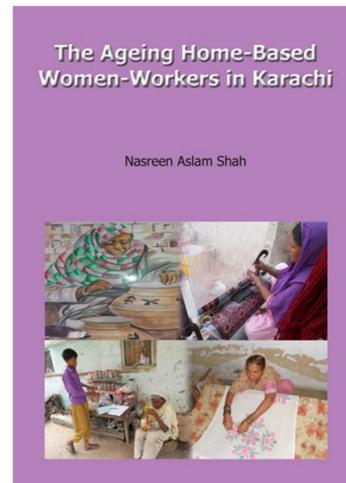


Book Review

Title: The Ageing Home-Based Women-Workers in Karachi
Subject: Research
Author: Nasreen Aslam Shah
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The word ageing catches our attention as an impression of experience, respect, and knowledge while on the other hand it also expresses an image of weakness, loneliness and loss of power. The two thoughts combined with gender dimension signify that men to some extent and women usually are affected by ageing mostly. The Ageing Home-Based Women-Workers in Karachi is an outcome of a study portraying the challenges faced by old age women workers of the informal sector in Karachi. Prof. Dr. Nasreen Aslam Shah has contributed many published research work in the area of women and work. The Ageing Home-Based Women-Workers is an overview of the ageing women's experiences narrated by these women. The uniqueness of the study lies in its connection with studies conducted earlier by the author similar issues (The Self-Employed Women in Pakistan, 1994). As she writes,

“My two-decade long partnership, and association with home-based working women of the squatter settlements of Karachi and my research produced as a result of this interaction has convinced me that among the most neglected of this group are the aged and the ageing women. I have observed how some of the younger women whom I met in the late 1990s, have aged early not in physical terms but in social terms; the others have reached their biological old age. Both continue to struggle for their daily bread. This research, therefore, is designed to study the life, experiences, and struggles of the ageing home-based working-women”.

The book is appropriately designed to draw the reader's attention towards this problem which might grow with more severity in the coming years. The book is divided in five chapters beginning from introducing the problem and moving on to understand different approaches and theoretical backgrounds of the problem. The author raises key questions regarding the very meanings and purpose of life, the percentage of the aged and the ageing, and human longevity which is increasing across the globe. These probing questions lie in the realm of physical as well as spiritual world.

Further, it moves on to explain the concept of ageing. Though it is a genderless process, as both men and women get older, however, ageing causes multi-dimensional challenges for women as compared to men. Females are at clear drawback in world communities because most of them live under the control of men throughout their lives, economically dependent upon men, or if they earn, their hard earned income is often handled or usurped by the family. Besides ageing, women face specific health issues. They are vulnerable to joint diseases, weak bones and high blood pressure, cervical and breast cancers, anemia, and most of all depressive disorders. Older women are often excluded from development programmes, including credit schemes, help for small businesses, farming, and community development projects. This is unfortunate since studies show that collectives of ageing women can be highly successful in development projects and in repaying loans and that older women rely upon a diverse range of activities to sustain themselves and their families.

The rationale behind the study shows an understanding of ageing women's experience of wage earning and its related health needs. The research collects women's life stories as narrated by them. The discussion shows that ageing and the older women are important members of our society. At the same time, the older are also the most hopeless, engaged in limited work, based on charitable organization, old age assistance or the charitable help of others, suffering from all types of medical conditions, and are victimised in a variety of ways by social norms and state negligence. The narratives developed a systematic model for collecting cross-cultural, cross-class longitudinal data; the development of research based data for use in future studies to carry out qualitative, and especially life story based research; including policy oriented and community based educational materials. The book is highly recommended for academics, researchers, development practitioners and the students of Social Sciences.

Nasreen Aslam Shah is Meritorious Professor, Chairperson, Department of Social Work and Director, Centre of Excellence for Women's studies, University of Karachi since 1988. She has published several research papers, reports, and books on women and work in the informal sector of Pakistan. She also edits Pakistan Journal of Gender Studies and Pakistan Journal of Applied Social Sciences.

Dr. Shagufta Nasreen is Assistant Professor in Centre of Excellence for Women's Studies, University of Karachi.