

Old Age People: A Socio-Economic View of their Problems in Peshawar City, Pakistan

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Abstract

This paper presents various socio-economic problems of the elderly people in the urban area of Peshawar, the capital city of the North West Frontier Province. The study finds that the people aged 60 and above felt discomfort at their homes for not taking their consent in all important decisions related to family affairs; providing no proper opportunity to establish social contacts on regular basis with their relatives or neighbourers; and not facilitating their entertainment or excursion. They, being no more contributory to family finances, were feeling a liability on their respective families as no attention was paid to their economic needs and proper medical treatment. Pension was the only source to fulfill their desires. The study recommends for giving proper attention to solve their problems such as participation in important decisions related to family affairs through direct actions by relatives or through various channels of communication and religious scholars in sermons.

Key Words: Decision-making, social contacts, economic position

Introduction

Apart from biological, aging is a series of transition from one set of social roles to another structured by the social system of a society. The age categories such as infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, middle age, and old age are the inexorable stages of human life being determined in biological and socio-economic conditions. Old age is categorized into different groups: physiological, biological, functional and emotional. Physiological aging is concerned with behavioral and individual changes; biological aging focuses on changes taking place in the structure and function of the human body;

identical age group in terms of those within the group being incapable to uphold their functions in society; and finally emotional aging describes changes in one's lifestyle and attitude reliant on one's self-perception of being old (Ayranci and Ozdag, 2005). Old age is normally the final stage of life cycle and it frightens every one in view of not helping others rather being dependent on others economically and in other matters of life. As for the physiological structure is concerned, old men are mostly short-tempered and people consider it the second 'childhood of them', demanding for their care and attention. If they fail to get their desirable things, they become depressed and loose health due to feelings of helplessness. Problems and other matters related to them are covered in the subject matter of Gerontology, an academic discipline.

The Greek word *Gerontology* is derived from *geron*, which means an old person whereas *logy* means study, so gerontology stands as the study of old persons (Macionis, 2008). It includes studying social, physical and mental changes investigating into the aging process, normal age and age related diseases, problems of the old age, effects of aging population on society, and applying this knowledge to devise programmes and policies for the welfare of the old people (Wikipedia, 2008).). In 1945, the first Gerontological Society was organized and through its journal nearly 50,000 files were compiled on biomedical and social researches related to aging during twenty years from 1954 to 1974 (Woodrup, 1975). On the basis of these researches several theories like disengagement theory, conflict theory and symbolic interactionist theories of gerontologists, sociologists and psychologists came forth. The importance of olders comes forth from different sources.

In the religion of Islam it is has been made mandatory for the youngsters to give full reverence and respect towards their parents. The Holy Quraan has emphasized upon children to be good with their parents; a mother patiently bears her child in weakness after weakness, calling for paying gratitude

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to Allah almighty and then to parents (Holy Quraan 31:14). Likewise, The Holy Prophet (PBUH) has also highlighted the significant position of elders by stating that when a vulnerable person in old age even from other clan comes to you, you give him respect and Allah almighty will reciprocate with such act of kindness at your old age.

With the evolution of society, the problem of old age became stern in highly industrialized and developing countries. Industrialization and modernization created new jobs opportunities but also generated problem of loneliness for elders as they were left at native homes by their youngsters' migration (Cowgill, 1972).

Keeping in view the tremendous services rendered by the elders in different capacity when they were at bloom, the United Nations through its landmark decision in 1991 declared 5th October as an International Day of the older persons to observe across the globe on different forums and also attributed the year of 1999 in commemoration of the old age people (Faiz-un-Nisa and Ikram, 2002).

