

Ra'ana Malik*
Farooq-e-Azam**

Nuclearization of family and the status of elderly women: A case study of District Sargodha

Abstract

There are 841 million aged persons in the world and this number is expected to increase up to 200 million by the year 2050. In developing countries like Pakistan, aged persons with minimal social security benefits are living in miserable situations. In Pakistani society women are overburdened with the responsibilities of their families. But with changing family dynamic like nuclearization of family system in the absence of social security or old age benefits elder women needs to be studied to understand their vulnerabilities. So, the study objective was to explore the socioeconomic vulnerabilities of elder women to understand the impact of nuclearization of family system on elder women in the country. To gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon the researcher adopted case study method under interpretivism. The researcher found elder women in nuclear family system with less social interaction, high dissatisfaction from the absence of their children around, and highly vulnerable due to economic dependency. Nuclearization of family system has impact on elder women considering they were useless individuals just waiting for their time to leave this world because this was the time of young generation. The researcher made some recommendations on the basis of study findings that elder women should be provided old age benefits, proper counseling for their mental wellbeing, proper health care and should be studied more deeply.

Key Words: Gender Awareness, Media, Violence against Women

Introduction

According to the World Health Organization, there is no specific criterion or standard to define the old age, it is decided by the role of person, job status, stamina and contribution towards the society (Bergeron, 2001). However, in Sociology, there are specific meanings of aging and being old. According to the sociological perspective, "aging consists of passage from and socially defined position to another in the causes of growing up and growing old. Such passage is usually marked by the occurrence of socially acknowledged events, for example, the extreme into or exit from roles or social positions like spouse, workers, parents

* Department of Gender Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore Pakistan, Phone: +92 321 4661101; +92 42 35952994, Fax numbers: +92 42 35952991, E-mail address (es): raana.malik@yahoo.com, raana.pu@gmail.com

** PhD Scholar, Department of Gender Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore

of a dependent child” (Gowri, 2003). According to the WHO Population Aging Report (2016), there are 841 million aged persons and the number is expected to increase up to 200 million by the year 2050. The increasing number of old people is a global challenge as nothing has been planned to cope with this challenge. The decreasing number of working population all over the world also presents alarming situation. Further, in developing countries, old aged persons with minimal social security benefits are living in miserable situations (United Nations 2013). Moody (1998) argues that physical, psychological and social aspects are interrelated and have deeper impacts on individual's lives. Moreover, he concludes that this unified transition from stages of life to the other is not governed by biological system but by social systems. In human life, old age cannot be avoided because it is one's natural destiny in biological process and this destiny cannot be changed with socio-economic conditions. Cultural backgrounds, social roles, life expectancy, health status and physical appearance are among the other factors, which contribute to the notion of aging.

However, the presence of old people in a society symbolizes the past of a society and respect of the elders reflects culture and morality of a society. They guide the young generation, pass the traditional values and experiences, and guarantee the cultural stability (Powell, 2005). In traditional societies, they were the decision makers and leaders of the society (United Nations, 2013). Powell and Whidin (2004) argue that due to technological advancement, industrialization and urbanization, their role is viewed as limited from young generation's perspectives. This change of perception has changed the individuals' behaviors towards the old persons. Rise of older age groups might have adverse implications for the care and well-being of elderly persons (Powell, 2005). In most developing countries, elderly people depend economically and socially on their families. A great number of the elderly people live with their young children or with their grandchildren. About 80% elderly parents reside with one or more children in such countries like India, Pakistan, Singapore, Indonesia and Bangladesh (Bengtson et. al, 2000).

According to the United Nations (2014), old population in Pakistan is approximately ten million, which is 6% of the whole population. This percentage is estimated to increase up to 15% by 2050. Currently, Pakistani culture is in transition. Manifold changes are occurring at all the social levels. Industrialization, urbanization, development and progress have changed Pakistani society. The change has posed different challenges. Nuclear family system has replaced joint family system. The tradition of supporting and caring parents in their old age is weakening day by day. Old people cannot exercise any authority on young generation. Social transformation resulting from the modernization of society has changed the status of elderly persons. Today, old women face different problems such as fewer opportunities of earning, high disease prevalence rate, low interaction in society, isolation from their children, unawareness of their legal rights and naturally reluctance to ask for justice (UN, 2014).

