then younger ones opt for marriages. Marriages among these children of working parents become psychological need of these children. Whereas the aged parents are forced to consider it as a blow to their co-living and in most of the cases married children move to new house and leave the parents to their lonely atmosphere. These marriages though needed for welfare of individuals concerned in marriage it leaves the elders into emotional isolation, sometimes even cause physical isolation.

Sons and daughters-in-law complex and elders

Among the much worried human relations which affects the elders in Indian context is the (assumed and believed to be important is) relation establishing after son's marriage. Newly entered female member into the family is generally looked upon with extra care and caution. Elders belonging to male usually worry about their son's concentration shifting and they going to be left alone. Daughters-in-law creating household split and moving to have their new household and leaving elders to their fate is often considered as more common in urban areas than in rural areas.

Males in urban areas usually opt for the partner with earning ability. When such males enter into marriage they are left with more options which usually favours the separate living rather than the cohabitation with elders. Further, women of today find it ridiculous to tolerate the elder parents of husbands when they themselves are capable of pressing their husbands to tolerate their own parents if they wish so. Women's empowerment opportunities and economic independence provided in urban atmosphere certainly rise the question of why only the parents of husband.. why not parents of wife.. should be taken care of. In order to avoid this potential question usually newly married opt for household with no parent's interference. Whereas in rural atmosphere property rights change legally only after the death of persons and elder persons enjoy supreme position if they own property. Further even in landless rural population elders of the family were given importance and their welfare is a concern of younger generation. Usually in rural atmosphere, planned family structure to have young couples, small children, old people at a time is followed and maintained.

Having male child or opting for male child to continue the family is having long traditional history. This aspect of socio-cultural practice leads to unethical methods of sex determination; negligence on part of female child is of great concern for those who worry about the well being of society. When the nuclear families increase in urban area these families wish to have male child and also wish to have daughter-in-law to live along with them. But paradox is that the daughter in-law also wants to have her own household.

Family budget in urban area restricts the number of children. Thus those families which get first child as male usually try to avoid next child due to the fear of getting next child by chance as female. This type of attitude increases families with single male child. In the similar way those families which get first child as female also stop at that stage in the fear of getting next child also female. Thus single child families are forced to exist in urban areas. Whatever may be the reason to have single child, it has been observed that economic conditions and time permitted to the urban parents allows just enough opportunity to have single child rather than more children. Since it is still followed norm daughters are sent to household to which they were married off. It is supposed that these female members were new addition to already existing household whereas sons remain to be members of the original family even after marriage. But changing trends in urban areas follow the tradition up to certain extent and then take a sudden turn. Married male and female usually want to have their own house to live and all freedom to take decision on household. This in turn gets support by their economic independence. Thus this leads to trend of abandoning the elders to their fate of loneliness.

Daughters-in-law of urban area

A study involving 840 households belonging to various socio-economic groups has been undertaken to study the cohabitation of daughters-in-laws with elders of husbands of these daughters-in-law. This is the part of study which involves study of problems of elders in urban area. Hubli-Dharwad corporation area is fast growing township with considerable history of urbanization. This area is amalgamation of various cultural practices and harbours many aspiring families. Approximately equidistant from Bangalore and Mumbai these twin cities are exposed to extreme urban and rural atmosphere. Traditional

practices are incorporated along with modern practices in this area. Thus, a transitional socio-cultural set up exist in this area.

A survey involving data collection by observation and questioning the randomly selected households involving either of the parents above sixty years of age has been conducted. Data collected from the households where sons got married showed that about 42% of sons left the household to have new one within three years. In this 42% about 28% of sons are in talking terms, whereas 72% are not communicating in any form. About 62% of the non communicating separated sons and daughters-in-law started living together separately after having quarrels which follow separation.

Though there are few instances of separate living within a year and two they constitute majority of cases where arrangement to live separately is inevitable due to existence of job places in separate town and area. Separation from parents has been observed to avoid travelling daily 16 kilometres up and down in 32% of cases.

About 24% of the households with elders above 60 years of age are having eligible sons/ daughters waiting to get married. About 14% of households are having their children working in different areas away from residence (i.e., beyond 40 Kilometre distance). Maximum number of children to these elderly parents recorded is 8 in two households. Families with more than 3 daughters in a family are 18% recorded, whereas families with more than three sons are 22%. In this survey of families, where both husband and wife are above 60 years of age are 722 and 118 families are having female partner below the age of sixty, among them 52% of the female are still attending the jobs. About 340 families are having widowers and 214 families are having widows.

Analysis of data collected reveals that those families which are having their own house built, own family business, agricultural land in nearby village are having cohabitation more compared to ones those living in rented houses and not having any common financial support. About 42% of male elders are living separately from their life partner due to various reasons. Among them, wife living with sons and daughters-in-law (preferring to live with them) accounts for the 52% of this kind of separation.

