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**PSYCHO-SOCIAL PROBLEMS FACED BY ELDERLY PERSONS IN  
URBAN POOR FAMILIES IN KARACHI: A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Elderly is a significant segment of human population. Traditionally, they had been accorded the power and respect due to their functional role in agrarian society which favored joint family system. Industrialization and urbanization favored nuclear system where the functional role of the elderly decreased, thereby lowered their power and prestige which ensued many psycho-social problems. This study is conducted to highlight such problems. The study was aimed at finding the problems under two categories, protective factors which prevent problems and risk factors which lead to problems. Twenty elderly persons were interviewed through the combination of purposive and snowball sampling. The nature of interviews was semi-structured. Interviews were recorded electronically and thereby were transcribed and coded manually. This study brought out very significant insights pertaining to the issue.*

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**Keywords:** Elderly, Reverence, Industrialization, Urbanization, Gadgets

**INTRODUCTION**

Industrial revolution brought a paradigm shift in human society. The society that had been changing with slow pace now began changing with leaps and bounds. Technology reshaped every aspect of human society. Technology added pace in the process of urbanization and modernization. Each aspect of human society began to be modernized, that is, divorcing from the traditional pattern and embracing the modern trends. Family, which was the basic unit of human society, was deeply affected by the process of modernization. The structure and functions of the institution of family were dramatically changed. Agrarian society favored joint family system which demanded all the members of family to work together at farm. More children were valued as they were considered asset who joined the hands of family to work at farm. But the industrial society required individual to migrate and settle apart from his family along with his wife and children. This trend broke the joint family system and led to nuclear family. In this familial setting elderly lost the previous respect and power in familial matters.

**RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Urbanization has added the attraction in the urban life. People belonging to every class are being affected by the changes brought by modernization and urbanization. The families that are poor but living

in urban areas suffer the most. Glaring urban life affects them and they nurture the desires to increase the quality of life as par other people in surrounding. This affects the elderly lives. They are considered as burden by family in the face of high cost of living in urban life. Medicine, food, and other needs of elderly drain the money hard earned by family. This situation keeps irritating the family members and their behavior remains rude towards elderly. The behavior of family members becomes the cause of many psychological problems for elderly such as loneliness, alienation, depression, anxiety etc.

#### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- To determine the protective factors that shield elderly from psycho-social problems in their families.
- To identify the risk factors that increase the psycho-social problems for elderly in their families.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- What are the protective factors for elderly in their families?
- What are the risk factors for elderly in their families?

#### **SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

Due to the better medication and increasing awareness about the causes and consequences of various epidemic diseases the death rate has declined and the life expectancy is on increase. As a result, the proportion of people crossing the age limit on sixty years is on rapid increase. This phenomenon has resulted in the increasing proportion of graying population. Though the proportion of ageing population is increasing, still, their specific problems remain outside the limelight of scientific knowledge due to the poor attention of researcher to this crucial aspect of society. This study highlights the crucial issues of elderly. By highlighting their issues and finding ways to the solution will turn them from burden to the asset for society.

#### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Elderly maltreatment is found in both urban and rural settings. Comparatively, urban areas experience greater abuse than the rural settings (Mawar et.al., 2018). Literature suggests various types of elderly abuse i.e., physical, psychological, emotional, financial, and sexual. Among them, psychological abuse is reported to be greater than others (Mawar et.al., 2018; Seth et.al., 2019) Furthermore, psychological abuse seems to prevail greater in middle and affluent classes than the lower (Farid, 2017).

With the increasing ratio of graying population, it has become mandatory for society to look into issues of elderly people and frame appropriate policies to address their issue. But the issues that are faced by elderly remain out of limelight and fail to receive attention from media, policy makers and public (Michael K, 2010). Traditionally, Elderly were not only the head of their own families but they commanded respect in their community and were counseled on important matters pertaining to community (Nhongo, 2004). Considered as burden in urban family, elderly had been a valuable

asset in traditional family who performed many important functions for the family. One of the most important functions of elderly in traditional family had been care providing (Sudnongbua, 2011).

Well of elderly persons in urban setting depends on the ability of the elderly persons to cope with the challenges created by disease, the nature of their income, the nature and frequency of social activity and the social support they get from their family members (Harkirit, 2015). Though the children do not want their elderly institutionalized and keep them in old homes. They consider it morally and ethically inappropriate to put their elderly at old homes (Raju, 2002). Elderly abuse is very common malpractice in urban poor families. It is intentional act of neglecting the needs of elderly person (Kumar, 2014).

