



Gender Bias in Old Age Care and Economical Aspects

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Abstract

Care is synonymous with family and there is a need to understand the impact of gender in the larger cultural context of industrialisation, modernisation and globalization. In the traditional patriarchal system, senior members were ensured obedience and loyalty through their control over family resources. But with time the status, the moral obligation, and the gender role of caring assigned to women is also changing. The elderly women in India are a little higher in number than their male counterparts. The widowed females are four times more than the widowed males. These elderly women especially widowed face problems such as loneliness, as these women are spending the latter part of their life without any kind of security measures. They are economically vulnerable and are often exploited in the form of service. This paper will highlight the problems faced by older women and the measures to ensure a secure and caring environment. An analysis of their economic status is done and suggestions are made to empower them.

Keywords: Gender Bias, Old Age Care, Economical Aspects, Modernisation, Globalization.

PAPER/ARTICLE INFO

RECEIVED ON: 05/10/2013
ACCEPTED ON: 15/12/2013

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Shalini Gupta (2013)
"Gender Bias in Old
Age Care and
Economical Aspects" *Int.
J. of Trade and Commerce-
IIARTC*,
Vol. 2, No.2, pp. 453-459

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gender bias and population aging are two such topics that have been receiving notable scrutiny in the present time. Population aging is a complex and multi-layered phenomenon that is gaining traction worldwide. With the rise in life expectancy, the aging population is rapidly growing, leading to significant social, economic, and political implications. In 2000, it was noted that 1 in every 10 people was in the age group of over 60, it has been estimated that by 2020, every 1 in 8 people will belong to this age group. One of the prime reasons for population aging is the incredible advancements being made across the fields of healthcare, nutrition, and living conditions. With the population aging, a rising concern for the people is the care of the elderly.

The issue of old age care is one of the most pressing issues facing the world today. With the rising elderly population and increasing demand for quality care and support, the provision of adequate old age care has become a global challenge. The issue of old age care encompasses various aspects, including healthcare, social support, financial security, legal protection, and emotional wellness. The absence of adequate old age care can have a significant impact on the quality of life of older adults, their families, and the community at large.

Gender bias has always been a prevalent and deeply rooted societal constraint in not only India but all across the globe. It affects almost all parts of our daily life; this also ends up including old age care. However, in recent years the government and various voluntary organizations have been trying their utmost best to uproot gender disparity and promote gender equality. Still, a lot of prejudices and discrimination are present in our society, particularly when it comes to the care of our elderly family members.

2. THE PROBLEM OF OLD AGE IN INDIA

Time and its impact on us is something that has always been inescapable. Every human pass through the various stages of life- childhood, adulthood, and old age. In our childhood, it is our parents who carry the responsibility of caring for us, as we transition into adulthood, the older members of our family transition from their adulthood to old age. Another vulnerable phase of life full of problems. As they slowly lose both their physical and mental health, proper care must be provided for them. Money problems arise as this population mainly depends on their pensions and savings, which are limited in amount and also not possible for all. The proportion of old people in India has been on the increase due to the low death rate, leading to a larger portion of our population needing proper old age care in the later phase of their lives.

Old age home was not something that was extremely popular here in India, just a few decades back. Negligence in care for the elderly was considered a 'Western' problem. But with changing times and scientific advancements comes a slew of new problems. India is currently undergoing a demographic transition, where the population is aging rapidly. The proportion of older adults above the age of 65 years is increasing, while the proportion of younger people is decreasing. This has led to a sudden increase in the emergence of old-age homes across the country. This has also caused the problem of 'neglect of the elderly' to take center stage, so much so that India has passed 'The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizen Bill 2006'. Under this bill, the government has made it imperative that the adult children of the elderly are required to look after them.

Old age homes are residential facilities designed to care for elderly people who require help with daily living activities or are no longer able to take care of themselves. These places seem to have become a necessity in today's time. The need for old age homes has increased as the population ages and the number of people living alone grows. In addition, the growing prevalence of chronic diseases and disabilities among older adults has made it difficult for them to fully care for themselves. The lack of family members or caregivers available to provide care for them has also contributed to the rise in demand for old-age homes. The younger generations either refuse or are incapable (financially) of taking care of their older parents, resulting in cases of abandonment or neglect.

