



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Geography

CHANGING PERCEPTION OF HEALTH WELL BEING AMONG TWO GENERATIONS OF WOMEN: A CASE STUDY OF KOLKATA

KEY WORDS: women, health wellbeing, generations

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ABSTRACT

Health is regarded as the most important as well as most neglected factor in determining women wellbeing. In the patriarchal society where the women are regarded as burden, it is the common practice to overlook the health condition of women. The socio-cultural tradition and norms often influence the women to prioritize their family than their own health. As a result, they often neglect their own health problems until and unless the problems become chronic or fatal. However, with the changing time and socio-economic structure of the society women literacy and economic participation has increased rapidly which in turn has influenced the perception of health wellbeing among women.

INTRODUCTION:

The word 'Wellbeing' is generally viewed as a description of the state of people's life situation (McGillivray 2007). OECD (Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development) in its Better Life Initiative known as **Betterment Index** (How is Life, 2013, 2015). The OECD framework for measuring individual wellbeing includes eleven different dimensions that are important for well-being today, grouped under the two broad domains: **material conditions** (income and wealth, jobs and earnings, housing), and **quality of life** (health status, work-life balance, education and skills, social connections, civic engagement and governance, environmental quality, personal security, and subjective well-being). So, in order to achieve complete wellbeing, it is important to achieve health wellbeing and this is particularly important for women as they have the tendency of neglecting health. In the society where patriarchal dominance still prevails, the people are born as male and female but eventually become girls and boys to grow as women and men. This very idea has been deep rooted not only among the males but also the females of the society which make them apathetic towards their own health until and unless the problems become chronic or fatal. Women's literacy and educational attainment has witnessed an increasing trend all over the world in the recent past coupled with expansion of economic opportunities, political participation and increased bargaining power within home (Stevenson, 2009) which directly affect the perception of health wellbeing among the women.

Review of Literatures:

There are various literatures and reports regarding the health of women as it is primary factor of determining wellbeing. WHO (2009) has stated that women's health has become an urgent priority in today's world. According to the Report, the women of reproductive age group (20-44 years) are most vulnerable to different health problems that are related to the reproductive system like abortion, unwanted pregnancy, pregnancy complication and most importantly malnutrition especially the deficit of iron and calcium. The IIPS and ORS Macro, 2000, have estimated that in the states like West Bengal, Bihar, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, between 63-83% of married women suffer from anaemia.

According to National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-2016), the main health issues suffered by women are overweight, anaemia, blood sugar and hypertension. The survey has showed that the urban women of Kolkata suffer most from anaemia which is 46.4% followed by the problem of obesity (40.7%) and blood sugar (8.5%) which are much higher than the state average except anaemia. The use of contraceptives is also much higher than that of state average (21.8%) in Kolkata (32.9%).

The Study Area:

Calcutta, now known as Kolkata among various other metropolises is very unique in its character in the manner that unlike many older cities the precise year of its birth can be identified. The Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) has been

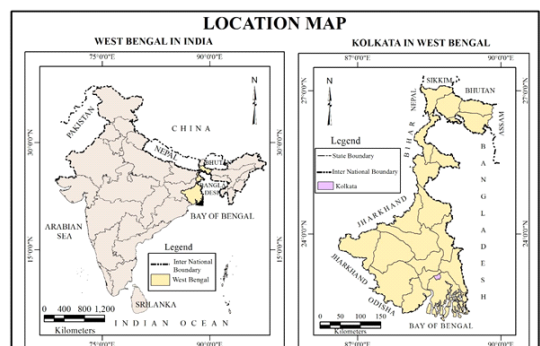
selected as the study area. The KMC is located on latitude 22°34' N and 88°24' E. The area of KMC is 185 sq km. KMC has population of 4,486,679 (2011) and has a density of 24,306 persons /sq km (2011) with 144 wards. Kolkata is regarded as one of the most important cities in eastern India in terms of concentration of commercial interests and cultural aspirations offer hospitality to members of all communities, religions, and language groups since its inception.

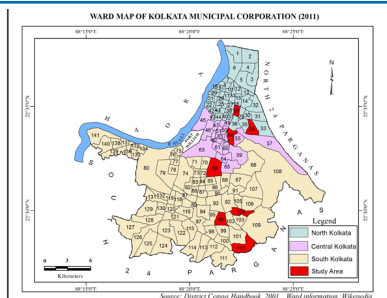
Kolkata is regarded as one of the most important cities in eastern India in terms of concentration of commercial interests and cultural aspirations offer hospitality to members of all communities, religions, and language groups since its inception. In this study, seven wards under KMC, i.e. 28, 34, 56, 69, 96, 104 and 110 have been selected randomly from north, central and south Kolkata so that the heterogeneity of socio-economic characteristics of the city reveal from the study.

METHODOLOGY:

Total 1644 women respondents were selected from different educational levels, occupational categories, religious beliefs which include both working and non-working women aging between 18 to 60 years. The age group then is divided into two; 18-40 as the young generation and 41-60 as the old generation. As the religious status, both Hindu and Muslim women were considered in this study to make a socio-cultural comparison.