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Grounded theory is a broad perspective on how to conduct qualitative social science research. It comprises a distinctive methodology, a particular view of scientific method, and a set of procedures for analyzing data and constructing theories. It is the process of inductively generating theories from closely analyzed data. The specific procedures used in grounded theory comprise an array of coding and sampling procedures for data analysis, and a set of interpretative procedures that assist in the construction of theory that emerges from, and is grounded in, the data.

The data was collected through the well-known qualitative method 'interview'. The interview was semi structured. In which we prepared an interview guide which helped us to stick to the predesigned route. During the semi-structured interview process, we had to frame numerous relevant questions emerging from the response of the respondents. Snowball method was used to reach at respondents because it was quite difficult to reach and acquire response from elderly without any reference.

Twenty elderlies belonging to poor families but residing in urban areas were interviewed. As we were selective in choosing the respondents for data collection, so the pattern of the sampling was purposive sampling. Interview schedule/guide was prepared to extract the data from the informants. Both primary and secondary questions were asked. Mix of question types were used i.e., descriptive, storytelling; knowledge etc. the questions were framed in funnel structure, beginning from least sensitive to most sensitive questions. The data was decoded and interpreted manually. Themes were extracted and data has been presented under various themes. The data has been analyzed in the form of text.

This study followed proper ethical standards. The objectives of the study were told to the elderly, and it was conveyed that their participation was voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw from the at any stage. Besides, a separate permission was sought for recording the interview. The real names of the respondents were kept hidden. Lastly, while interviewing the respondents were not asked any disturbing questions which could put him against their own family if they answered.

## DISCUSSION

The nature of residence plays crucial role in the social-psychological health of elderly. During the research we found that if the accommodation offered to elderly is comfortable enough, it contributes a lot to the social and psychological well being of elderly. This study unveiled many forms of residential arrangements of elderly persons. Traditionally, the residential patterns of parents have been patriarchal, where the parents prefer to live along the male married child instead of female married child. It is considered against the cultural mores to live with the married daughter in the house of son-in-law and consuming food from their house. No male elderly was observed living with married daughter.

Female elderly, namely Noor Bibi, 74 years old was living with her married daughter even though she had two married sons as well. It was observed that she was not satisfied with the attitude of daughters-in-law, which is why she preferred to live along with the married daughter instead of married sons.

Elderly, namely Abdul Majeed, was living in a joint family, where all his married sons lived together. Rest of the elderly who were interviewed was observed living with their one son, either the eldest one or youngest one. In most of the cases elderly reported living with youngest son. As elder keep separating their families after marriage and babies and elderly are thus finally left with youngest son.

Power, the ability to influence other's behavior, affects the self-esteem of any person. The level of power determines the degree of self-esteem. More the power a person enjoys greater the self-esteem is felt. This study discovered many social factors behind the degree of power enjoyed by elderly. The power of elderly was inquired in three steps ranging from most to least. The elderly who claimed decision making on major issues of family unquestionably were believed to enjoy greatest power. The elderly, who were merely consulted on major issues, were believed to enjoying moderate power. Whereas, the elderly who were not even asked suggestions on various family issues, were believed to enjoy least power in family.

During the study we found that the male respondents were more likely to enjoy power pertaining to important family matters. Education can be the factor behind their power as all five respondents, who reported enjoying significant power over family matters, were literate and the exceptionally, the sixth one who reported no say in family matters was illiterate one. Apart from their own education, they had got their all children educated; means those elderly who enjoyed greater power over family matters their children were educated and well settled.

Besides the literacy factors, parenting style seem to play role behind having significant power over family matters. Abdul Majeed, who claimed that "each and every matter of family is decided by me". When we asked the reason behind that much level of obedience on the part of family members, he answered, "I don't intervene in the private matters of life of my children. I have given them reasonable autonomy with respect to their personal affairs. This is why they empower me with the important decisions with respect to family matters and obey

me unquestionably". He reported further that he never even suggests anything to his married children unless they themselves bring any matter for asking my suggestion.

Study revealed greater sense of powerlessness in female respondents. Neither of any female respondents claimed for enjoying decision making pertaining to important family matters. Partly this can be attributed to the patriarchal structure of our society. One of them, namely, Rabia, who was matriculated, reported that, though, she has no any say in important matters of family, yet their male married children consult the matters with me. This can be attributed to the literacy of female responds which enable her to come up with workable suggestions proposing before married children.

Study discovered powerlessness was not solely felt in female respondents. A male elderly respondent, namely, Aslam, who was widower, reported that he was feeling deep sense of powerlessness. His suggestions are never taken seriously, while decision making is very far cry. This was the exceptional case of powerlessness in male elderly respondents. This can be attributed to the state of widowhood. Widow elderly depends over daughters-in-law for personal needs like clothing, food and other. Dependence creates hostile atmosphere in family when any time any need remains unfulfilled. This produce anger in the widower elderly and in return the behavior of family members turns aggressive.

