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Together and apart: A study of elderly-children relationship in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

The ageing population in India is growing rapidly, bringing new socio-economic and health challenges for the elderly. Traditionally respected and supported by the joint family system, many elderly now face increasing isolation as younger generations migrate for work or education. This study examines the socio-economic conditions, health status, and parent-child relationships of elderly individuals in Himachal Pradesh, comparing those living with their children and those whose children reside elsewhere. Using a descriptive design and convenience sampling, data were collected from 50 elderly respondents through interviews. Findings reveal that the majority depend on pensions, live in joint or extended families, and reside in rural areas. While most elderly reported their health as acceptable for their age, multiple health ailments were common, especially among those living apart from their children. Relationships with sons were generally more congenial than with daughters, who mostly live with their in-laws. Migration of children was primarily for employment. The study highlights the need for stronger family counselling, local day care centers, telemedicine services, and community support to improve the well-being of the elderly and strengthen intergenerational bonds.

Keywords: Ageing, elderly-children relations, migration, socio-economic conditions, health, Himachal Pradesh

Introduction

Since time immemorial, elderly in India have been accorded a place of honor and importance in the family and community (Rajan, Mishra, & Sharma, 1999) ^[13]. Ancient literature in India is replete with reverent references to the elderly. Long life was cherished, old age was viewed with deference, and the elderly played an important role as advisors and counsellors. On the other hand, the family and community looked after them regardless of their productive capacity (Mishra, 2000) ^[14]. To a society and culture that has long prided itself on its veneration of the elderly, the existential reality of the aged may come as a surprise. Our older citizens are reminded daily of their expendability and the coarseness of society. This is due to the way they are treated within the family, the woeful inadequacy of the health care provisions, and the glaring problem of economic security and financial sustenance. It is evident that modern Indian society is ill-prepared to meet the challenges posed by the aging of its population.

The decadal growth of the elderly population (population growth rate over a 10-year period) compared to that of the general population showed a huge contrast. While elderly decadal growth is predicted to rise from 35.5 percent in 2001-11 to 35.8 percent in 2011-21 to 40.5 in 2021-31, the growth is said to decline from 17.7 to 12.4 to 8.4 percent in the general population, respectively. The average annual growth rate of the elderly population, compared to the Population Census 2011, is 3.28 percent. The elderly population in India is one of the fastest growing populations in the world. According to the National Statistical Office (NSO) report 2021, India's elderly population is projected to reach 194 million in 2031 from 138 million in 2021, a 41 percent increase over a decade (NSO, 2021) ^[15].

Rapid advances in science and medicine and better quality of life are leading to an increase in the longevity of populations in several regions of the world. The ageing of the world population is a matter of concern for policymakers and administrators who are thinking in terms of the demographic, social, psychological, economic, and health aspects of ageing. The major problems which oldest people faced by the elderly are lack of economic provisions,

poor health conditions, lack of emotional support, and illness in the post-retirement period. This state of affairs becomes a socio-economic problem as many people feel it is a problem. The problem of inadequate income after retirement, loss of spouse or ample free time, poor health, social isolation, family relationship and physically and financially dependency etcetera-all these situations are interrelated or interdependence, the traditional Indian joint family system is now declining and more families are becoming nuclear, which contributing or increase the gravity of the problem.

Significance of the study

The problem under study is related to elderly who reside with their children and whose children are out of their homes for various reasons. In states like Himachal Pradesh, where young people have fewer job opportunities, they have to go out of state for jobs. It is also important to know the condition of older adults whose children are out of their homes because of work, study, or any other reason.

Review of related literature

There are following studies related to issues and problems of the elderly.

Kumari (2013) ^[22] conducted a study on elderly people with special needs in old age homes. Kumari and Akbar *et al.* both found that the reason for coming to an old age home was the misbehavior of their children and the inattentive behavior of family members towards them. On the other hand, Neeraj (2019) ^[23] studied elderly people in Haryana and tried to determine the affordability, accessibility, and effectiveness of services provided by old age homes. Neeraj also suggested combining orphanages and old-age homes. Kumar studied an old-age home in Himachal Pradesh and found that people residing in old-age homes are satisfied with the accessibility and facilities provided by the old-age home.

