

**EMOTIONAL AND ECONOMICAL ASPECTS OF AGED PEOPLE
LIVING AWAY FROM THEIR CHILDREN: CASE STUDY OF
DEHRADUN**

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ABSTRACT

Aging is a process that is characterized by a lifespan where an individual looks back at his/her life and previous accomplishments. Old age is marked by adjustment to psychological (emotional and social isolation) and socio-economic changes. This requires continuous coping skills that can help the elderly to adapt to such changes. The situation analysis shows that the population of elderly is growing every year in India. Thus, it is important to shift our focus toward the elderly community that feels highly neglected and isolated because their children are away from home. The present study has been conducted to get an insight into the current status of the elderly parents whose adult children are living indifferent cities or countries. The focus of the study is on elderly parents residing in Dehradun. The survey conducted, throws light on the psychological and economic impact in terms of 'empty-nest syndrome' (loneliness), depression, poor socio-economic condition and deteriorating health conditions of the senior citizens.

Keywords: elderly, empty-nest syndrome, economic condition, emotional impact, Dehradun.

Introduction

Elderly or old age is defined as the age that is near the average life span of a human being. The Government of India in January, 1999 adopted the 'National Policy on older persons' which states 'senior citizen' or 'elderly' as a person who is of and above the age of 60 years.

It has been seen that the average life expectancy of an individual has increased in the last few decades due to the improved healthcare worldwide. India is also witnessing such a trend. According to the Census of India, the life expectancy of an Indian was 52 in 1975. Today an average Indian man lives beyond 67 years and women about 70 years. Looking at the statistics it is confirmed that increased longevity and lifespan also mean that there are more elderly people than before in our country. Census 2011 indicates that from 56.5 million elderly in 1991, the

number of elderly (those above 60) has increased to 103.2 million in 2011, the largest ever in the country's history. With such an increasing number every year by 2050 India will have a large section of senior citizens to look after. A large portion of the elderly population will be very old (80 and above) and will consist of more widows, as women tend to live longer. Most of this ailing, frail population would be living in villages. According to the census report of 2011 there are around 73 million people above the age of 60 years in rural areas and 30.6 million in urban areas. The life expectancy at birth during 2009- 2013 was 69.3 for females as against 65.8 years for males. At the age of 60 years average remaining length of life is found to be about 18 years (16.9 for males and 19.0 for females) and that at age 70 was less than 12 years (10.9 for males and 12.3 for females). The old age dependency ratio has increased from 10.9% in 1961 to 14.2% in 2011 for India as a whole. For females and males, the value of the ratio recorded in 2011 was 14.9 % and 13.6%.

In India, majority of its population is aged less than 30, so the problems and issues of the elderly have not been given much importance and consideration. However, with the rapid changes in the social situation and the emergence of more nuclear families in last two decades , the elderly people have begun to feel emotionally, physically and financial vulnerable. These needs are to be addressed by the policy makers and administrators at central and state governments, voluntary organizations and civil society.

Constitutional provision for Senior Citizens

Indian constitution has mandated the well-being of older persons under Article 41, a Directive Principle of State Policy. The article states that "the State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want." The constitution has also made social security the concurrent responsibility of the Central and State Governments.

Legal Obligations for maintenance of parents

Section 125, of the Criminal Procedure Code, section 4 of the 'Hindu Adoption & Maintenance Act, Maintenance and Welfare of Parents Act and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act 2007, deal with the concerns of Senior Citizens in India and lays down rules for their maintenance.

Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act 2007 provides for:

- a) Maintenance of Parents/ senior citizens by children/ relatives made obligatory and justifiable through Tribunals
- b) Revocation of transfer of property by senior citizens in case of negligence by relatives

- c) Penal provision for abandonment of senior citizens
- d) Establishment of Old Age Homes for Indigent Senior Citizen
- e) Protection of life and property of senior citizens
- f) Adequate medical facilities for Senior Citizens

Empirical Evidence:

Study undertaken by Help Age India 2017 in Urban India reveals that nearly 90 per cent of the elderly, who have worked, in the informal sector, where they did not receive social security coverage, like pension and medical claim, post retirement, continue to work beyond retirement age or suffer from neglect and alienation.