This paper uses structured primary survey data from the selected study areas. This study has considered both the physical and psychological assessment of women health. The parameters that are considered for analysing the perception of health wellbeing among two generations of women are: aware about problem of obesity, workout or diet, regular health check, regular intake of medicine, medicine without doctor's prescription, vitamin/nutrition supplement, smoke, intake of junk food and alcohol, aware of using contraceptives, health check-up before conceiving, menstrual hygiene, trouble in sleep, feel stressed/ depressed, tired easily, guilt feel and common physiological problems like heart, diabetes, migraine etc. these factors are supported by the information regarding number of children and age of having first issue.





Analysis:

Over the history of time the ideas and attitudes of women towards the family as well as the society have also changed. Sinha, 1979, in this context believes that the younger generation have different feelings, way of thinking, different ideas and have their own values. This gap is more intense in the urban context due to more exposure to media of communication and educational opportunities which have change their attitudes and approaches.

Kolkata today has come a long way from the days of yore. It has witnessed significant improvement in female literacy rate as well as

Table 2: General Health Awareness

Generations	workoutregime	regular health check-up	medicine without prescriptions	menstrual health hygiene	use of contraceptives	pre-natal health check-up
18-40	44.70%	35.30%	64.80%	55.80%	94.7%	70%
41-60	10.60%	73.10%	77.80%	35.90%	64.40%	4.40%

Source: Primary Survey

Reproductive health concerns are one of the major focus areas of the wellbeing of women. The issues that are related to the reproductive health of the women are unintended pregnancy, maternal mortality and menstrual hygiene. From the analysis it can be noted that the women today have far great control over their reproductive life. With the introduction of various modern contraceptive measures today's women have been able to control unintended pregnancy, maternal mortality rate and delay the average age of reproduction. The advertisement of contraceptives during the late 20th century focused on 'to maintain gap between two children' which changed into 'measure to enjoy the pleasure of sex without the consequences of unplanned and unwanted pregnancy' in the 21st century. Today's women give more preference to their career and are opting for late marriage and taking decision regarding family planning. As a result, the mean age of having the first issue has been delayed. In fact, during the analysis many of the respondents acknowledged the fact that they don't want a child which is almost unthinkable for the old generation of women who believe the fact that motherhood is every woman's destiny and the femininity is best expressed through motherhood. The young generations of women standing in this 21st century often jeopardize this age old concept which is reflected in the study (Table 3) with almost equal share of percentage of those having only one child and those without children. Hence today most of the families have single child while the maximum percentage of old generation of women reported of having more than one child even 4 to 5 children (Table 4). Apart from the awareness regarding contraceptives, healthy pregnancy also improves the health wellbeing of a woman as it leads to healthy birth. Preconception and prenatal care can help to avoid many health complications of the mother and the fetus thus reduces the risk of maternal as well as infant mortality. This awareness regarding prenatal check-up was almost absent among the women up till few years ago. The present study reveals that the young generation is slowly becoming conscious about the benefits of prenatal checkup which starts even before getting pregnant. Thus, when more than 70% of young women of Kolkata have reported that they are aware of prenatal checkup or have opted for it, the percentage is almost negligible for the old generation of women.

Table 3: Mean Age of Having First Issue

Mean Age	<22	22-25	>25
Generations			
18-40	2%	53.5%	44.50%
41-60	14.50%	64.5%	17.10%

Source: Primary Survey

female work participation over the last few decades.

Table 1: Female Literacy and Female Work Participation Rate, Kolkata

	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Female literacy Rate (%)	60.34	63.1	72.1	77.3	84.06
Female Work Participation Rate (%)	5.70	5.80	6.91	12.0	14.8

Source: District Census Handbook

This increasing literacy rate and work participation rate of women has changed the age-old perception of health wellbeing among them. With the advent of new technology and social media and of course by the various initiatives and policies undertaken by the Government, the awareness regarding health condition has improved. The young generation of women has started to understand the importance of being physically and mentally well. While discussing about the general health condition of women (Table 2) in Kolkata, it is seen that the general health awareness is more in young generation though it needs more attention from the women themselves and also the policy makers.

Table 4: Number of Children

No. of Children (%)	1	>1	no children
Generations			
18-40	38.6	25	36.4
41-60	38.2	47.1	14.7

The other important aspect of the health wellbeing of women is the menstrual hygiene. Every women of the reproductive age group go through this phase every month. Unfortunate enough that standing in 21st century, the cognizance related to menstrual hygiene is minimum among the women; both young and old generation. Following the social taboos, the menstruation which is essentially a biological phenomenon is supposed to be restricted from their daily activities as they are regarded as impure during this period. The old generation of women still believes that the women become 'dirty' during menstruation and this is the topic that should not be discussed publicly. Consequently, the young generation of women did not get proper advice and guidance regarding physiological process and proper hygiene practices. It is rather unfortunate that only 55% of the young women are aware of menstrual hygiene and take proper care to maintain the hygiene while the percentage is 36% for the old generation of women.