In traditional societies like Pakistan, women remained overburdened with family responsibilities throughout their productive age absolutely depending on male family members. For dependent women the importance of the family becomes more crucial particularly in their later age. As elder people have had experiences of losses in their lives such as deaths of loved ones, broken relationships, health

ups and downs and limited mobility they need more family support in this stage of life. Bhat (2001) argues that older women living alone in their homes develop relations with their neighbors to remain in touch with their local communities. As the society got modernized the importance of family unit faded and the concept of nuclear family got popular even in developing countries like Pakistan (Bengtson et. al, 2000). As mentioned above that a large number of population in Pakistan falls under the category of elders and assuming the challenges of old age especially for women it becomes more essential to investigate the phenomenon of nuclearization of family and its consequences on the lives of elder women. Elderly women are considered a financial burden on the family and useless for modern life. The younger generation is addicted to speed, performance, efficiency and growth but the elderly women cannot come up to all these modern requirements (Gowri, 2003). There is an immediate need to give attention to the issues and problems of old citizens especially the elder women in Pakistan.

Research Questions

1. What is the perception of elderly women regarding behavior of young generation towards them in family?
2. Is there any communication gap between the elderly women and younger generation?
3. How do elderly women see their socio economic status in the family?
4. What are the expectations of elderly women from their family?

Methodology

The present study was qualitative in nature and philosophical foundations were provided by the interpretive school of thought as the researcher tried to explore a phenomenon at micro level settings. There was supposed no underlying laws governing the behavior of individuals because it depends on individual experiences i.e. how an individual will behave with others in various social settings. Inductive logical approach was used to conduct the research with partially deductive reasoning because the study tools and initial categories for data analysis were guided by the previous literature. To meet the study objectives, the researchers selected 10 women aged 60 years and above. The purpose was to deeply understand the multiple dimensions of nuclear family system on older women. The respondents were living in Tehsil Bhalwal of District Sargodha, Punjab Pakistan. The respondents were identified purposefully with the help of gatekeepers.

Participants

All participants were living separately from their family either alone or with their husbands. Three out of ten participants were living with their husbands separately from their sons. Another four women were living with their son's homes, but in isolation. There were cooking and taking care of themselves independently. Their sons don't even had talking terms with them regularly. Whilst the other three women were living separately all alone. Four of the women

were living in the rural area whilst six were living in city Bhalwal, Sargodha. Four of the women were earning for their living, four were getting pensions of their husbands and husbands of two women were earning. None of the women were getting any financial support from their sons.

Findings

Socio-Economic Status of Women

The researcher found that socioeconomic difference and different demographic characteristics of the participants showed different kinds of challenges and factors influencing the phenomenon under investigation. Like elder women living in urban localities have different kinds of problems due to nuclearization of the family system as compared to women in rural areas. For example elder women living in urban areas not having any other source of income have better opportunities to earn their livelihood their own while elder women with no source of income in rural communities have to depend of donations and even beg sometimes. *“People give me donations (sadda) which I spent on my food and medicine.”* (Bashira Bibi, 70 years old living in a village near Bhalwal, Sargodha). This also reflected that in urban localities elder women have opportunities to get engaged and remain busy productively instead of being bored and stressed having nothing to do in rural communities. *“I do dish washing and house cleaning for a family here to earn my livelihood and my son has a job in the city and lives there with his wife and children”* (Naseema Bibi, 63 years old from Bhalwal, Sargodha). This also reflects that women earning their own feel confident and satisfied about life then those women depending upon donations. The researcher also found that sons don't want to spend their money on their elder mothers either on their health expenses of living expenses. In cases where elder women had some permanent source of income their family relations were normal to some extent and in cases where women were totally dependent they were living in worst kind of family relations. This reflects that young generation feels their elder mothers' burden on their families and try to avoid them by not interacting with them and move in different cities to live their lives independently. Elder women dependent on their young children were found living a passive life not interfering and not arguing in any matter and expressed that they were just passing their time waiting for their death.

