

AGED AND THE ISSUES OF STATUS IN THE FAMILY

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INTRODUCTION:

The population of the aged is increasing in the developed and developing countries. And the span of life had also increased. It is because of sharp decline in the mortality rate, steady decline in fertility rate and improvements in medical technology as well as public health programmes. India's aged population is currently the second largest in the world.

As most of the old people are free from their earlier occupation and spending most of their time in family. Therefore, there is a need to study the problems of the aged particularly women and the status of the aged in the changing family system. The present study was conducted in Gulbarga city selecting 400 respondents of pensioners and non-pensioners category. Respondents were selected by using stratified proportionate sampling who were studied by employing an interview schedule.

1. Aged and the Family:

It is generally held that with the advent of modernization, formal education, white collar occupations, increasing scope for self-employment for both men and women, provisions for civil liberties under democracy, the traditional joint family has disintegrated. Consequently, the aged have been left high and dry to look after themselves or are made to live at the mercy of sons and daughters-in-law or alone.

Traditional joint family played an important role as an agent of social welfare for its immediate and distant kith and kin. It looked the responsibility of looking after the aged, the infirm, and the ailing parents and grand parents' provided food and shelter to orphans, widows and destitutes/desertees and extended social and economic help to those in need.

Desai (1955) has pointed out that even today an individual has to take resort to his family in case of illness. A man has to look to his joint family in case of physical disability, unemployment and old age.

Changes in the joint family are perceived in terms of nuclear family as husband and wife and their unmarried children. It is true that nuclear elements such as individual freedom and autonomy, and a higher standard of living are influencing the traditional joint family. In the present study, the joint family is understood as a group where two or more married brothers live together by pooling their income and sharing family responsibilities, obligations and commitments. It may include parents, uncles, sisters or daughters-unmarried divorcees, desertees or widows and other near or distant relatives.

Type of Family of the Respondents:

Table-1

Type of Family

Sl. No.	Family composition	Respondents				Total	
		Pensioner		Non-pensioner		No.	%
		No.	%	No.	%		
1.	Joint family	25	13.00	80	37.00	105	26.00
2.	Nuclear family	161	87.00	134	63.00	295	74.00
	Total	186	100.00	214	100.00	400	100.00

$\chi^2=3.84$, $df=1$, Not significant ($p<0.05$)

Data presented in Table-1 shows that an overwhelming majority of the respondents (74%) living in joint families. It means that the respondents under study were staying with their children, grand children, etc. On the other hand, only 26 per cent were living with their brothers, children and other members of the family. It follows that as per the general assumption, a majority of the respondents staying in nuclear families are likely to face problems of adjustment. A further analysis of the data show that a majority of both pensioners (87%) and non-pensioners (63%) women were staying in nuclear families. In our study differences in the type of family are not likely to affect the problems of the aged women.

2. Care of the Aged in the Family:

Here an attempt is made to assess whether or not the aged are respected, honoured and treated well by the family members. Many of the problems of family adjustment in old age are attributed to the changes that have taken place so rapidly in the modern society on account of industrialization and urbanization. Sociologists are divided in their opinion about the status of the aged in the family. According to sociologists, old people in traditional societies enjoy a better status and authority in the family, primarily on account of the value system.

Fulfillment of Basic Needs:

Basic needs viz., food, shelter and clothing are ultimately related to one's survival. A satisfactory fulfillment of basic needs ensure a happy, contented peaceful life. This is true for the aged, women and children.

a) Fulfillment of Needs of Food:

Food is the basic requirement that sustains body and mind. Clean, hot and nutritious food provides strength, vigour and power. It enables the person to work for longer times, withstand diseases and enhances the span of life. Vijayalaxmi the aged favourably. The respondents were asked whether the food served was hot and fresh, served in time and appropriate to their age. The opinion of the respondents is draw in Table-2.

Table - 2
Fulfillment of Food Served

Responses	Respondents				Total	
	Pensioner		Non-pensioner		No.	%
	No.	%	No.	%		
Very satisfactory	100	54.00	100	47.00	200	50.00
Just satisfactory	70	38.00	100	47.00	170	42.00
Not satisfactory	16	8.00	14	6.00	30	8.00
Total	186	100.00	214	100.00	400	100.00

$\chi^2 = 2.967$

$df=2$

Not significant (<0.05)

Table-2 shows that 50% respondents said that the food served was satisfactory. Similarly, 42% of the respondents mentioned 'just satisfactory'. During our discussion, it came out that a good proportion of them were not satisfied the way the food was served. Only 8% expressed dissatisfaction and these belong to working class (economically lower class).