Four types of services were found during the study. All the elderly, both male and female, reported they served their families by going to market and buying vegetable, fruits, and other important items of consumption needed at home. They were not forced to do this rather they reported they did it by their own wish as it was necessary to move somewhat physically in order to remain physically fit. So, they considered this service as their physical exercise. Culture of the society does not allow women or girls to go outside the home alone. It is against the local mores if any girl or women moves outside home alone even for her various needs. Elderly serves very important function in this respect. They take the girls or women along them outside the home. May it be the need of medical checkup, attending any ceremony or going to tuition etc. Such families who do not have elderly at home suffer in this respect.

Financial status of elderly play very important role in the social life and psychological health of the elderly. If an elderly has a source of personal income, he does not need to depend on family members for fulfillment of his/her personal needs. Study revealed that if an elderly has personal source of income he does not look towards family for fulfillment of his/her needs. When he/she does not depend on family, the environment of the family remains least hostile. If an elderly does not have source of personal income, he/she must depend on family members for his/her every personal need. In times, when certain needs of elderly remain unfulfilled in case of dependence on family members, it contributes to hostile environment. This adds psycho-social health of elderly.

Study revealed two types of categories of elderly. First one those who had personal source of income and second those who did not have

any personal source of income. Those who had personal source of income reported greater power over family matters, feeling respected, absence of loneliness and depression, etc. whereas, those who did not have personal income and depended on family for their personal needs, report least power over family matters, least respect and more depression and loneliness.

Study found various patterns of elderly care. Firstly, elderly was looked after by their sons. It is important to note that all the sons were not responsible for looking after elderly but only one, in some cases oldest son and in some cases youngest son, were responsible for looking after their elderly. Gender difference was evident with respect to elderly care. Son was the more likely to be responsible for caring father, whereas daughter was more likely to be responsible for her elderly mother. Male elderly did not feel comfortable with daughter-in-law, so he was more likely to rely on son if he required any care. Whereas female widow elderly also did not report healthy relationship with daughter-in-law, which is why she also relied on married daughter for emotional, social, and mental needs, if she lived nearby her. But she had to rely on daughter-in-law for her physical needs.

Study revealed various aspects of behavior of family members to their elderly. Elderly who was literate, they were more likely to report as being respected by their family members. Apart from that another social determinant which caused elderly to be respected was the level of dependence. Elderly who depended least on the family members were more likely to report being respected by their family members. Gender difference was evident in this regard. Male were more likely to be respected as compared to the female elderly.

Elderly who had to spend their whole of the day at home reported some form of disrespect meted out to them by their family members. Again, the gender difference was evident. Female elderlies were likely to be disrespected by their family members as compared to the male elderly respondents. When they were further inquired and asked who they would blame for disrespect. Female elderly blamed their grandchildren, especially female grandchildren for disrespecting them. One male elderly respondent, namely Abdul Aziz, explained that though he is respected by the son and his family, but he has also other sons who live separate from him. They and their families do not respect him; they don't give him any regard.

Elderly is at greatest risk of retardation of mental health. Study discovered various social factors which contributed to their poor mental health. Loneliness is an important mental trauma, where elderly feels disconnected by the people surrounding them. Except those elderly who were running their shops, rest of all elderly respondents reported experiencing loneliness. They were inquired the reason behind loneliness. Two main reasons were discovered during the study. Firstly, both male and female elderly respondents attributed their feelings of loneliness to the death of spouse. Spouse is very important source of social interaction. They share and care each other. Absence of spouse renders other in a state where he is unable to share his feelings. This brings him/her loneliness. Secondly, sense of loneliness was prevalent among those who had spouse even. They

attributed their loneliness to the absence of any work. They believed they have to pass their day by counting moments. Contrary to them, those elderly who were running own shops reported no feelings of loneliness. This is evidently attributed to their busy day.

Apart from loneliness the feelings of depression were found in the elderly respondents. There were, off course, certain social situations which stimulate the feelings of depression in elderly. Those elderly who reported the feelings of depression attributed it to the behavior of their family members. One female elderly, Rabia, who reported that she experiences the feelings of depression, attributed to the ignorance on the part of family members. She explained that when she needs anything, and her family knows that need, still if they ignore that need and despite her repeated reminding, they remain ignorant of her need, then she becomes depressed due to that attitude of her family. When she was asked who she would blame most in her family. She held son and daughter-in-law equally responsible for ignoring her needs.