Singh (2009) ^[16] studied loneliness, depression, and sociability among older adults. Singh found the relationship between them, and Solanki *et al.* observed loneliness, depression, and sociability. Singh found in his study that despite being sociable old age people experienced loneliness and same in the study of Solanki *et al.* (2016) ^[24] found that there were positive correlation between the loneliness and depression.

Kumari (2017) ^[8] have researched about the quality of life on old age people in which they all found that old age people mostly feel lonely even among their family member. Mohta *et al.* have done a unique study, Mohta *et al.* have taken the use of internet and its impact on quality of life of old age people, Mohta *et al.* found that most of the information old age people got by using internet and internet use was associated with cognitive advantage but did not seem to add value to quality of life.

George (2009) ^[25] in his study only had taken adjusting factor in his comparison study whereas Pandey *et al.* (2015)

^[26] in his study had used quality of life scale (QOL) in which physical and mental health has also been measured. Pandey *et al.* also revealed that people living in old age are better than those who are living in family setup. Kumari (2020) ^[27] studied the nutritional status of elderly people, and the daily intake of different food groups was also calculated and compared with the balanced diet recommended by the National Institution of Nutrition (NIN). Kumari found that the low-income group used fewer dairy products than the high-income group. On the other hand, Roy *et al.* (2020) ^[28] conducted their study among tribal people in West Bengal, where they found problems similar to those found in urban areas or among non-tribal people.

Falkingham J *et al.* (2017) ^[29] found that level of lifestyle related disease is higher among older women than men. Khanal *et al.* (2018) ^[30] found in their study that the majority of their respondents lived in an old-age home because there was no one to take care of them after their children migrated. Adhikari *et al.* (2011) ^[1] found that children's migration had nothing to do with the physical health of elderly people.

Rationale of the study

Over time, the nature and gravity of the problems of elderly people have changed. Therefore, there is a need to study these issues from different perspectives. This study aims to learn more about the issues facing elderly people in Himachal Pradesh. The Elderly Ageing Report states that in 2023, Himachal Pradesh ranked third in India in terms of population proportions. Accessibility for the elderly is also challenging due to the distinct geographic conditions compared to other states in India. Another problem is that the state's youth are leaving the state for jobs and education, which affects the elderly.

Objectives of the study

The basic objective of the study is to know the socio-economic and health conditions of the elderly, the study also focused on to find out their relationship with the children.

Research Methodology

This was a descriptive study. A sample of 50 elderly parents (above 60 years) was taken using the convenience sampling method. In this 50 sample, 25 samples were taken from those whose children were out of their home due to various reasons, and the rest 25 were those who resided with their children. The sample was taken from the capital of the Himachal Pradesh using the interview schedule method.

Results and Discussions

Socio-economic conditions of the respondents: Studying the socio-economic conditions of elderly in Himachal Pradesh is crucial for understanding their challenges, improving their quality of life, and ensuring inclusive development in a rapidly ageing society.

Table 1: Socio-economic conditions of the respondents

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percent
Age of Respondents	60-64	18	36.0
	65-69	17	34.0
	70-74	9	18.0
	74-79	4	8.0
	80 and above	2	4.0
Category of Respondents	General	40	80.0
	SC	8	16.0
	ST	2	4.0
Education Level	Illiterate	15	30.0
	Literate	1	2.0
	Up to Primary	8	16.0
	Up to Middle	2	4.0
	Up to Matriculation	11	22.0
	Up to 10+2	5	10.0
	Up to Graduation	4	8.0
	Post-Graduation	3	6.0
	Any other	1	2.0
Income Source	Pension	23	46.0
	House Rent	3	6.0
	Agriculture	4	8.0
	FDs/Savings	1	2.0
	Monthly given by Children	3	6.0
	More than one	16	32.0
Family Income	<100000	21	42.0
	100001-500000	19	38.0
	500001-1000000	9	18.0
	More than 1000000	1	2.0
Type of Family	Nuclear Family	12	24.0
	Joint Family	21	42.0
	Extended Family	17	34.0
Residential Location	Rural	46	92.0
	Urban	4	8.0