While an old age house should not easily be considered as the first option, in certain circumstances it is the better and safer option for the elderly.

3. PROFILE OF SENIOR CITIZENS IN INDIA

The elderly in India feel neglected, isolated, dependent, and abused-

- [i] 90% from the unorganised sector with no social security at the age of 60 (no regular income)
- [ii] 30% of older persons are below the poverty lines
- [iii] 45% have chronic diseases and disabilities
- [iv] 73% literate dependent on physical labour
- [v] 55% widow (many of them with no support)
- [vi] 40% of senior citizens living with their families face abuse in one in six cases to light.

4. AGEING TRENDS IN INDIA

Table 1: Growth of Elderly Population (60+) in India (Census 1951-2001)

Census Years	Magnitude of Elderly Population (in million)		
	Male	Female	Both (M+F)
1951	9.7	9.9	19.6
1961	12.4	12.4	24.7
1971	16.9	15.8	32.7
1981	22.0	21.1	43.2
1991	29.4	27.3	56.7
2001	37.8	38.9	76.6
NSS 2004	33.2	33.2	66.4

Source: Census of India

In the above-shown table, the rapid increase in the number of the older generation in India has been presented. There has been a total of 41.6 million increase in the population of older people, from 1951 to 2004. The increase seems to have accelerated over the years. The number of elderly men and women is almost the same, being equally distributed across all five decades.

5. GENDER ISSUES AND OLD AGE CARE

Care is one of the most important and fundamental United Nations principles that address older persons. In a family, the responsibility of this care for older people generally befalls on the women of the household. There is a need to understand the impact of class, gender, caste, and other factors amid the larger cultural context of industrialisation, modernisation and globalisation. In the traditional patriarchal system, the senior male member of the family ensured his superior position based on the money and resources that he earned. Changes in family size and composition, the role and status of its members, and its guiding ethos have all changed.

Caring is inherently considered feminine, a fundamental part of the identity of women. Women are more likely to enter into a caring relationship because of moral obligation, gender roles, etc. whereas the man will more likely take on such a caring role because he has always shared the household with the spouse or as the unmarried son living with the widowed parent.

6. PROBLEMS OF OLDER WOMEN

The share of elderly women is a little higher than their male counterparts. Incidences of widowhood are much higher among females 60+ than among males of the same age group because it is customary for women to get married to men older by several years, also they do not remarry and live longer. This means that the number of widowed females is as high as four times that of widowed males.

It is highlighted that in many regions aging has to be seen with a focus on women and their needs so that they can lead an active healthy life. The number of widows is increasing all around the globe (Kinsella and Gist, 1998). Women's increasing longevity and lack of physical resources lead to psychological distress and mental illness. Elderly women, especially widowed, are likely to face more problems as compared to elderly men because of differences in their status and role in society. The following factors contribute to the concern:

- Nucleation
- Rise in number of people opting out of marriage
- Trend of increase in single child families (reduced number of children)
- Separation
- Divorce
- Dispersion of children due to migration

All these factors leave today's elderly with fewer families to tend to them in old age.

Studies by the United Nations show that by the year 2025, elderly women will surpass their male counterparts in number, making up about 14.1% of the total population of India.

In accordance with social norms, man has always relied on his wife to take care of him in most traditional settings. This care giving usually continues in old age, implying that an old man can rely on his spouse to take care of him in this vulnerable stage of life. The same cannot be said for old women. These women already face many challenges in the form of limited rights to financial assets and opportunities, and must also carry the heavy burden of not only serving her husband

but also maintaining her health. Many times, these poor women are not shown care by their immediate family and end up facing psychological challenges such of loneliness and depression.

