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ELDERLY LIVING IN OLD AGE HOME AND WITHIN FAMILY SET-UP

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KEYWORDS :

Introduction

India like many other developing countries inthe world is witnessing the rapid aging of itspopulation. Urbanization, modernization andglobalization have led to change in the economicstructure, the erosion of societal values, weakeningof social values, and social institutions suchas the joint family. In this changing economicand social milieu, the younger generation issearching for new identities encompassing economicindependence and redefined social roleswithin, as well as outside, the family. The changingeconomic structure has reduced the dependenceof rural families on land which has providedstrength to bonds between generations.

The traditional sense of duty and obligation ofthe younger generation towards their older generationis being eroded. The older generation iscaught between the decline in traditional valueson one hand and the absence of adequate socialsecurity system on the other (Gormal 2003).Illness increases with age. All else being equal,an older population has greater needs forhealth care.

Life satisfaction continues to be an importantconstruct in the psycho-social study of aging. Itis one of the commonly accepted subjective conditionsof quality of life and seems to be one ofthe facets of successful aging, both of which arekey concepts in aging. Research reports that lifesatisfaction is strongly related to socio-demographicand psycho-social variables (Iyer 2003).

Old age means reduced physical ability,declining mental ability, the gradual giving upof role playing in socio-economic activities, anda shift in economic status moving from economicindependence to economic dependence uponother's for support. Old age is called "dark" notbecause the light fails to shine but because peoplerefuse to see it (Gowri 2003).

The expectancy of life in India is much lessthan 60 years. Psychologically too, most Indiansappear to consider themselves old earlier thanthe chronological age of 60 years and the Indianwomen regard themselves to be old even muchearlier (Montross et al. 2006). According to Mayor (2006), "Some peopleuse their chronological age as a criterion for theirown aging whereas others use such physicalsymptoms as failing eye-sight or hearing, tendencyto increase fatigue, decline in sexual potencyetc. Still others assess their aging in termsof their capacity for work, their output in relationto standards set in earlier years, their lack ofinterest in competing with others, lack of motivationto do things or a tendency to reminisceand turn their thoughts to the past rather thandwell on the present or the future."

One of the major impacts of globalization isbreaking up of traditional family system. InIndia, migrants from the villages and towns tocities predominate, resulting in breaking up offamilies into nuclear families. The aged who areleft behind have to fend for themselves. This isleading to an increased danger of marginalizationof the geriatric population due to migration,urbanization, and globalization. Another impactof the globalization is the increasing economicburden on the elderly, especially the women whohave practically non-existent property rights andother social security measures (Bhat 2001).

It is important that the state, civil society andcommunity recognizes the rights and needs ofthe elderly women and make suitable policeslegislations and effective implementation ofhealth and security schemes which already exist.

The elderly citizens are in need of urgent attention.They do not need our pity, but the understandinglove and care of their fellow humanbeings.It is our duty to see that they do not spendthe twilight years of their life in isolation, painand misery. Older persons are, therefore, in needof vital support that will keep important aspectsof their lifestyles intact while improving theirover-all quality of life (Dandekar 1993).

Hence, the present study was conducted tocompare the general feelings, social relationshipsand personal likings of the elderly residing withfamilies and in old age homes, with the followingobjective in view:-

The present study was undertaken with thefollowing main objectives:-

1. To study the background profile of elderlystaying at old age homes and within thefamily.
2. To compare the environment of elderlywomen residing in old age homes and withinthe family environment in terms of.
3. General feelings.
4. Social relationships.
5. Personal likings.
6. To assess the attitude of elderly.

Methodology

The present study is based on an urban sampleof 60 individuals aged 60 years and over. Outof these, 30 were institutionalized and 30 werefrom family set-up. The data was collected using aspecially designed Interview schedule and observationtechnique through a house-to-housesurvey for those residing in the family. The dataon institutionalized aged was collected from,"Home for the Aged" .Most of the individuals included in the presentstudy were sixty years of age or above and nonworking.