Study conducted by Help-Age on India's 80+ population in rural India shows that majority of the population in the age group of over eighty years lives in rural areas that have the least facilities for the necessary special health and family care. Majority of these elderly people suffer from disability, chronic disease, terminal illness, dementia and depression, accidents, falls, nutritional deficiencies, loneliness, vulnerability to crime, dependence on others, and frequently in need of urgent support measures. Women in this age group are more vulnerable. An overwhelming portion of this group are widows who, in India, suffer multiple miseries—being women, being widows, being poor, leading longer and more agonizing lives than men. This ageing population, with numerous problems needs urgent attention.

According to a study published in **Neurosciences in Rural Practice in 2010**, about 22 per cent of the elderly in India or every fifth elderly in the country is depressed. The worldwide average of the depressed is 10.3 per cent. The research undertaken by **United Nations Population Division (UN 2011)** foresees India's older population to increase dramatically over the next four decades, the share of India's population aged 60 and older is projected to climb from 8 percent in 2011 to 19 percent in 2050 and life expectancy at birth is projected to reach 74 years, by 2050. According to this study the by mid-century, India's 60 plus population is expected to encompass 323 million people, a number greater than the total U.S. population as in 2012. This increase is expected to bring policy challenges due to changing family relationships and limited old-age income support.

The National Family Health Survey conducted in India in 2005-2006 examined the living arrangements by households. The survey found that more than four out of five (78 percent) Indians aged 60 and more lived in the same household with their children, while about 14 percent lived with only wife/husband and 5 percent lived alone. During the same period, the share of older Indians living with their children declined by about 7 percentage points.

A number of trends may explain these changes in living arrangements, including rural to urban migration for employment that separates families, and changing social expectations regarding intra-family obligations (Bloom et al. 2010). Recent surveys confirm this shift in attitudes. 40 percentage decline was seen in the attitude of adult children for whom caring for their elderly parents was their duty—from 91 percent in 1984 to 51 percent in 2001 (Ramamurti and Jamuna 2005, cited in Uppal and Sarma 2007).

Inter-generational conflict may also explain why elderly live in separate residences from their offspring. Both generations may prefer living separately and there is evidence that even when they reside apart, adult children and elderly parents remain economically and socially interdependent (Husain and Ghosh, 2011). In the future, Bloom (2011a) argues that India's system of family-based support will not be able to withstand the increased numbers of older Indians.

Age-well Research & Advocacy Centre New Delhi-Carried out nationwide survey in 2010 to identify and understand the problem of isolation in old age. The survey was conducted in 20 states across India, on sample size of 10000 persons in the age group of 60 plus, the major findings were that 83.71% older persons were found isolated in old age. 8371 older said that they feel isolated or experience loneliness. Level of isolation in old age of older persons living in urban areas was quite higher up to 89.8% in comparison to older persons of rural areas, where 77.62% people reportedly feel isolated. Majority of older persons (44.23%) said that no/less interaction with family members or within society is major cause of their state of isolation or loneliness. 37.81% elderly feel isolated because they were living alone or with their spouse only. 37.81% elderly feel isolated because they were living alone or with their spouse only.

The rapidly ageing population is a matter of worry for India because of two reasons. One, attitude towards the elderly is changing. Though India's traditional philosophy requires children to look after their parents, nuclear families have little time or resources for their old parents. Increased migration from rural areas also forces the younger generation to leave their elders alone, back home. Finances are stretched and healthcare expensive. Depression has emerged as another common ailment among the aged.

It has been widely seen that with the growing number of elderly in India there are no such amenities that are provided to them to cater to their needs. They are at the mercy of their children or the lifetime savings made by them, which is just enough for them to have their basic needs met. The elderly suffer from depression and loneliness because of the fact that their children stay away from them. This is the feeling of empty-nest syndrome, which Merriam Webster Dictionary defines as a "feeling of prolonged sadness, loss, or emptiness that is often

experienced by a parent whose children have grown up and moved away from home that takes over them leading to various other health problems”.

CASE STUDY OF DEHRDUN:

Survey was conducted to investigate the situation and factors that influence the life quality of a sample of older adults in Dehradun. .

Sample selection

The following study was conducted in Dehradun district in the state of Uttarakhand. The total sample was 3000 elderly. A door to door survey was conducted, and elderly above the age of 60+ years were selected.

Analysis of the data

For conducting the study, a written informed consent was obtained. The survey consisted of brief questionnaire in which the participants were asked to respond to the 26 questions by choosing an option that suits them the best. Study variables included socio-demographic parameters such as age, sex, education, occupation, socioeconomic status, and marital status.