It has been observed that there is no relation between education of daughters-in-law and in incidence of separate living. Recorded quarrels about dowry demands by in-laws and breaking of children's marriages are found in 3.5% households under study. However female children returning to parental house after unsuccessful marriage after legal separation are reported in 7 households. Whereas sons facing legal separation of spouse is reported in 6 households, 8 households involving elders under study were reported to have either son's or daughter's marriage for second time (4 houses with daughters second marriage and 2 houses with son's second marriage after legal separation, and 2 houses with sons second marriage due to death of spouse).

Survey conducted shows that both separate living and cohabitation are having their share of problems which make the elders to suffer. Problems demanding financial sharing are more troubling than those of relations which need emotional sharing to most of the elders.

As the daughters-in-law are new addition to the existing family it is natural for other members to watch and critically assess the early behaviours of newly joined individual. Unlike early days houses are not crowded with relatives cohabiting. It

is very rare for any daughter in law to find more than one or two brothers or sisters of her husband. But limited number of people to share the feelings and difficulties in convincing the existing ones, aggravates the adjustment problems for a newly entered member in nuclear families. There are chances of domination of husband's mother and thereby over bossing is felt by these newly entered members. Usually under these situations separate living appears to be manageable solution. Elders under some situation opt for loneliness than having daily disputes with daughters-in-law.

It has been observed that there are exaggerated blaming on daughter-in-law for the problems of elders. Projecting these family members in negative character in TV serials and films is very common. While projecting the old people as exploiters of young daughters-in-law is not uncommon, the fact that young women's potentially capable of mesmerizing the male members (son) and thereby causing separation in family is most commonly accepted without much need of evidence.

But in urban atmosphere with nuclear family setup getting more common, separate living after marriage by newly-wed people is not shocking to elders. There are instance where marriages take place with condition of living separately. As the role of elders in selecting of spouses for their children is decreasing and love marriages are increasing separate living apart from elders in getting increasing.

Observation presented and discussed here are part of gerontological study survey of Hubli-Dharwad twin cities. Daughters-in-law whether from educated background, from big families, small families working, not working have very little role to play in problems of elders. It has been observed that to live along with elders or away from elders is allegorically decided before counter blaming. However, there exists a general trend of blaming daughters-in-law for separate living of elders. One generation gap always exists between those who gets blame and who are blaming. Sympathy factor favours the elders if voted by elders.

Discussion and Conclusion

Children are taken care in family due to maternal instinct and paternal instinct, where as in case of taking care of elders no such instinct is enforcing. Only factor stimulating in case of caring the elders is the feeling of obligation gratefulness and related responsibility arising out of these feelings. Further, there exists a chance of evaluation of elder's contribution before extending any favour to these people. In case of children hopes can be kept alive about their cooperation in future by providing proper education and molding, thus expectation of reward exists while caring the children. While caring elders such hopes are no place but only sense of responsibility seems to have potential to bring about the force in younger ones to involve in care of elders.

Present day elders are left with very few relations to take their care due to establishment of nuclear families, especially in urban areas.

Considerable number of aged people is sharing the total population throughout the world. Advanced medical facilities

are supposed to be the contributing factors to this increase. Meanwhile it has been reported that majority of them are living under substandard health conditions. This is more so in India and in other developing countries (Ingle and Nath, 2009, Bagchi 1998 Irudaya et.al. 1999)

Aged one is having problems and they can express it unlike children they know what they want to have. Helping these people is thus easy and needs interaction. Age related health problems are categorized and possible assistance are being standardized. But socio-cultural practices and local traditions restrict some participation of aged ones in certain activities. Symbolically aged ones are often referred to as useless lot, just waiting for ending of their life. More activity on the part of elders is being looked down as mischievous or overcrossing by youths, whereas youths even without any achievements are looked up as prospective individuals having chances of development. These attitudes change with time and space. Elders who are weak and living lonely often get the attention of stray youths and often lose their lives. Attacks on old people for money are increasing in cities. This calls for co-habitation of elders even if they are not related, in closely secured localities. Familial relations are bound to change, young ones need privacy and freedom. Elders should develop to minimize the interference in youth affairs and should learn to live in proximity of youths, especially with related youths. Children can turn to elders for help since they know they are capable, but elders turn to youths for help are not sure of getting it because there is no surety of capability. Under these conditions elders can provide assistance for youths to become more capable by sharing finance and expectancy and thereby they can get needed safety and security. This can be achieved by cooperative activities. But to deal with familial relations a open minded initiation to understand the relations are needed. Daughters-in-law and elders of family can cooperate if they sincerely try to understand.

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