A further analysis of data showed that 54% of the pensioners

were very satisfied and 47% of non-pensioners also had expressed 'very satisfaction' about food serving in the family. Of those who mentioned 'just satisfactory', 47% were from non-pensioner's category, while 38% were from the pensioner's category. It means more non-pensioners than pensioners were dissatisfied with the way the food was served to them. In this category aged women (above 70 years), who were not earning any income but depended on their son's and husband's income, were found relatively more in number.

On the whole, the data shows that majority of the respondents did not experience any difficulty as far as serving of food to them by the family members was concerned. It was also observed that very few of the aged (above 80 years) with low income security were not looked after well with a sense of personal care.

b) Fulfillment of Housing Needs:

Housing constitutes one of the basic needs of a man in society. Housing standards reflect the attitudes, values and ideology of a society and nation towards human habitation. House is a place where people in general fulfill their basic, domestic and personal needs of life, physical and mental health, working efficiency, emotional security and social status are likely to be influenced by housing facilities. The economic pressures in urban areas have put a serious strain on adequate accommodation facilities in cities and towns (Khan, 1997). There is a close relationship between the happy and contented life of the aged and housing conditions. Here three questions were asked whether:

1. Proper facilities for sleep - cot or floor were provided
2. A separate room or a common hall or varandah
3. A kachcha or pukka building was provided.

Table-3
Fulfillment of Housing Needs

Responses	Respondents				Total	
	Pensioner		Non-pensioner		No.	%
	No.	%	No.	%		
Very satisfactory	120	64.00	130	60.00	250	62.00
Just satisfactory	40	22.00	50	23.00	90	22.00
Not satisfactory	26	14.00	34	17.00	60	16.00
Total	186	100.00	214	100.00	400	100.00

$\chi^2=0.618$ df=2 Not significant (<0.05)

It could be seen from the table-3 that 62% mentioned that the housing facilities were very satisfactory. It means a majority of them were provided a separate room, a cot and an RCC building with proper ventilation. The age group of 60-70 years were constructed spacious houses during their earning period. Out of remaining 22% pointed out that they were just satisfied with the facilities of accommodation by their family members. Most of them living in rented houses. Data also show that, 16% of the respondents were provided minimum accommodation. A further analysis of the data showed that there was not much differences in the accommodation facilities provided to the pensioners and non-pensioners women. The ² test does not support the association between the attitudes of the respondents and housing needs.

c) Clothing Needs:

Clothing is one of the basic requirements of a civilized society. It protects human beings from the harmful effects of nature. The significance of clothing is very important for aged people, as their body cells gradually die out. In order to assess the status of clothing for the aged people under our study here three questions were asked.

1. Cloths to wear according to season
2. Bed-linen such as rugs, chaddars, bed sheets to sleep on and

3. Maintenance of clothes, that is whether they are regularly washed and ironed and whether new clothes are brought/ stitched when the old ones are worn out.

Table-4
Fulfillment of Clothing Needs

Sl. No.	Responses	Respondents				Total	
		Pensioner		Non-pensioner		No.	%
		No.	%	No.	%		
1.	Very satisfactory	130	70.00	140	65.00	270	67.00
2.	Just satisfactory	40	21.00	60	28.00	100	25.00
3.	Not satisfactory	16	9.00	14	7.00	30	8.00
	Total	186	100	214	100	400	100.00

$\chi^2 = 2.556$ df=2 Not significant (<0.05)

An analysis of data with regard to facilities for clothing is presented in table-4, which shows that an overwhelming majority of the respondents enjoyed 'very satisfactory' facilities for clothing. This category belongs to rich class. Those who were 'just satisfied' constituted 25 per cent. And only 8 per cent of the respondents were not satisfied.

Responses of the pensioners with regard to clothing slight different from those of the non-pensioners, that is 70 per cent of the pensioners as against 65 per cent of the non-pensioners felt the clothing was very satisfactory. It means that the pensioners, compared to non-pensioners had better clothing facilities. Out of those who mentioned 'just satisfactory' 28% were from non-pensioners category, as against 21% pensioners. And a small proportion of the pensioners (9%) and non-pensioners (7%) could not get the minimum requirements of clothing. Both sections belonged to a lower economic strata.