However, at the same time it is seen that the women of both the generations are reluctant to visit health care providers and prefer to intake medicines without any prescriptions from a certified practitioner. Both the generations acknowledged the fact that for general illness like cough and cold, fever, allergy, headache, etc. they take over the counter (OTC) medicines. It is surprising that the young women being educated are not aware of the health risks related to the OTCs. The percentage of women taking medicines without prescriptions is more or less same for both the generations. The reasons are easy to understand superficially. The O.T.C is convenient, readily available in pharmacies, and less expensive than going to the doctor and perhaps paying for a costly prescription. However, the actual reason may lie deep within the patriarchal norms of the society where the women are expected to sustain even in the harshest situation and have least control over their own lives. This idea of neglecting themselves and taking care of the rest of the family members has transmitted over the generation and in spite of education and employment the young women too are not out of this tradition.

The study reveals the fact that though the general awareness regarding the reproductive health has improved to a larger extent, the tradition of neglecting general health continues in the young

generation also which is reflected in their physical health condition. The most common health problem (Table 5) the women suffer is nutrition deficiency like calcium and iron deficiency which leads to the diseases like anaemia, osteoporosis, osteoarthritis, etc. and increase their susceptibility to infections. Moreover, the young women have an increasing trend of smoking and taking alcohol and most importantly the readymade foods which affect their health (Table 7). Though the study has also found that today's women are more health conscious than the old generation of women as they follow workout regimes and diet chart strictly but these potentially harmful behaviours ultimately lead to various health hazards like cancer, heart problems, high triglyceride level, etc. However, it is seen that the chronic health diseases like cardiovascular problem, diabetes are more associated with the old age group. The lifestyle of the young women can bring health benefits and will help to live an active and healthy life until the old age. Because of the increasing trend of career prioritizing, delaying marriage and childbearing and leading unhealthy lifestyle today's women suffer from the problem of infertility which was almost absent in the old generation. This in turn has increased the health risk and other associated problems of the women as well the child.

Table 5: Physiological Problems

	heart disease	infertility	diabetes	anaemia	calcium deficiency	migraine
18-40	9.40%	37.60%	18.80%	38.80%	43.50%	65.70%
41-60	40.40%	11.20%	51.60%	46.10%	57.80%	54.30%

Source: Primary Survey

Being psychologically well, is the combination of feeling good as well as functioning effectively. The concept of functioning effectively includes following the domains like self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, self-growth and personal striving. The women in their everyday life play multiple roles of mother, wife, daughter, daughter-in-law and few have to play the role of paid workers. As the young generation of women are more employed than the older one, the self-esteem and urge of personal growth in life is more among them hence the happiness and satisfaction. At the same time these women lead more stressful life. The reasons are manifold. Firstly, the women who work outside have to balance both the family and work, especially the married women with children. However, today work culture with hectic working hours for which they are not able to give sufficient time to the family and feel responsible for any sort of ill happenings in the family despite the inability to control the outcome. This causes a feeling of guilt coupled with stress. Secondly, the tough competition and the personal aspiration for acquiring higher position in the workplace also cause stress and sometimes panic disorder among the young working women. The study (Table 6) has revealed the fact that today's generation of women are the victims of stress and depression due to the unrealistic expectation either from the parents in terms of education and career or from the husband in terms of family care coupled with huge work pressure and the rat race of proving the best in the work front. However, the rewarding aspects of psychological wellbeing of the young generation of women are they are more socially connected and share good relationships with others which reduce their stress to a larger extent, have the urge of growing and expanding and open to new experiences, have the sense of realizing their own potential and have the capability of adopting to the new situation and act accordingly to reflect their self-knowledge and effectiveness.

Table 6: Psychological Problems

	tired easily	trouble in sleep	depression	anaemia	stress	guilt feel
18-40	46%	37.60%	31.20%	30.60%	38.70%	22.70%
41-60	52.10%	11.20%	42.30%	16.10%	12.70%	12.30%

Source: Primary Survey

Table 7: Practices Affecting Health

	Smoke	Intake of Junk Food	Intake of Alcohol
18-40	57.90%	89.90%	32.10%
41-60	10.10%	66.40%	3.60%

Source: Primary Survey

CONCLUSION:

The women of Kolkata today have come a longer way pledging themselves to justice and equality of status and wellbeing. The differences in attitudes and behaviours exists between individuals and changes with age, experience and not forgetting the role of socio cultural factors. The education and work participation have performed their role in enlightening women and realising their worth to the family, society as well as to the nation. The study suggests that there is a slow but steady divergence from the traditional and orthodox way of life; the women today are still stuck towards certain norms and ideas that they inherit from their childhood. The Mann Whitney U test (Table 8) on health wellbeing among two generations of women has further proved that the women of present generation are far more aware of their own health and do not hesitate to take good care of themselves.

Table 8: Mean Rank of Health Wellbeing by Mann Whitney U Test

	Mean Rank
18-40	1096.31
41-60	372.94

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