(N=50)

According to the primary data collection, the majority of the respondents belonged to the age group of 60-64 years (36%), 34% belonged to 65-69 years, and only 4% belonged to 8 years and above. The category distribution of the respondents is given in the above table. The majority of the respondents were from the general category (80 percent), followed by SCs (16 percent) and STs (4 percent). Regarding educational level, the majority of the respondents, that is, 30 percent, are illiterate, 22 percent have an education level up to matriculation, 10 percent have an education level up to 10+2, and only 8 percent of the respondents have up to graduation level education. The source of income of the respondents shows that most of the respondents depend on pensions for their source of income, while 32 percent have more than one source of income, including pensions, rental income, and agricultural income.

Regarding family income of the respondents, it was found that 42 percent of respondents had a yearly family income of less than one lakh, and 38 percent had a family income between the ranges of one to five lakhs. In this it has been found that majority of the respondents i.e. 42 percent reside in joint family where as 34 percent are in extended family system and 24 percent are in nuclear family. The majority of the respondents were from rural backgrounds.

Respondent's relations with children:-Intimacy between elderly parents and their children plays a crucial role in ensuring emotional security and reducing feelings of loneliness in old age. Understanding this closeness helps reveal how family bonds impact the overall well-being and quality of life of the elderly.

Table 2: Respondent's relation with their children

In your opinion, how congenial is your relationship with Son		
	Living with children	Living without children
Very Congenial	2 (8.0%)	6 (24.0%)
Somewhat congenial	23 (92.0%)	17 (68.0%)
Not have son	0	2 (8.0%)
Total	25 (100%)	25 (100%)
In your opinion, how congenial is your relationship with Daughter		
	Living with children	Living without children
Very Congenial	4 (16.0%)	10 (40%)
Somewhat congenial	9 (36.0%)	7 (28%)
Not have daughter	12 (48.0%)	8 (32%)
Total	25 (100%)	25 (100%)

(N=50)

The above table shows the intimacy of the elderly with their sons. In which we can see that the majority of the respondents who reside with their son have intimate relation (92%) with their son. Among those who do not reside with them have an intimate relationship only 68% have a more intimate relation (24%) and rest 8% do not have a son. The table shows that respondents who do not reside with their children have a more intimate relationship (40%) with their daughters. The researcher found that all the respondents'

daughters are married and are in their in-laws' houses. We can see that respondents who live with their children have (32%) intimate relationships with their daughters.

Reason for migration of children:-In Himachal Pradesh, children frequently migrate from rural villages to urban centers to pursue higher education and job, driven by limited local educational facilities and aspirations for better career opportunities.

Table 3: Reason for migration of children

Reason for migration of the Children		
Reason	Frequency	Percent
Work	18	72.0
Education	7	28.0
Total	25	100.0

(N=25)

In this table, we can see that the reason behind the migration of most of the children is work (72 percent), while the rest have education (28 percent). These data are from respondents who did not reside with their children.

Health of the respondents: Studying the health of elderly people is essential to understand their specific medical and care needs, prevent neglect, and ensure a better quality of life during old age.

Table 4: Health of the respondents

Serious Ailments of the respondents		
Serious Ailment	Living with children	Living without children
Poor sight	1(4%)	2(8)
Blood Pressure	2(8%)	2(8%)
Cold and cough	3(12%)	6(24%)
Diabetes	2(8%)	2(8)
Gastric	2(8%)	3(12%)
Stomach Trouble	2(8)	0
No physical problem	5	1(4%)
More than one	8(32%)	6(24%)
Crippled arms, hands	0	1(4%)
Heart problem	0	1(4%)
Any other	0	1(4%)
Reason behind sickness of elderly people		
Reason	Living with children	Living without children
Problem on health	3 (12%)	2 (8%)
Hereditary Problems	0 (0%)	4 (16%)
Due to ageing	14 (56%)	12 (48%)
Others	8 (32%)	7 (28%)
Total	25 (100%)	25 (100%)
Opinion of the respondents of their health		
Opinion of the aged	Living with children	Living without children
Good or excellent	7 (28%)	9 (36%)
All right for my age	16 (64%)	14 (56%)
Only fair	1 (4%)	2 (8%)
Poor	1 (4%)	0 (0%)
Total	25 (100%)	25 (100%)