The Government of Pakistan introduced Social Security scheme Act, 1965, ensuring the provision of pension and benevolent fund. In 1996, the government made further headway towards facilitating them in the form of Employees Old Age Benefits (EOB) Act, to achieve the objective of article 38(c) of the constitution of Pakistan by providing compulsory social insurance. It is observable that in the rural areas of Pakistan, old age people do not feel strange in view of great amount of social cohesion. Unlike, there exists no social proximity in the urban areas of the country, which has created many problems to elders. For this purpose the government of Pakistan initiated facilitating the elderly people of the urban areas by establishing Care Homes at Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi. However, Peshawar and Quetta, provincial capitals of the North West Frontier and Balochistan respectively, are still deprived of this facility. Thus, by identifying the vital gap of psycho-social importance, this study is taken into account to flash the neglected issue of elders into the main bases of sociological concerns. It has been observed that the old age people are suffering from various socio-economic problems and the present study focuses on that in the target area of Peshawar.

Materials and Methods

This study was carried out in Hayatabad, a major cluster of urban population in Peshawar city. A sample size of 60 elderly people having the age 60 years onward were interviewed from six residential

phases of the target area, giving equal representation to each residential phase under the purposive sampling technique. Keeping in view the nature of study it was preferred to collect data under the mix method approach, including both qualitative and quantitative data. No problem appeared in data collection, as respondents mostly remained present at their homes. The sampled respondents happily responded to every question and did not try to conceal facts regardless of any outcome. They were investigated through open ended and closed ended questions on the study parameter such as source of income, health and related problems, participation in decision sharing, social relations, financial position and family's support, and status and perception of the old age people towards all these situations. Qualitative data was collected through Focus Group Discussion (FGD), which contained the following thematic questions.

- Observing the physical and mental conditions of the aged people who participated in FGD.
- Identifying their socio-economic problems mainly focused on social contacts, participation in family related affairs, financial support and desirables etc.
- Ascertaining their perception on the present situation around them.

The quantitative data was analyzed through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and qualitative data by using NVIVO.

Results and Discussion

The quantitative data is presented through comprehended tables along with necessary explanations on the parameters of the study. Qualitative information has been mixed up in discussion made over the quantitative data given in the tables. Both methods of data proved helpful in drawing the results.

Marital status and Age composition of the elderly people

The elements of marital status and age group of the old age people are greatly associated with the accuracy of data. Table 1 shows that 93 % respondents were married and out of them 56.5 % were in the age group of 60-65 years, 26.5 % in the age group of 66-70 years and 10 % were in the age group exceeding 71 years. Only 7 % respondents had single status in the age of 60-65 years

Table 1 Marital Status and Age Groups of Respondents

Marital Status	Age group			Total	% age
	60-65	66-70	Above 71		
Married	34	16	06	56	93
Unmarried	03	01	-	04	7
Total	37	17	06	60	100

Source: Field Survey

It becomes clear from data that majority of the sampled respondents (66.6 %) were in the initial stage of old age and able to answer the queries with full sense and mental concentration. Life long experience and marital status of aged people are related to validity of data.

Income Sources of Aged People

Table 2 presents data regarding economic needs being fulfilled through different sources. A sizeable

number of respondents i.e.73.3% served at different positions before their retirement, 15 % engaged themselves in business activity, 5.1 % used their property as an income source, and 3.3% each depended on their children’s earning and own labouring.

Table 2 Source of Income of the Aged People

Main source of income	Frequency	% age
Pension	44	73.3
Dependent on children	02	3.3
Business	09	15
Own Laboring	02	3.3
Property	03	5.1
Total	60	100

Source: Field Survey

It depicts that a big majority of the aged people (73.3 %) were retired government servants and they depended on their pension amount, which was insufficient to meet their needs/desirables, creating socio-economic inconveniences in their lives. It indicates that family members did not provide any financial assistance and pension amount was the only economic resource they relied on. They did not develop relations with their close relatives for critical economic position and neglecting role of families. The left over role of family members could be associated with the urban environment where individualism supersedes traditional values such as respect for seniors and social proximity with them as a tool of psychological support in the crucial stage of age. It matches the views of Cowgill (1972) who ha

holds the processes of industrialization and resultant urbanization as responsible factors for generation of various kinds of problems for elderly people.