Any behavior, on the part of family members, that offends an elderly physically, emotionally, socially, mentally, or financially that constitutes elderly abuse. Study did not find any physical abuse. No elderly, male or female reported physical abuse on the part of family members. Male elderlies were more likely to suffer emotional and mental abuse. One male elderly, Abdullah, reported that sometimes his daughter-in-law pass such comments which hurt him emotionally. The worst victim of elderly abuse was the female elderly. Female elderly respondent was more likely to face the financial abuse. No male elderly respondent reported financial abuse that is the misuse of money of the elderly that he gets from his personal sources. One women elderly respondent, Noor Bibi reported financial exploitation of her personal money that also constitutes abuse. She explained that she gets money from Benazir Income Support Program through card. She gives card to his son for withdrawing money from nearby ATM machine. He does not give her full amount. Grabbing half of money and returning the remaining to her mother.

Study revealed that women elderly was more likely to suffer abuse as compared to male elderly. This can be partly attributed to frequency of time one passes at the home. Women elderly spends more time at home than the male elderly. This puts her at the risk of abuse. Secondly, male elderly has comparatively more aggressiveness than women elderly which helps him defending himself from the exploitation of his family members.

#### **FINDINGS**

- Elderly who has the privilege of separate room have less problems with their families.
- Living with married daughter seems to be protective factor for female elderly.
- Male elderly face lesser problems as compared to female elderly.
- Educated elderly seems to be in good condition than uneducated.
- Elderly who gives autonomy to their married children report higher satisfaction.

- Elderly having personal source of income report lesser problems with family.

#### **LIMITATIONS**

- This study was conducted on the elderly who belong to poor families. The psycho-social problems vary significantly with the variation of class, gender etc. so this study will be able to highlight the psycho-social problems of elderly belonging to poor families. Such finding may not apply to the elderly belonging to rich families.
- While determining the mental and emotional health no tool was used for measurement. Simply they were asked to report their feelings, such as do you feel loneliness? Why do you feel it?
- Due to the mood swings of elderly, many questions which seemed somewhat sensitive, were not asked and were escaped. This may have left some loops in the study.
- Few elderly respondents were interviewed in the presence of their family members. As we could not move them from the place as we were the guest. And were present at their place so did not have power or even courage to ask them to move from there; otherwise, we could lose the opportunity to interview the respondent. The presence of their family members might have affected the response of elderly.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Elderly who had been revered in traditional society have lost their dignity in the modern society. They had been very important source of keeping the families together, intermediating the conflict between two brothers, moral development of the grandchildren etc. due to the loss of such functions modern society witnesses extreme conflict among families, and high level of juvenile delinquency. Elderly had been the important agents of socialization. They used to tell the stories to their grandchildren which contained moral lessons. Modern society witnesses the loss of this crucial function. Due to poor interaction between elderly and their grandchildren, we find low level of morality in children of the society.

We saw in this study that the level of dependence affects the well being of elderly. Those elderly who depended least on family with respect to their financial and physical needs, they had reported healthy relationship with their families. Poor elderly who are almost illiterate, have never been in any service, thus expecting no fringe benefit, are in the worst state, looking towards their children for even their minor needs. Children who are also poor, with less income and more children, hardly meeting both ends meet, find it difficult to bear the expenses of their elderly. So, if like the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), any such program might be started for the elderly belonging to such poor, low-income families, it would boost the well being of elderly in such poor families. When they would have personal money, they would no more be burden on their children.

It was seen that the availability of spouse improved the chances of emotional, mental, and social well-being of elderly. Those elderly



who had spouse reported significant mental and social health. The values of modern society discourage the remarriage of widow or widower. Widow elderly cannot even express the desire of remarriage. They do not die for sexual needs, but marital bond is very important source of emotional and mental support. She can never express the desire for remarriage. Sometimes widower brings out courage to express the desire for remarriage due to which questions are raised about his morality by his own children.

Elderly remarriage is very rich area where research needs to be conducted. It should be researched that what are the cultural, social, psychological, and economical factors which prevent widower to express the desire of remarriage. It should also be researched that which behavior on the part of children is faced by elderly widow when they express the desire for remarriage. Additionally, it should also be researched that when a widower remarries despite the opposition of family members, how he is behaved and treated by his family members after marriage.

It was noticed that those elderly who did not interfered in the personal lives of family members, they were more likely to be respected by their families. They reported significance influence over the important matters of family. This point should be conveyed to the elderly that the time is different now. They must adopt the changing environment. They should not desire to move children on their whims. Rather children should be given autonomy with respect to their personal lives. These teachings should be imparted to elderly through media, mobile phone messages, newspapers etc.

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