

ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS OF ELDERLY WIDOWS WITHIN THEIR OWN FAMILIES

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Abstract

The human life span is a cycle of circumstances where each individual passes through the stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence, youth, middle-age and finally old age. The last stage often renders a person physically and emotionally weak. Their physical and emotional capacities decelerate with advancing age and as the result they can no longer take care of their own needs. Elderly and their children are profoundly influenced by social structure and processes, not just in the positive manner of spectators, but as active participants whose behavior, preferences feelings and beliefs influence the social situation and future lives of joint actions. Parents and young married couples were linked in interactions, communication and processes of mutual aid that involved services, care, emotional binding and financial help, the flow being generally from parents to children. But when parents become widow the problem will be other way round. With this background, an attempt is made in this paper to focus on the influences of social, psychological, economic and health factors on the financial, personal and the advisory exchanges of the elderly widow women with their married children.

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Introduction

With the general increase in longevity, particularly in the developed countries, the care of the aged is assuming greater importance. There the old are at least measurably protected through social insurance or public assistance schemes and receives institutional care on a very large scale. The developed countries have organized systems that include pension schemes, old-age assistance, institutional care, clubs for senior citizens, homes for the aged, “meals on wheels”(mobile canteens for visiting from house to house), friendly visiting, home helps, adoption of grandparents (securing in effect, foster homes for the elderly), mail, drugs at reduced cost, patient sitters, and cooperative buying. In developing countries, which are largely agricultural, the pattern of the joint or extended family had traditionally provided a built-in system of care of the aged within the family itself because these countries lack the funds and resources to meet the need of the elderly. Thus, the family is the only source of protection and care for the aged in India.

Intergenerational support is characterized as the exchange that is giving and receiving of support. The basic properties of this exchange are high levels of concern, interaction and obligation expressed in mutual aids. It takes many forms among contemporary Indian families including the giving and receiving of money, material resources, care, household assistance, companionship and advice etc. Most of the studies regarding support between elderly and their married children have tended to regard these domains as discrete, focusing in the correlates and determinants of each type of assistance. The researcher found evidence that different forms of assistance can be regarded as multiple indicators of an underlying construct of giving and receiving. Thus, with the exception of giving advice, the particular commodity (money, household assistance) matters less than whether one is the higher exchanger or a receiver.

The different types of support and assistance that elderly persons receive can either be formal or informal. The formal support is provided by formal service providers. Some formal services are free, but others are provided on a fee-for-service basis, meaning that anyone who is able to pay can request for services, which offer a wide range of services like old age insurances, Medicare facilities, supplementary medical insurance, adult day care Centre, old age home, health care services, senior citizen housing schemes etc. which are aid services. In addition to

this, other free services like old age pensions, disability pensions other financial benefits to older persons who are below poverty line are also available but these benefits are conditional.

Constitution of India recognizes the duties of the state towards the elderly in its article 41, section 125 (d) of the criminal procedure code (1973) makes it mandatory for a person of sufficient means to maintain his/her father or mother who needs maintenance and if neglected is liable to be taken to court. In 1983-84, NGOs for the first time were given grants by the Government for services for the aged. Some state transport undertakings provide concessions to old persons. The pension schemes, provident funds and insurance schemes are some other provisions. However, these provisions exist in the Government sector and the organized sector only. The large numbers of elderly in the un-organized sector are not covered by these schemes. Informal services are those provided through families, friends, neighbors and religious institutions. Elderly persons receive a considerable amount of support through these informal support networks.

Among all these, the family is the most important provider of informal services for many old individuals. It is estimated that 80 to 90 percent of care provided to elderly persons living in the community is provided by the family members. Usually family members can provide better emotional and social support than others. Family members know the persons better and are more available for round-the-clock support. The feeling of attachment and deep emotional security usually occurs within family relationships. Children and parents continue to depend on one another for both emotional and instrumental support throughout the life course.

Different family members tend to provide different types of assistance. Daughters tend to provide most of the care giving and are more involved in house-keeping and household chores. Sons typically performed managerial and maintenance tasks and were more likely to provide assistance with household repairs and financial matters. Allen 1994; and Lee et.al, (1993) also found that women are substantially more likely to become caregivers than men, and the role of caretaking appears to result in more intensive “hands-on” activities for women than men. Further, studies of the effects of gender consistently demonstrate stronger affectional ties between mothers and daughters than any other familial combination. Mothers report more positive affect with adult daughters and are more likely to rely on them.