Effects of changing roles, and composition of the family on the elderly:

- Exploitation
- Neglect and apathy
- Economic vulnerability
- Exploitation in the form of service where the mother -in law had to perform all the services
- Absence of emotional support
- Loneliness

7. WOMEN AS CARE GIVERS

When it comes to caring for the elders in a house, almost everywhere their kin or family are the chief providers of the care. And, when one says family, we may as well say that women provide care. Wives, even if they are old, continue to provide care to their husbands, while the converse may not generally be true. Invariably, in their absence, it is the son's wife and daughter-in-law who have to look after the old at home. Thus, caring has been considered a women's domain, which due to increased longevity, invariably stretches well into their old age and at times for as long as they live. Apart from daughters-in-law, the care burden also shifts to the married, widowed, and divorced daughters, many of whom have their children to look after.

The heavy workload of being an unpaid caregiver, not only being responsible for all household chores but also in charge of taking care of the children, contributes heavily to the increased health issues and poor economic conditions of older women in India. As a housewife, usually, they are unable to work for wages and are left to depend solely on their male counterparts in their lives. Thus, they give up their economic security and health in favor of taking care of their family.

8. WORKING WOMEN AND CARING RESPONSIBILITIES

The working women phenomenon has brought about significant economic and social changes over decades, marked by the revolution in gender roles. Work, home, child care, and providing care to the frail and disabled are impacting more and more families. This change in responsibilities and expectations from women has led to a reduced time for care giving.

9. ECONOMIC CONCERNS FOR ELDERLY WOMEN

The concerns related to the economic welfare of elderly women are complex and intricate. These issues that are deeply rooted in the societal structure leave these women highly vulnerable in the later stages of their lives. One of the major issues faced is that of limited savings and income. The situation often becomes worse due to factors such as interrupted or informal employment during their working years, resulting in inadequate contributions to pension schemes and a lack of retirement benefits.

Elderly women, due to cultural and societal norms, may become economically dependent on family members, particularly in the absence of a good support system. This dependency becomes a source of vulnerability, especially when confronted with challenges such as changes in family dynamics or financial instability within the household.

Disparities in the effectiveness of social security programs contribute to economic concerns for elderly women. Some may not have sufficient access to these programs, resulting in gaps in financial support and protection during a period in life when it is most needed.

It has been proven by numerous studies that less than half the population of older women have inherited properties. Widows, especially those who relied on their spouse's pension or retirement benefits, may confront the abrupt cessation of these financial lifelines. In cases where the deceased spouse did not leave behind a comprehensive financial plan, widows can find themselves without the necessary economic support to sustain their needs, particularly in the face of rising healthcare costs.

Lastly, some elderly women may desire or need to work in their later years but encounter employment discrimination. Limited employment opportunities, coupled with discriminatory practices, further hinder their ability to overcome economic challenges.

10. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Factors like the nuclearization of families, the rise in the number of people opting out of marriage, the increasing participation of women in the workforce, the dispersion of children due to migration, and the trend of increase in single-child families, all these factors leave today's elderly with fewer members in the family to look after them in old age. Caring has always been considered a woman's work. At home, it is considered their duty to take care of the elderly. But, with improved medical aid, the longevity of life is increasing and the changing status of women, work, home, child care, and providing care for the elderly is impacting the family. They are raising their voices and resentful to share the responsibilities. In the changed circumstances, even the older are now required to take care of each other. Men as a care giver is an emerging new trend. But the problem can only be solved if the elderly are respected and taken care of and the younger people realize that with time they will also become old. So, to set a healthy social tradition older people should be cared for as old age homes can provide them with good infrastructure, food, and medicine but it cannot be a substitute for emotional security which the elderly need at that stage. There is a definite need to increase awareness about the schemes available for elderly people amongst women. When it comes to retirement plans, it is important to increase funding and programs that include payment flexibility and transparency. Better healthcare facilities should also be made available to elderly women. We need to develop an open mindset toward this issue and be willing to welcome the elderly into our lives. These people devote their entire lives for our sake, we should be respectful of their efforts and not abandon them when they need us the most. Another way of raising awareness in general masses can be targeted advertisements in mass media. Women too need to be aware of this situation and not only think but work towards securing their future by saving early.

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