Memory status and physical condition of the respondents

Table 3 depicts that 58.33 % had normal memory to interact with people, 30 % had minor mental weakness and 11.66 % had much mental weakness. Their memory state was checked in discussion through putting some tedious questions time and again in order to gauge the nature of replies reflecting similarity or contradiction.

The second part of the table reveals that 41.66 % respondents appeared in normal physical condition, 30 % looked physically weak and 28.33 % had relatively bad health condition.

Table 3 Memory status and physical condition of the respondents

Memory	Frequency	% age	Physical condition	
			Frequency	% age
Normal	35	58.33	25	41.66
Weak	18	30	18	30
Too weak	07	11.66	17	28.33
Total	60	100	60	100

Source: Field Survey

It becomes easier to state that majority (41.33 %) had weak and too much weak memory which was attention-deserving as they mostly they were in the age group of 60-65 years but even then their memory status was not in sound functional state. A considerable number i.e. 71.66 % (both weak and too much weak) had bad physical condition. Such changes are prospected to be natural as decline stage in life cycle begins after 40 years, but sometimes improper social surrounding and self-perception to be old can precede other realities. Bad physical and mental conditions of sampled respondents were looking a blend of both situations. Here, the categorization of Ayranci and Ozdag (2005) regarding physiological, biological, functional and

emotional changes in old age is also identical to the findings of this study.

Socio-economic Status of Old age people

Socio-economic problems of the sampled old age people have been listed in Table V which indicates that 33 (55%) respondents negated their participation in decision making such as matrimony of youngsters in family, purchase of property and holding of gatherings etc. 31 (51.7 %) had no access to have relations with their relatives and neighbourers, 32 (53.3%) felt inferior on different occasions when ignored, 50 (83.33%) did not get entertainment facility, 43 (73.66%) felt as economic liability and 52 (86.6%) endorsed their non- contributory financial role in their respective families.

Table No 4 Status of the Old age people in different situations

Answer	Problems					
	Participation in Decision Making	Relations with Relatives/ Neighbourers	Feeling inferior	Entertainment	Liability on Family	Not financially contributory
Yes	27	29	32	10	43	52
No	33	31	28	50	17	08
Total	60	60	60	60	60	60

Source: Field Survey

The above data infers that the elderly people (55%) had no active role in family-related decisions. Though it is a general perception in Pukhtun society that old people are very much experienced and their participation in decision-making ensures its positive feedback but in sampled area the situation presents a reverse picture. The reason is that in rural area patriarchy has strong cultural clutches ensuring headship of aged people till their death but in urban society women have a considerable authoritative role which has reduced the importance of old age people. Elaine and Henry (1961) in their theory ‘Disengagement Theory’ have exempted olders from the position of social responsibility in order to ensure the orderly operation of society. It was also observed that majority of sampled respondents (51.7 %) had no opportunity of social contacts with neighbourers/friends/relatives. The family members did not fulfill their responsibility to give proper time to their senior age members themselves and neither paid heed to their problems including no arrangement of meetings on regular basis with their friends, colleagues and other sort of associates. They mostly felt alone and even a liability on family that generates various kinds of negative thinking. Ayranci and Ozdag (2005) have viewed helplessness as an outcome of such situation whereas Emile Durkheim,

in his theory on suicide, sees loss of social integration which can appear in the form of an extreme action.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is concluded on the basis of both quantitative and qualitative data that the elderly people in the target area had various socio-economic problems including no participation in all kinds of family related affairs, no opportunity of entertainment or outing/excursion, no relations with relatives and neighbourers to interact with them in culturally and geographically strange urban environment, and inability to play a strong economic role in families affairs and accomplishment of their economic desires. The study recommends introducing ole age allowance for the aged above 60 years, facilitating them with Internet particularly in the socially alien urban environment, establishing Care Homes in Peshawar and emphasizing upon media to play its vital role through various programmes/ features in highlighting the old age people’s problems developing over time.

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