Other informal sources like friends and neighbors were also considered influential in providing essential informal support like offering assistance in running errands or performing household chores or discuss new policies that affect themselves. They also noted that religious institutions provide social and emotional support through group activities and community events.

Intergenerational support among the elderly and their married children is not one directional at any given time. Children often take care of their elderly parents, but at the same time healthy elderly persons can also provide great help to their adult children. Research undertaken on the basis of elderly parents living with their adult children suggest that for the young-old, more assistance flows from the elderly parents to the adult children than the other way round. In another study by Ward, 1992; it was reported that older parents were doing more than three quarters of the house work. They often contribute to the expenses of child rearing (education, housing and/ or orthodontic care) if their financial position is sound. Studies of intergenerational support also consistently note that resources, assistance and support flow in both directions. The pattern of co-residence prevails among the elderly and their married children. Indians have had a long history of joint families where sons take on the responsibility of caring for the elderly parents. The parents themselves may or may not be without the adequate means to support especially in the third world countries, where the welfare means are either very meager or nonexistent. This also acts as a sort of insurance against the insecurity of old age. The foremost and most important reason for wanting sons is the “expectations of economic security” in old age. This reason has been cited by many researchers in their studies as one of the primary reason. In developing countries, parents most willingly sacrifice their present day pleasures and invest on their children as a measure for assuring their future security. Children are an attractive investment because “a child draws upon resources when they are relatively plentiful and provides a return resource of support in old age.” In a similar study conducted in India in the city of Hyderabad, an overwhelming proportion of non-slum dwellers (87%) and nearly all slum dwellers (94.6%) reported “old age security” as the primary motive for wanting a son This trend transcends borders and has also been reported in Taiwan where Mueldar (1972) also reported that a majority of Taiwanese fathers expect economic assistance from their children in their old age.

It may be a cultural expectation or normative obligation or compulsion on the part of the son to take care of the needs of the parents or exchanging help (it may be one way or reciprocal) depending on the resources. Other than this, there are a number of factors which influence exchange. Some of the studies specify the rank order in which this exchange is expected. As when the economic status or the health deteriorates, the primary care-giver is assumed in rank order by spouse, followed by an adult child, or another relative. As for elderly widow, her own adult child usually is the first to intervene to provide assistance. These supports can be of any type as parents turned first to children in times of need. Their help included, physical assistance (for example, providing transportation, giving a hand in moving, redecorating, maintaining the home place), material support (loans and gifts of money and needed items, cosigning notes for large purchases and so on) and emotional support.

The patterns of interaction among adult children and their elderly parents may be substantially different when the parent loses a spouse. There may, for example, be more giving of aid in addition to the emotional support. Reciprocity is a key factor in maintaining satisfactory relations between middle class adults and widowed mothers. Adult daughters were more likely to describe their relationships with their mothers as balanced and satisfying, while adult sons described relationships with their mother as one way that is giving aid which is motivated by a sense of responsibility and obligation. Adult children tend to offer more help to the widowed mother in order to support her bereaved new life. The closeness, thus generated encourages adult children to be more willing and cooperative towards their parents

The life expectancy of the female elderly surpasses that of the male. Hence, elderly females are much more likely to be widowed and living alone than male. Widows outnumber widowers in India, the reason being, that the wife is often about five years younger than her husband. In the country like India, a poor woman faces the additional tribulations of being a woman as well. In old age, widowhood brings not only loneliness and depression but also economic dependence. The traditional joint families, which have been taking care of elders, have been taking care of elders; have been disintegrating due to the forces of modernization.

Widowhood is considered as the curse in India. It has further enhanced if it is attached with elderly widow woman of India. In a patriarchal society, women are customarily known for

making adjustments. They never retire from household duties and as a result even in old age, they are keeping on adjusting to the changing situations.