Areas surveyed in Dehradun	No. of families interviewed	Members in the family and Children working out of Dehradun
Vivek Vihar pocket 2	20 families	4 – 5 members 15 families have children pursuing higher education or working outside Dehradun
Mohit Nagar	30 families	4 – 5 members 22 families have children pursuing higher education or working outside Dehradun
Vijay Park extension	49 families	4 – 5 members 35 families have children living outside Dehradun for jobs or for higher education purposes
Kaulagarh Road Rajender Nagar Street No.- 1 Street No.-2 and	40 families	5 – 6 members 35 families have children living in cities other than Dehradun for higher studies/ job

Street No.-8		
Rajpur Road Jakhan	30 families	4 – 5 members 22 families have children living outside Dehradun for jobs or higher education
Siddharth enclave GMS Road	22 families	4 – 5 members All families have children either studying or working outside
Clement town	57 families	4-5 members 53 families have children either studying or working outside
Majra	52 families	4-5 members 48 families have children either studying or working outside
Race Course	44 families	4-5 members 38 families have children either studying or working outside
Raipur	15 families	4-5 members 10 families have children either studying or working outside

The purpose of the study was to determine the prevalence of depression and loneliness among the elderly whose children are staying away from home and the economic conditions for the elderly.

Case Study of Urban Dehradun

During the sample survey 3000 elderly were interviewed in different urban areas of Dehradun. The following qualitative result was obtained after analyzing the data”

This data reveals that more than 50 per cent youth are pursuing their education in colleges outside Dehradun after completing their schooling from schools like St. Josephs Academy, Convent of Jesus and Merry, St. Thomas College, Bright Lands, Carman school, St. Judes, Cambrain Hall, Marshall school, Asian School, Aryan school, Summer Valley school. Most of

the students in the residential schools come from cities other than Dehradun in case there is no loss of educated youth. Those young men and women who went out of Dehradun for further studies preferred to take up jobs in metropolitan cities. 45 per cent men and women who completed their higher studies in Dehradun went out to work in bigger cities in the hope of finding a lucrative career. In many cases the absence of children has caused emotional and social isolation, depression and loneliness among the parents, which hampers their overall well-being.

Psychological Impact

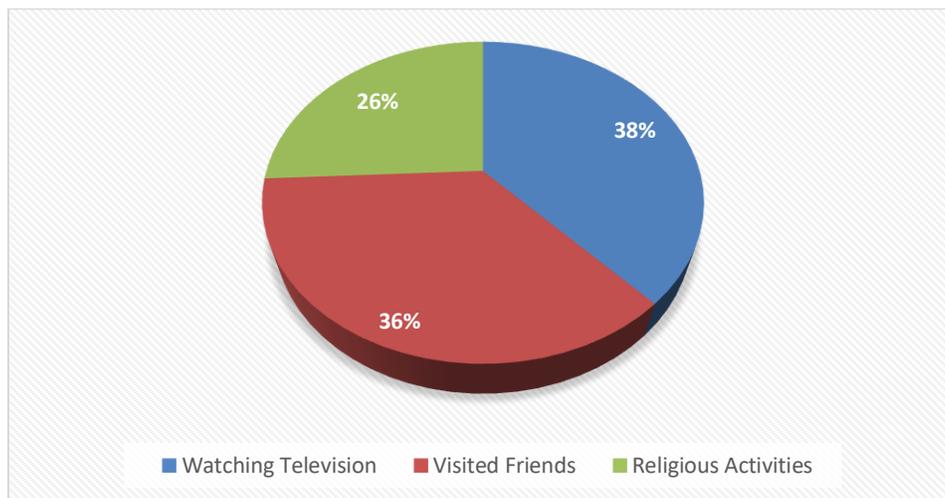
Emotional Isolation: Emotional isolation can affect everyone but older people are particularly vulnerable after the loss of friends and family, reduced mobility or limited income. Emotional isolation leads to loneliness and depression, caused due to an “empty-nest syndrome”. The empty-nest syndrome is a new concept for elderly who feel a longing for their children, away from home or outside India. The present survey revealed that 71 per cent of children chosen as samples are staying away from home. In last decade thousands of young, vibrant, highly educated youth of Dehradun left their homes to either find work outside the state or to work outside India. Many, who moved away, were software engineers and computer technicians. Large number of such youth received permanent residency in other parts of India or abroad and a temporary work shift became the shift of a lifetime. Across Dehradun there are many elderly couples who experience being left all alone and parent-orphaned ; as their children left Dehradun to get better lives outside the district or abroad leaving their parents behind all alone and emotionally isolated. It is common for the elderly to feel emotionally isolated where they have none to share. The survey revealed that, 55 per cent of the elderly interviewed would like to visit their children more often due to emotional isolation. It was also found that 72 per cent percent of elderly preferred not to inform their children about their emotional isolation. The parents tend to hide their feelings of sadness probably because of the thought that they don't want to disturb or trouble their children with their emotions.