Family life

The most common aspect of elder women's lives was that they were living in that situation because of different kinds of circumstances instead of their own will because they expressed they did not want to live alone at this stage of life. *“My sons and daughters are married living in the city with their families for better education of their children. I don't want to live alone at this age but they have fewer opportunities in the village”* (Hajra 65 years old from Bhalwal, Sargodha). Their children got married and settled in different cities for having better opportunities of earning, good quality of life and for their children's education. Another aspect they highlighted that young generation, particularly their sons' wives did not like to live in joint family and they were found not interested in looking after their mother in-laws particularly. This also reflects the stereotypical notion of 'Saas and Bahu' relationship is getting worse and daughter in-laws tried

their best to avoid living with their mother in-laws. The study found that elder women miss their sons' company and wish to spend their old age with their sons particularly but were compelled to live alone. The study also found that young generation do not like to share their feelings and matters with elder women either they are sons or grandsons while elder women have greater wish to share their feelings and thoughts with young generation. They also like young generation to share their ideas with and to sensitize them about their values. *"I always wanted to look after my grand children and take care of them but my sons moved to cities with their families and none of them asked me to come with them"* (Naghma Bibi 60 years old from a village near Bhalwal city).

Social Interaction

Another element appeared in the study that due to loneliness in their old age elder women have to face stress and anxiety sometimes and it further causes psychological issue amongst them. The study found that elder women suffering from some kind of disease need particular attention of their children but they were facing severe neglect because of their illness. Young generation particularly their daughter in-laws were avoiding them the most because of their illness. *"I am old and ill (suffering from asthma) not being look after by my son and his wife and always miss them living alone in this small house in village."* (Bashira Bibi, 70 years old living in a village near Bhalwal, Sargodha). The study also revealed that elder women spend their time visiting their neighbors when they have less interaction with their own family members or their family members don't interact with them. Elder women in the study expressed that they value their family members and respect their privacy not interfering in their matters particularly. The researcher found that most common response from elder women was that young generation doesn't have much time to spend with their elders and they are very busy in their daily routine. It also emerged during the interaction with elder women that they acknowledged that young generation thinks elder women with out-dated values, thoughts and stereotypes and in their modern lives they don't want elder women to interfere. This was the reason that researcher found family relations of elder women in their families were in worst conditions in most of the cases. Sons don't have time to spend with their elder mothers because their young wives don't like it and don't allow them in some cases. *"Children are grown ups now, they are independently doing their jobs and busy in their life, they don't have time for elders, I don't insist my sons to live with me because their wives don't want to and I don't want to create tensions in their life. I am happy in their happiness."* (Bushra Bibi, 70 old from a village near Bhalwal Sargodha).

Satisfaction in Life

The researcher found in this study that major factor which gives elder women satisfaction in their old age was the success of their children particularly the successful marital life of their sons and daughters. And the most disturbing factor in their lives was the unsuccessful or failed marriages of their children. And in various cases the researcher found elder women complaining and regretting on the failed marriages of their sons and daughters. The death of their young sons also affects badly on the psychology of elder women and they sometimes suffer from continues grief and loss feelings. The study also found that elder women living

with their husbands were more satisfied with their family life and they expressed that it is their wish to live with their husband till the end of their lives. This revealed that women at old age feel satisfied to live with their husbands while widows or divorced elder women living with sons or someone else feel burden on them and live unsatisfied life. The researcher also found elder women living with their husbands were more confident.

Social Life

The researcher found that elder women in nuclear families have a great challenge of passing their time and have limited options to get them engaged in. Nuclearization of the family system has minimized options for elder women to spend their time. Some women spend their time sitting in the streets looking passerby or having lighter conversations with them or observing the everyday life of people around. Their social interaction remained limited to their age fellows and occasionally they are able to visit them not mostly and younger generation doesn't feel comfortable interacting with elder women. The study found that mostly elder women remained inside the home looking after the house and don't interact very much outside the house in the community. The study also found that elder women living in nuclear families think that attending ceremonies is not their domain and they have lived their life of ceremonies now is the time of younger generation. The researcher explored that nuclearization of the family system has affected social life of elder women in multiple ways that they wanted to spend time interacting with their children but their children are busy in their own lives and don't have time for their elder mothers. Majority of elder women in the present study expressed that they wanted to share their feelings with their sons and also want to listen to their sons to guide them to help them but there are problems either their sons don't have time for that or their wives don't allow them and sometimes their sons don't want to talk to their elder mothers too.