Research Methodology

The research process consists of a number of closely related activities that overlap continuously rather than following a strictly prescribed sequence. The first step, in any research is the formulation of the problem where a clear statement about the purpose of the study is made which in turn influences the type of information to be collected or gathered by the researcher.

After formulating the problem the next step is specification of the research design. The research is carried through certain procedures called designs. The Mac-millian Dictionary of Sociology states that the research design is a broad plan of a piece of empirical research, specifying the manner in which the data is to be collected and analyzed. As the main purpose of the present study was to describe the relation of widow women with their married children, therefore a descriptive research design was considered to be more appropriate insights into the problem being investigated

The next step requires is to specify where the study is to be undertaken and who is to be investigated. The present study was undertaken in Chandigarh; because is generally known as the retired people's paradise

The next step was to decide about the method for gathering data. There are various ways of collecting information in a scientific manner such as observation, interviewing, questionnaires, case study, projective and other indirect techniques and the use of available data in the form of statistical records, personal documents and mass communication etc. Each method has its own advantages and limitations. For the present study, the researcher collected the data with the help of interview schedule.

An interview schedule consists of a set of questions which are asked and filled in by an interviewer in a face to face situation with another person (Goode and Hatt, 1952). It is an act of verbal communication for the purpose of eliciting information (Black and Champion 1976). An interview method was used here because aged people generally enjoyed talking to others and were interested to tell others about what they think and feel about. Moreover, the interview is the most appropriate technique for revealing information about complex, emotionally laden subjects or for probing the sentiments that may underlie an expressed opinion because it provides insights

into unexplored dimensions of a topic. It is a highly effective exploratory device. For this purpose, a structured schedule was used to elicit the required information from the respondents. Structured schedule asks definite, concrete and pre-formulated questions that are questions prepared in advance but not framed on the spot. For this the researcher took the sample of 100 elderly widow's women and 100 their sons living together with the help of simple random sample method.

Objective of the study

- (i) To explore the influence of socio-economic variables on interpersonal dealings and exchanges between the elderly widows and their married children.
- (ii) To examine the association between the self-feeling and esteem of the elderly widows with their married children.

Summary and conclusions

Life course theory recognizes that relationships at any particular point in time are a manifestation of a trajectory of interaction over the life span. Patterns of mutual support are formed over time and are part of a continuing interaction that is shaped by historical circumstances. Consequently, outcomes such as relationship quality are not an isolated stage or state. By and large the elderly women are dependent on their sons. A combination of affection, general obligation, long term reciprocal commitment for well-being of the elderly tend to be more persistent in the family which is missing these days. The traditional norms and values of Indian society laid stress on showing respect and providing care for elderly is no longer there. Consequently, the older widows were feeling insecure in their life. Following are the results of the present study.

Financial Help:

The cardinal rule of financial help is that a person who helps must have adequate funds to help the others. The other factors that affect the financial help are cordiality of relationship as well as physical and psychological well-being of the persons involved. Financial help need based and is also dependent on the financial affordability of the giver. In cases where elderly or the children had surplus funds there was no difficulty in helping. However, in cases where both had no surplus funds for help though they wanted to accommodate each other, they just pooled their resources and did giving and receiving at the same time. A separate table was made to measure

the financial help among the elderly and their married children. The following table will enlighten the financial exchanges between elderly widows and their married children.

Table -1 - Financial Exchange among Elderly and Their Married Children

Financial Help	Elderly widows	Married Children
Giving Help	55	35
Receiving Help	35	55
Both Giving And Receiving	20	20
Total	100	100

It was crystal clear from Table number-1 that nearly 55% per cent elderly as compared to 35% per cent of married children were giving help. Against this 55% per cent of married children as compared to 35 per cent of the elderly were receiving financial help. It was found that 20 per cent of the elderly and 20 per cent of the married children were both giving and receiving financial help from each other which showed their inter dependence.

Personal Help:

Children remain a potential resource for older parents and the quality of relationship is an important determinant of both seeking and receiving personal help. The elderly usually prefer to receive help for personal care, every day chores and other on -going needs from close family members. Aged parents who believe that their children would give assistance if the need arises have better psychological well- being than those who are less certain about what their off spring's response would be. Besides willingness of the person giving help, the health factor also counts. A person who is not in good health cannot give proper personal help to the other. The following table will appraise the personal help given or received by both elderly parents and their married children.