Social Isolation: Social isolation and loneliness are precipitated by a number of factors, including living alone, health problems and disability (Bailey, 2017). During the survey, it was reported that the elderly feel socially isolated because they are more homebound because of their growing age and lack of social circle. The sad state of affairs is that their children too do not visit them very often. The survey focused on the number of times children visited their parents so that the elderly feel less socially isolated. It was found that only 20 per cent of children visited their parents once a month, 25 per cent once in six months and 15 per cent visited them yearly (See Figure 1).The survey revealed alarming state of affairs where 32 per cent elderly visited their children rarely and only 28 per cent visited them yearly. With the results obtained from the survey, it is clear that the elderly feel isolated socially where they do not have their children staying with them and they try to make efforts to deal with the social isolation through being

active on the social media sites. The survey found that 56 percent educated elderly with the working knowledge of internet, use the social networking sites like face book, whatsApp..

Depression: How close does an older person live to his/her children and how often they see them, has an impact on how isolated and lonely they feel. Older people who see their children once a month or less are twice as likely to feel lonely than those who see their children every week. For 10 per cent of older people, their nearest child lives more than seven drive away (220 miles plus) loneliness is one of the leading cause for depression. As the survey has revealed that the elderly fear constant emotional and social isolation, they may experience depressive symptoms as they begin to adjust to their child being away from home. The common symptoms include changes in appetite, staying in constant sad mood, frequent mood changes, disturbed sleep pattern, and negative thoughts. Elderly parents miss their children and may be triggered by the sight of their child's empty room and have frequent memory flashes of the time spent with them. With the elderly suffering from the 'empty-nest syndrome' might lead to depression if there are very little means of diversion or social net working. The survey revealed that 38 per cent elderly resort to watching television, 36 per cent reported visiting friends and 26 per cent reported being involved in religious activities so as to keep themselves busy as it makes it easy to overcome loneliness and depression (See Figure 2).

Figure 2: Ways Elderly Share their Loneliness

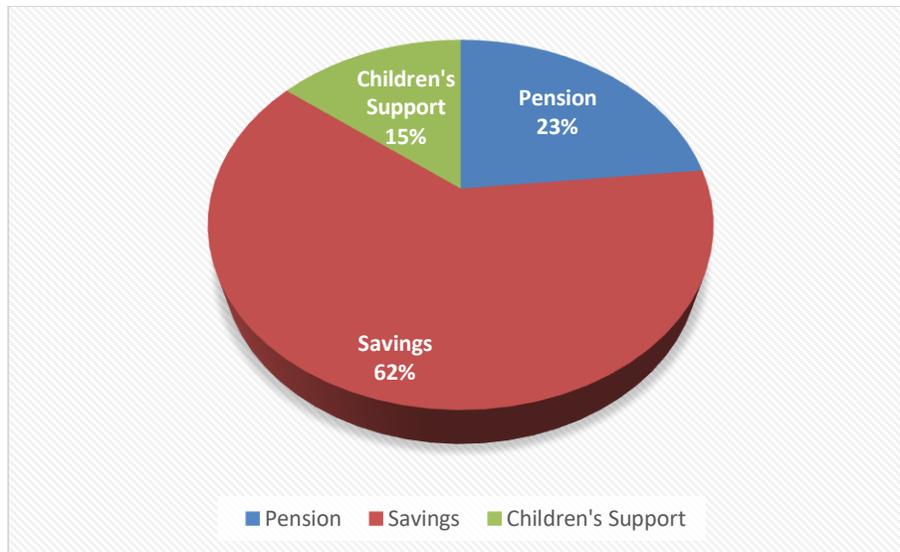


Impact of Isolation on their health: According to a study using data from the U.S National “Social Life, Health, and Aging Project, regardless of the causes of isolation and depression, elderly who feel lonely, depressed and isolated are more likely to have poor physical and mental health”. The feelings of loneliness are linked to poor cognitive performance, quicker cognitive decline and the increased risk of dementia. Socially and emotionally isolated seniors are more

likely to predict that their quality of life will get worse, and are more concerned about needing help from community programs as they get older and depressed. The survey revealed that half of the percentage of the elderly (51 per cent) suffered from various diseases showing the poor health conditions.