Daughters or Sons

In nuclear families elder women have not many of their blood relations around them and they try to revive their relations with their friends and age fellows and they visit them to share their feelings and pass their time. Sometimes elder women spend their time with their daughters visiting them in their in-laws and it also appeared in the study that daughters mostly have strong connection and relation with their elder mothers in nuclear families as compared to sons. Daughters regularly call their elder mother and ask them about their well being along with discussing about their family lives and seeking suggestions from their mothers. Mothers always found supportive for their daughters helping them with their moral and emotional support and guide them with their expert opinions. In the present study elder women have expressed that they always try to support their daughters and mostly their daughters listen to them. Majority of the elder women participants of the study expressed that also wanted to help their sons too but their sons don't consider them able to help and don't want us to help them and don't ask for help and even like no interference in their personal lives which mostly is a hurting attitude from sons for their elder mothers.

Factors Breaking Family Units

Surprisingly the researcher found that causes of nuclearization of the family system include financial issues and children breakup with their elder mothers because of financial issues and they think them as a financial burden sometimes and try to avoid them. This broken interaction also makes the lives of elder women miserable at their old age. Nuclearization of family system affects directly on the mental well being of elder women and they lose the capacity of social interaction and try to stay away from the society to avoid things which they think they can't handle. It is reflected in most cases that sometimes elder women living in nuclear family system prefer to remain inside their homes to avoid public interaction or social interaction because they think they are unable to interact with the people/society. The study reflects that major cause in nuclearization of the family system in Pakistan is brokenness of the family units or in other words the broken families are also included in nuclear families and due to the broken families elder women have to face stress which directly affects their mental well being making them unable to perform for their social well being. In case 20 the element of broken family leaving huge stress and effecting mental well being of elder women is explicitly vivid. The study found that sometimes physical disability of elder women due to age factor makes them unable to frequently interact with their social connections. Because in this condition they need help to move and to interact with their social connections and young generation is so busy in their own lives that they have no spare time to help elder women in interacting with the society.

Financial Status

The most interesting finding of the present research is directly related to the financial status of elder women. The researcher found that with stable financial status elder women feel satisfied in their old age and had good relations with their children, grand children and in the community. *I receive pension of my husband and my son's wife always demanded it which I refused and this is the reason she took my son away from me, I have enough money for food and medicine and I don't have to beg for money.*" (Amna Bibi, 68 years old from Bhalwal, Sargodha). This is clear from the above case where elder women had permanent source of income and they were living very satisfied life and they expressed it that this source of income has made them independent and satisfied otherwise they have to ask for money which would make them dependent on their children and could make them unsatisfied and stressed. Some elder women had permanent source of income in kind of receiving their dead husbands' pensions and this was the most satisfactory element for them financially. Some elder women had property and receive income from that which makes them independent and satisfied because in the cases where elder women were dependent on the income of their children they had more complaints and more issues between them and their sons' wives.

The study revealed that secured financial status lead elder women living in nuclear family system to live a satisfied life. The study also found that elder women with greater sense of independence try to secure their old age with permanent and secure source of income. The study also revealed that with secured financial status elder women had greater level of respect within their family members and in their communities. This shows that to spend a satisfied old age

elder women in nuclear families need secured permanent source of income. In some cases it was clear that elder women had issues with their children, grandchildren and daughter in-laws because their financial needs were not being met properly. The most pressing financial need of elder women was their medicine expenditures which they wanted to be met properly to survive and this was considered burden in cases where elder women were dependent.

The study found another aspect in cases where elder women were dependent on their sons that there was a conflict between elder women and their sons' wives on the financial expenses of elder women. Elder women in such cases had more objections and issues from their sons' wives because they consider it their right that their sons should meet their financial expenses as their obligation while their wives don't think so. The wives think that they are the only responsibility of their husbands and they should be given preference of their mother in-laws in term of financial expenditures. The study also found that there were more issues in the families with lower financial status and elder women living in such conditions had greater sense of dependency and were unsatisfied. This also appeared in the study that sons with lowest income try to avoid helping their elder mothers because they have minimum income and maximum responsibilities from their families.