TABLE -2 - Personal Exchange among Elderly and their Married Children

Personal Help	Elderly widows	Married Children
Giving Help	25	32
Receiving Help	32	25
Both Giving And Receiving	43	43
Total	100	100

On the basis of the analysis of Table-2, it was found that 32 per cent of the elderly widows as compared to 25 per cent of the married children were giving personal help. As against this 25 per cent of the elderly and only 25 per cent of the married children were receiving help. In-case, however, of both giving and receiving 43 per cent of the elderly and 43 per cent of the married children showed their personal interdependence on each other. All this showed that there was great cohesion in the families. The elderly who needed help were receiving the same from the children. The children being of younger age generally did not need personal help and that is why only 25 per cent hard cases were in receipt of help from the elderly. In majority of the cases both giving and receiving of personal help was involved and that also confirmed the cordiality in relationship.

Advisory Help:

Being the elders in the family with more experience on various family matters, the elderly widows ought to be a good source of information and advice for the younger generation. Advisory help is also dependent on such factors as intelligence of the advisory and cordiality in relationship with the receiver. An arrogant person never acts on a good advice which may even be of utmost beneficial to him. Interaction with the children acted as a buffer and cushioned the effects of stressful events and situations, offer emotional sustenance and affirmation of one's identity, yield needed assistance, help time structure in meaningful ways, and provide continuity

in important roles. Even those who are very dependent on each other for personal care and assistance can reciprocate with affection, companionship and advice. The following table will fathom the advisory help given and received by the elderly to their married children

Table-3 - Advisory Exchange among Elderly and Their Married Children

Advisory Help	Elderly widows	Married Children
Giving Help	17	73
Receiving Help	75	15
Both Giving And Receiving	8	12
Total	100	100

From the above Table -3, it can be summarized that 17% per cent of the elderly widows and 73% per cent of the married children were giving advisory help to each other. On the other hand 75% per cent of the elderly and 15% per cent of the married children were receiving help. It was, however, noticed that 8% per cent of the elderly as well as 12% per cent of the married children were both giving and receiving advisory help from each other. It showed relationship is not smooth among the elderly women and their married children and also proved their interdependence.

Overall Interdependence Level:

The support supplied between parents and their adult children is characterized by a clear imbalance. Intergenerational relations are played out in several fields: the affective domain, domestic, financial, care, professional and scholastic help, baby-sitting for grandchildren, and so on. The relative importance of these different aspects of intergenerational support can clarify the ties between children and parents. To ascertain if the elderly are considered as an asset or burden by their married children an overall analysis of financial, personal and advisory help was carried out. For this, three categories were made – dependent, independent and interdependent. The

following table will enlighten the extent to which the elderly widows were considered as an asset or a burden by married children as well as their dependency levels on each other.

Table-4 – Overall Interdependence Level

Interdependence Level	Elderly widows	Married Children
Dependent	78	10
Independent	8	79
Interdependent	14	11
Total	100	100

The Table-4 exhibited that 78% per cent of the elderly widows and 10% per cent of married children were dependent on each other. However, 8% per cent of the elderly and 79% per cent of the married children are independent. On the other hand, 14% per cent of the elderly as well as 11% per cent of the married children showed their interdependence on each other. So it is very clear that very less no. of the widow elderly women as well as the married children are interdependent on each other.

The overall picture that emerges from these observations leads to conclude that a majority of the elderly widows as well as their married children were both giving and receiving financial, personal and advisory help from each other. However, the giving and receiving of help is not on equal footings in each category. Whosoever is strong is giving and the other is receiving help.

Health Status:

The idea that old age is an age of ailments and physical infirmities is deeply rooted in the Indian mind, and many of the sufferings and stresses within curable limits are accepted as natural and inevitable by the elderly. With the growth and increasing age of older population, it is important to assess the health situation of the older persons, because it determines not only their

ability to interact, but also how others in the family perceive them as recipients of affection and interaction. For the individual in poor health, relationships with family members may cease like with siblings or grandchildren, while with others it will continue because of an obligation on the part of the closest relatives that is spouse or adult children. An index was made to analyse the health status by dividing it into three categories that is good, average and bad. Good health was assessed by asking such questions like feeling young, full of spirits etc., average health was judged by the feeling miserable most of the time and bad health was evaluated by those who were susceptible to chronic diseases or ailments etc. The following table will throw light on the health status of the elderly and their married children.