The non–institutionalized elderly personsprovided information about their age, whilethe age of the institutionalized individuals wasascertained from old age home records.

The datawas collected using a specially designed interviewschedule and observation technique througha house-to-house survey for those residingin the family. Prior to final data collection, theinterview schedule was tested on a small subsampleand subsequently finalized, upon successfultesting and minor modifications.The interviewschedule was divided into four sections.

The first section included questions regardinggeneral information of the respondents. The secondsection included questions

pertaining togeneral feelings of old age people to happiness,loneliness, depression, security, insecurity, differentmoods. The third section included questionsregarding social relations of old peoplewith friends ,relatives and family members andthe fourth section included questions regardingthe personal interests and hobbies of old agepeople.

The information, thus, obtainedwas analysed according to the objectives of thestudy, coded and tabulated. The results have beenpresented in the form of numbers and percentages.

Results and discussion

The problems of the aged vary from societyto society and have many dimensions in our country.Old age had never been a problem for Indiawhere a value based joint family system issupposed to prevail. Indian culture is automaticallyrespectful and supportive of elders. Ageingas a natural phenomenon has all along engagedthe attention of the civilized world. Provisionfor the aged in the society has become oneof the constitutive themes of our modern welfarestate.

However the disintegration of the jointfamily system and the impact of economicchange have brought into sharp focus the peculiarproblems which the old people now face inour country.

General Information

Table 1 reveals that 47 per cent of the totalrespondents belonged to the age group of 65-70years. The family size of the respondents variedfrom 2- 13 family members in the family setup,whereas for most of the aged in old age home,the family size varied from 2-9 members. Extendedform of family seemed to the most popularform now in both the setups.

Table 1: General information of the respondents

Variables	*Living in the family*		*Living in the institution*	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*
Age				
+60-65yrs	10	33.3	1	3.3
+65-70 yrs	14	47	5	16.6
+70-75 yrs	4	13.3	14	47
Above 75 yrs	2	6.6	10	33.3
Education				
Illiterate	11	36.6	28	93.3
Primary	9	30	1	3.3
Middle	5	16.6	-	-
Matric	3	10	1	3.3
Hr.sec.		-	-	-
Graduation	2	6.6	-	-
Type of Family				
Joint family	11	36.6	10	33.3
Extended family	19	63.3	20	66.6
Number of Family Members				
2-5	7	23.3	18	60
6-9	14	46.6	12	40
10-13	4	13.3	-	-
13-above.	5	16.6	-	-

General Feelings of Elderly Women

This section tries to study the internal generalfeelings of old age people like: happiness, loneliness,depression, different moods, security andinsecurity – social, emotional, economical, physical,help and support. The perception of the agedat youth was that 'old age' was a period of relaxation in life.

About 60 percent of the elderlywomen living in the families had a positive attitudetowards old age, while negative views regardingold age and the perception of old age aslast stage of life which lacked in social securitywas observed in views both in family setup andold age home.

Figure 1 reveals that majority (63.3 percent)of the elderly women living in families felt thatit was a period of dependency because they weredependent upon their family for support, 16.6percent of them felt economically insecure,whereas 20 percent of the respondents now perceivedold age as a stage of loneliness. In case ofinstitutionalized inmates 40 percent stated economicinsecurity and loneliness as the reason fortheir negative perceptions.

Stressful family relationships and lack of familycare precipitates the eldery's poor psychologicalwell- being (Litwin and Shiovitz 2006).Twenty -seven percent respondents stated thatthey felt neglected in the family but the respondentskept themselves busy by taking up varioushousehold activities like looking after their grandchildren,doing small household chores etc.and only 3.3 percent of them reported that theywere humiliated by their daughters-in-law andtheir sons did not care for them. As is true of ourculture, 70 percent of the elderly women livingin the families were looked after by their familymembers and the respondents stated that theirchildren gave them respect, proper care and comfort.

On the other hand, 63.3 percent of theelderly women living in the families got supportfrom their family members. They also receivedfinancial, social and emotional support fromtheir children.