Role in decision making

The study found that elder women living in nuclear family system had no role in decision making particularly in other people's lives but they were totally independent in decision making for them. Elder women living in nuclear family system were due to multiple reasons and a major one was that the young generation doesn't allow them to interfere in their lives which mean that elder women have minimum role in decision making. But it appeared in the study that elder women were independent in making decisions about them particularly those having independent and permanent source of income. This study revealed that elder women in nuclear family system have lost their role in decision making to somehow because young generation doesn't want their lives to be interfered in. Almost all the participants of the study expressed that they had greater role in decision making process when they were young and in the position of family head but with the passage of time they have lost that position and that is why they have no role in decision making now. This reflects that age and its relative position in the family matters a lot for role in decision making and women in their old age lose that position and this minimizes their role in decision making particularly in nuclear family system. *"We have made our decisions, now young generation is more educated and financially independent, they have different thinking and they don't listen to us so I don't interfere in their decisions."* (Hakim Bibi, 75 years of age from Bhalwal city Sargodha)

The study also found that young generation opts for nuclear family system because they don't want interference in their lives. Another element in this aspect includes that young generation particularly wives of sons don't want their mother in-laws to interfere in their married life. In majority of cases it is clear that sons are not maintaining their interaction with their elder mothers and even not visiting them for years, which shows that they are avoiding them and in some cases it is vivid that this is because of their wives. Majority of elder women in the study

expressed that their sons don't contact them because their wives don't allow them and this is to minimize their role in decision making.

The researcher found during the course of data collection that elder women expressed in some cases that young generation doesn't think that elder women are capable of making decisions in this modern era. They explicitly have expressed that our children and grand children are on the view that we are unable to understand the life in the modern age and have no capacity to take decisions in this age. They think that elder women carry their old traditions which don't apply today and their decisions are influenced by their out dated traditional thinking which creates conflict of interests between young and old generations.

Conclusion

According to Huoliqin (2002) that aged women provide great service of child care all over the world. As compare to early era a greater number of the young children living with their old parents nowadays. So it is the responsibility of the adults to pay attention to the wellbeing and health of the old parsons. In Pakistani society at the time of child bearing if a woman is living in joint family the elder women of the family take great care of her. While in nuclear family system women face different issues at such occasion like child birth etc. traditionally the old mother-in-law plays a great role for her daughter-in-law in this matter. The researcher draws her conclusion of the study answering the researcher questions that most of the elderly women in nuclear family have lowest socioeconomic status and their socioeconomic status matter a lot in their satisfaction in life and determining the quality of life they are living. Strong socioeconomic status of elderly women leads them towards a better and satisfied life in their old age (Gidden, 1990). Elderly women consider young generation different from them and have their own needs, choices and preferences where they lack behind. Young generation according to elder women living in nuclear family system is less interactive with elder women and don't like their lives to be interfered and prefer living according to their own choices (Dowd, 1975).

Young generations' behavior towards elderly women is not supportive which creates gap between young and old making elders more vulnerable. Elder women living in nuclear families feel living an aimless life counting for their remaining days of their lives waiting for their time to come to leave this world thinking that there is nothing left for them in this world and they have lived their lives. Minimized social interaction between young generation and elder women has created this sense of deprivation and uselessness amongst elder women. The requirements of modernity and modern life has made young generation preoccupied and overburdened having no time to think for others around them particularly for elders, thinking that they were something useless and enhanced self centered behaviors caused social isolation for elder women living in nuclear families. Preservation of moral values may bring a positive change among elder women's lives restoring interaction and relation between young and elder women making their lives better. Punch (1998) is of the opinion that in some Asian countries, working women are also playing the duty of caregivers in the families. It is her responsibility to take care of her husband's old parents also. It is not

compulsory for all the working ladies and some women hire maids for the old parents to look after them.

According to Smith as age growing day-by-day illness starts increasing rapidly. Instead of others it becomes necessary for old people to give care and health facilities (Smith et al. 2000). The tradition of taking care of the elders by young generation is decreasing day by day even in traditional societies like Pakistan. The old women become victim of the old values and traditional costumes on one side and insecure in the modern nuclear family system on the other (Gormal 2003). Older women living alone in their homes develop relations with their neighbors to remain in touch with their local communities. There is an immediate need to give attention to the issues and problems of old age and senior citizens especially of aged women in Pakistan.

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