In this table, we can see that the 64% of the respondents who are living with their children have said that their health was all right as of their age, whereas 28% have said that their health was good or excellent. On the other hand, 56% of respondents who did not live with their children accepted that their health was all right for their age, and 36% accepted good or excellent. The health of the elderly people of Himachal Pradesh is better than that of the elderly people of other states. In table, the serious ailments of both respondents living with their children and those not living

with their children. In both types of respondents, more than one serious ailment was observed (32% and 24%, respectively). However, it has been found that 20% of the respondents who live with their children has no serious ailments, on other hand there were only 4% of the respondents who have no serious ailments. Cold and cough problems were reported by 24% of respondents who were not living with their children and only 12% of those who were living with their children. Both respondents had 8% blood pressure problems, which is very common among

elderly people. The most common health problems among those living with their children were diabetes (8%), gastric problems (8%), and poor eyesight (4%), while those not living with their children reported gastric problems (12%), diabetes (8%), and poor eyesight (8%). Thus, it has been found that both types of respondents face serious health ailments, whether they live with their children or not. Health issues are common among elderly people but decrease if there are people among them who take good care of them. This study also found that elderly people are mostly dependent on other family members, such as daughter-in-law and grandchildren, in the absence of their children.

The table describes the reasons behind the things that make elderly sick. The table reveals that 56% of the respondents who live with their children and 48% of the respondents who do not live with their children believe that they face sickness issues due to their age. The study also found that respondents who did not live with their children believed that family problems (16%) were also the reason for their illness. Whereas both types of respondents, that is, 12% and 8%, believe that sickness is due to problems in their health.

Findings

- This study found that respondents had more congenial relationship with their sons.
- It was also found in this study that the majority of the respondents' children who do not reside with their parents do so because of their work, while the rest have other reasons.
- When asked about their health, the majority of respondents of both types accepted that their health was all right for their age. This means that they have accepted their old age.
- Most respondents had more than one serious ailment. Those living with their children reported fewer serious health issues, while cold and cough were more common among those living alone. Blood pressure was common in both groups. Other problems like diabetes, gastric issues, and poor eyesight were reported in both groups, with slight variations
- Majority of the respondents who live with their children and also who does not live with their children believes that due to the age they face sickness issue.
- Study also found that respondents who does not live with their children believes that family problems are also behind the reason which makes them sick.

Conclusion and Suggestions

As we all know India has the world's largest population of youth, with 66% of its population under the age of 35. So according to this we are going to see major elderly population in coming years, with this major problem of elderly will also impact this population. The purpose of this research paper is to study the relationship of elderly with their children whether living with their children or not. Pandey *et al.* (2015)^[26]

also revealed that people living in old age home are better than those who are living in family setup that is because the old age home have particular curriculum regarding health checkup, nutrition/diet, monthly or weekly outing. Whereas in research paper, researcher found that majority of the elderly who are living with their children have better condition as compared to those whose children are out of their home.

To strengthen elderly-children relationship counselling programme should be initiated it will improve and promote care of elderly within families. Government can set up more Day Care Centers at block or village level, especially in remote areas, so elderly people have safe places for health check-ups, meals, and social interaction during the day. Encourage NGOs and Panchayats to run programme on elderly care. Medical officers can be trained to improve elderly health care. Project like 'Vayomithram' (day care and recreation centers) in Kerala can be started in Himachal Pradesh also. Telemedicine facilities should be promoted more actively to ensure better healthcare access for the elderly. Such initiatives can definitely improve the congenial relationship between elderly and children.

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