Economic condition: The old age is marked by deteriorating physical and mental capabilities. The dependence of the elderly on their children is thus justified. The survey threw light on the socio-economic condition of the elderly in Dehradun, where it was found that 62 per cent are using their own savings for living, 23 per cent are using their pensions for meeting their end, 15 per cent of the elderly are on children’s support to live a life with basic needs (See Figure 3). With increase in inflation, hiked food prices, the cost of living has also become difficult. The cost of living is directly proportionate to the standard of living, thus, the limited savings that they have are only enough for their subsistence needs, and as a result they lead a life where budget is a major constraint. Initially Uttarakhand state was known to follow a money order economy where children used to send money to their parents, but survey reveals that Uttarakhand is no more a money order economy.

Figure 3: Economic Condition of the Elderly



Conclusion

The present results of the survey throws light on the emotional, social and economic condition of the elderly in Dehradun. It is evident that the elderly suffer from “empty-nest syndrome” marked by loneliness and depression. The elderly feel emotionally and socially isolated which has been affecting their health conditions leading to various diseases. The alarming results of the survey

draws our attention to the complete neglect toward the elderly. Also, the present survey reveals the economic condition of the elderly where the budget has become a major obstacle leading to a standard of living which is very basic.

Recommendation

The survey has revealed some striking concerns for the elderly. Thus, the researchers would like to suggest some measures that can be taken into consideration to improve the conditions of the elderly.

The suggestions are as follows:

- The government should initiate more social welfare scheme, with main focus on welfare of elderly population.
- Encourage joint family system as it has been the tradition of our culture to live together in same house or build houses closer to one's relatives so that there are frequent meetings and social interactions with their friends and relatives.
- The adult children could reach out to their parents frequently through phone, WhatsApp chat and social media. Technology has made it possible to have a daily interaction with each other at no cost at all. This will give the elderly a sense of belongingness and satisfaction of being loved by their children.
- The children must realize the universal truth that one day they will also get old and go through the same mental and physical vulnerability that their parents are passing through, hence they must visit them more often. If due to long distance frequent visiting is not possible the children can arrange for their local friends or relatives to visit their parents. This can also remove the isolation of the parents.
- The elderly people have the desire to feel useful in the house and society. They can be made to have a sense of purpose by involving them in local welfare schemes. In Urban India it is a common practice to have societies, working in the areas of colony welfare, community welfare and adult education schemes. The elderly people could be involved in these schemes. Participating in activities that give back are really important. Providing them with programs during the day to give them a sense of purpose will keep depression out, allowing them to remember their good times.
- The health insurance program for the people up to 65 years should be extended beyond this age.
With the increase in life expectancy 65 years of age is too short for such measures.
- The Integrated Program for Older Persons" (IPOP) launched in 1992, and revised in 2008 and 2015 for the welfare of Senior Citizens has laid down for the creation of Old Age Homes for elderly who had no one to care for them. In Dehradun there is an acute lack of

these Homes. The state government needs to set up well maintained Old age Homes, which are equipped with good health care.

- The life and property of senior citizen often becomes vulnerable e to crime committed against them by their own servants or nefarious relatives. The state government needs to have a area wise data of such senior citizens and offer them protection of life and property through police patrolling and frequent visits by Social welfare personnel.
- It has often seen that the elderly people have to stand in long ques to get their family pension from the bank. The government should make an arrangement to have their pension delivered at their doorstep every month.
- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has implemented the National Programme for the Health Care for the Elderly (NPHCE) since the year 2010-11. Under this scheme preventive, curative and rehabilitative services to the elderly persons at various level of health care are delivered In the two civil hospitals that Dehradun has there is lack of sufficient facilities in the geriatric departments. There is need to strengthen healthcare facilities for elderly at various levels in the district.
- Dehradun as a city needs to focus on expanding the industrial area so that more job opportunities are available. With the growing job opportunities, the children moving away from home for better jobs will be refrained. This will further reduce the loneliness and depression (“empty-nest” syndrome) of the elderly caused by their children living away from them.

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