3. Involvement of the Aged in Decision Making:

Decision making in the family is a critical element in the status of family members since it involves the allocation of resources and distribution of roles within the family. According Shobha I. (2001) decision making is an important indicator of self-esteem. It is generally argued that with the advance in age the ability to think and reason gradually begins to decline. Studies have shown that the more educated, and those with a white collar background tend to draw a line on issues of marriages and family. They are very firm in exercise of their power and authority about the issues like family and caste background of the girl or boy to be married. On the other hand, elders do not want to exercise their power and authority on personal issues like choice of girl in marriage, honeymoon, family planning etc.

Table-5
Involvement in Decision Making (Marriage & Family)

Responses	Respondents				Total	
	Pensioner		Non-pensioner		No.	%
	No.	%	No.	%		
Very important	140	75.00	130	60.00	270	67.00
Less important	26	14.00	34	16.00	60	15.00
Not important	20	11.00	50	24.00	70	18.00
Total	186	100.00	214	100.00	400	100.00

$\chi^2=11.59$ df=2 Significant (>0.000)

Table-5 show that as high as 67% of the respondents said that their decision was vital in deciding family issues. According to this category of respondents although their children held good position they never objected to the decisions of their parents. Data also show that only 15% said their decision was less important in influencing the family matters.

It can also be seen that 18% of the respondents said that their decision with regard to family matters was never binding few parents had given full freedom to their children to decide for themselves issues concerning their own lives. Studies

conducted by Kaur, Grover and Aggarwal (1987), Kaur and Kaur (1987) showed similar results. The χ^2 test has yielded positive result.

Data regarding pensioners and non-pensioners reveals that 75% of the pensioners, as against 66% of the non-pensioner said that they had a say in deciding issues pertaining to family and marriage. And 16 per cent of the non-pensioners as against 14 per cent of the pensioners, said their decision in deciding family issues were important. Data further reveals that 24% of non-pensioner, while 11 % from pensioner category said that their role in deciding family issues was not important. Our study revealed that in general a majority of the elders were involved in deciding family affairs. The study also revealed that more pensioners than non-pensioners were involved in decision making process. Studies conducted by Bhatia (1983), Saraff and Mohanta (2002) and Shaha (1988) support our inferences.

4. Social Adjustment of the Aged with Other Members of the Family:

Social interaction or adjustment of aged with other members could be studied within the framework of roles and status. That is whether the grown up sons are on speaking terms with their parents and talk to them with due respect and honour.

Relation between Parents and their Sons:

Interpersonal relations between parents and children are likely to be affected by modernization, liberalization, individualism and growth of youth culture. In modern India, as elsewhere, youths are deviating from the age old customs and customs. Aged people are less respected and honoured although the young have not totally given up and eschewed old customs and traditions. Researchers have often held that there is a grown up generation gap between aged and younger generation.

Table-6
Differences of Opinion between Aged and their Sons

Responses	Respondents				Total	
	Pensioner		Non-pensioner		No.	%
	No.	%	No.	%		
Regular	56	30.00	100	48.00	156	39.00
Occasional	70	38.00	100	48.00	170	42.00
Never	60	32.00	14	4.00	74	19.00
Total	186	100.00	214	100.00	400	100.00

$\chi^2=44.54$ df=2 Significant (>0.000)

Data collected regarding interpersonal relations between parents and sons show that 39% said that there were regular problems of understanding between them and their sons. The remaining 42% respondents said that differences were occasional and every effort was made to iron out differences. The remaining 19% said that there were 'never' any differences of opinion between the aged parents and their sons.

Data regarding pensioners and non-pensioners revealed that the pensioners (30%) compared to non-pensioners (48%) did not face problems of differences 'regularly'. The proportion of pensioners (38%) and non-pensioners (48%) differed significantly with regard to their responses that there were differences 'occasionally'. Most of the non-pensioners said that there were not prepared to adjust with their sons. The proportions of non-pensioners (4%) who said that there are no difference with their sons was very small. On the contrary, the proportion of pensioners who admitted that there were 'never' differences of opinion with their sons was 32%. This means the pensioners who were relatively more educated and economically secured, were sensitive to the challenges and demands of younger

generation and adjusted well.

It is concluded that aged people in general looked after carefully in the family and treated well in respect of their status. Aged pensioners category with compare to non-pensioner category women treated well and respected to their status, it is because they adjusted well to changing family and society. Specially young aged are actively participating in family matters.

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