Table-5 Health Status of Elderly and their Married Children

Health Status	Elderly widows	Married Children
4 - 6 (Good)	76	78
7 - 9(Average)	19	22
10 - 12 (Bad)	5	0
Total	100	100

A quick glance at the Table-6 displays that the elderly enjoy good or average health status. 73% of the total elderly widows reported that they were having good health status whereas 19 of them were having average health and only 5 of the elderly women respondents had bad health. So far as the health of married children is concerned, 79% of them enjoyed good health and only 22% had average health. A sick person cannot enjoy life though he may have huge wealth and caring children. The wealth and caring children may lesson his misery to some extent but cannot make him enjoy life fully. Health is a paramount factor for the enjoyment of life. The old sayings that “the health is wealth” and “if wealth is lost nothing is lost but if health is lost something is lost” also confirm this.

Nature of Relationship:

Just as individuals and their circumstances change over time, relationships themselves are not static. They have beginnings, middles and ends that are influenced by the personal developmental and social structural characteristics of those involved as well as by their patterns of everyday activities and interactions that take place between and among the participants. Family relationships are very long term, spanning decades and encompassing strong ties among three or more generations of members. Interactions occurring earlier in life can have implications for relationships later in life. Several studies have detected positive as well as negative relationships among the family members. Desai and Naik (1972) found that a large majority of the retired persons were reported to be satisfactorily treated by their family members. Young people were aware of the problems of retired persons and in general, had a positive approach and provided financial assistance, and in turn accepted them as heads of the family. On the other hand Luescher and Pillemer (1998) pointed out that close relationships are complex and cannot be relegated exclusively to either positive or negative categories. They demonstrated that members of both generations could appreciate the help and support but also strove to avoid dependence on each other. The following table will show the overall relationships among the elderly and their married children.

Table -6 - Nature of Relationships among Elderly widows and their Married Children

Relationships	Elderly widows	Married Children
Unsatisfactory	63	52
Satisfactory	22	39
Very Satisfactory	15	9
Total	100	100

It was evident from the Table-7 that maximum number of elderly widows as well as married children shows satisfactory or very satisfactory relations among themselves. Only a few were dissatisfied from each other. Good relationship might be because of their high educational level and sound financial position. Because of this they were not dependent on each other and it was only affection that bonds them together.

Psychological Well-Being:

Well-being of a person is considered as a great factor which affects his life. A person with higher level of well-being was found to be more energetic, more helpful, and having more interaction with the society at large as well as with their own children. Well-being can be fundamentally differentiated into two components- cognitive and affective. Measures that reflect cognitive or evaluative dimensions of well-being may be more sociologically interesting and meaningful because they have as their referents long term state of being like life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is a cognitive assessment of an underlying state of thought to be relatively consistent and influenced by social factors. In contrast, affective measures such happiness refers to states of being that are more transient that may be called psychological well-being.

Table-7 - Well- Being of Elderly widows and their Married Children

Ranking	Elderly widows	Married Children
Cognitive		
Low	51	47
Medium	38	24
High	11	29
Affective		
Low	49	46
Medium	34	42
High	17	12
Overall Well-Being		
Low	54	26

Medium	15	39
High	31	35
Total	100	100

The Table -7 depicts that the elderly were comparatively more capable of enjoying well-being in life than their married children. Elderly widows were having medium affective well-being whereas married children were high on affective well-being. Overall analysis indicate that both are high on well-being scale whereas married children were little more on the medium side. It may be due to new challenges and problems in the life of the younger generation.

The analysis of socio-economic characteristics of the elderly widow women respondents revealed that all of them were old, living in their son's houses, financially dependent on their sons, having, unsatisfied from their married children. Whereas, with regard to the married children, they belonged to young adulthood group, living in their own houses with their elderly mother, still seeking financial help, comparatively unsatisfied from their lives still hold affectionate relation with elderly widow mother.

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