Social Relationship of the Respondents

Children are expected to take care of theirelderly parents. However, the processes of socialchange, such as industrialization, urbanization,and migration, can have a negative impacton care for elderly people. In the present study,it was observed that 96.6 percent of the elderlywomen living in the families had social supportfrom their sons and daughters-in-law during theirillness.

The effect of this phenomenon is evidentfrom the weakening of the traditional bond ofjoint family. The elderly have been the biggestsufferers of this change of values and family system.

Many of them feel that the attitude ofyounger generation towards them has undergonea tremendous change and become less satisfactory.There is a common belief that in old agepeople tend to become more and more inclinedtowards religion. To an extent, religion providesa sort of social support in the form of personalcontact with other people at religious gatheringswith whom they could share their thoughts.It is believed that, 'it is around this social andreligious participation that the life of the oldrevolves'. It was observed that 33.3 percent ofthose living in families reported participation insocial and religious ceremonies. They expressedthat their interaction to relatives and friendswas due to their involvement in the religiousfunctions.

Personal Likings of the Respondents

Life satisfaction continues to be an importantconstruct in the psychosocial study of aging. Itis one of the commonly accepted subjective conditionsof quality of life and seems to be one ofthe facets of successful aging, both of which arekey concepts in aging. Research reports that lifesatisfaction is strongly related to socio-demographicand psycho-social variables.

It has beenfound that two socio-demographic characteristics(income and education) influence life satisfactionboth directly and also indirectly throughpsychosocial factors such as activity-physicalactivity level, satisfaction with leisure activities,and social contacts, Perceived health, and physicalillness (Huoliqin 2002).

As regards the personallikings of the elderly women living in thefamilies and old age institution, it was analyzedthat 43.3 percent of the elderly women living inthe families had more interest towards readingreligious books, magazines and newspapers forpassing their time, while 33.3 percent of themhad interest towards watching T.V. and the others(23.3 percent) listened to music for peace ofmind. 33 percent of the elderly women living inthe institutions stated that listening to music relaxedthem and helped forget their tensions, worriesand stress.

Only 6.6 percent were religiousminded. However, 87 percent of institutionalizedelderly women revealed that they worshiped atthe institution because a temple already existedinside the institution.Talking about the family members seemed tobe a favourite pass time for the residents of boththe settings, especially for those living in the institution.

Remembering the old happy memoriesand sharing these with their inmates gives nostalgiaabout feeling of accomplishment. It actsas a catharsis for the elderly. As few as 3.3 percentwere resorting to meditation to keep themselvesrelaxed, tension free and refreshed.

Conclusion

Old age had never been a problem for Indiawhere a value- based joint family system is supposedto prevail. Indian culture is automaticallyrespectful and supportive of elders. Ageing asa natural phenomenon has all along engagedthe attention of the civilized world. Provision forthe aged in the society has become one of theconstitutive themes of our modern welfare state.

The problems of the aged vary from society tosociety and have many dimensions in our country.However, the disintegration of the joint familysystem and the impact of economic changehave brought into sharp focus the peculiar problemswhich the old people now face in our country.And in the traditional sense, the duty and obligationof the younger generation towards theolder generation is being eroded. The older generationis caught between the decline in traditionalvalues on one hand and the absence of anadequate social security system on the other handthus, finding it difficult to adjust in the family.Ultimately, it could be concluded that the generalfeelings of the elderly women living in thefamilies had better position than that of the elderlywomen of the institution.

Better social relationswere maintained by the family dwellersbecause they had regular interaction, expressionsof feelings and support from the family. The existingcondition of the elderly women living inthe institution was that they felt lonelier, depressiveand had a lower level of satisfaction withlife. In this context, the need for preserving ourtradition of a joint family and the mutual cooperationand understanding between the youngerand the older generations could be more pressing. The situation calls for concerted efforts ofthe government, non-governmental organizations,religious institutions and individuals notonly to understand but also to solve or at leastmitigate the whole gamut of problems resultingfrom a graying society so that the aged peoplecan lead a dignified and meaningful life.

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