
**RELATIONSHIP OF AGED WOMEN WITH THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS:
A STUDY IN TWO VILLAGES UNDER DIBRUGARH DISTRICT OF
ASSAM**

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to explore the relationship between aged women and their family members which have an important influence on well-being across the life course. Using feminist perspective the present study tries to examine whether the gender role expectations for aged women stand as a barrier for achieving equal rights with men in their family and to show how this role affects their relationship in old age. The study significantly depicts that maximum number of the aged women have not been ignored by their family members and no gender discrimination has been found in context of age. The relationship of the aged women with their family members is manifested in beatific manner. They even expressed their contentment for getting economic and social security from their family members as well as others.

Keywords: Aged, Relationship, Family, Gender

INTRODUCTION

The relationship of aged people with their family members is of crucial important for different reasons and one which has extreme influence on the elderly member's relationship with non family individuals and organizations (Sinha, 1991). Family members are inextricably linked (Elder, 1998) in important ways through each stage of life, and these relationships are an important source of social connection and social influence for individuals throughout their lives (Umberson &Montez, 2010). Substantial evidence consistently shows that social relationships, especially family relationships, are the most important influences on the health and well- being of the individuals across the life course (Carr & Springer, 2010; House, et al., 1988; Umberson &Montez, 2010) and these family relationships, including social support (e.g., providing love, advice, and care) and strain (e.g., arguments, being critical, making too many demands), can influence well- being through psychological (Reczek & Zhang, 2016; Umberson, 1992),

behavioural, and physiological pathways (Thomas, et al., 2017). Indian family system takes up the role of an insurance cover for the individual. Care of the aged is an inbuilt norm in our traditional family (Malhotra and Chadha, 2007). However, the forces of urbanization, modernization and globalization have brought about major structural and functional transformation in the family, the primary care agency (Batra and Bhumik, 2007; Chakravarthy, 1997; Gokhlae, et al., 1998; Vijaykumar, 1995). Drawing on the importance of changes in the structure and functions of family having its influence on both the young and aged this study aim is to explore the relationship between aged women and their family members which have an important influence on well-being across the life course.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The aged person in the Assamese society occupies a very respectable position and still majority of aged people continue to live in joint families. However with the advent of urbanization, modernization and globalization tremendous changes have occurred in all spheres of life ranging from the structure and functioning of the family to the society. These changes have both positive and negative consequences on the relationship between members in a given family. Thus, the changes in the Indian joint family system has led the emergence of a number of problems are affecting both the young and the aged. Even where joint family are present, it appears to be impossible to provide the necessary care and attention for the aged and left to their own resources for the satisfaction of their needs due to the pressure created by the demands of different forces of changes of present day society. It is in these situations they need good relationship with family members as it is very important for adjustment in old age, so that they can spend their later life properly. Hence, the domain study is an attempt to explore the relationship between the aged women and their family members and to show how modern life style among the younger generation affects the relationship with the aged people.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to explore the relationship between aged women and their family members.

FIELD AND METHODOLOGY

The study is based on aged women living in two villages namely Kapahua and Barbam No. 1 villages of Tengakhat circle located in Dibrugarh district of Assam. Hence, for the purpose of this work, it is essential to provide a brief account of Assam, Dibrugarh district, and Kapahua, Barbam no 1 in particular. **Assam** is an area of 78,438 sq. km with population 31,205,576 (male

15,939,443, female 15,266,133). Population density is 398 per sq. km. According to 2011 census; literacy rate in the state was 73.18%. Male literacy rate was 78.81% and female literacy rate was 67.27%.

Dibrugarh district occupies an area of 3,381 square kilometres. As per 2011, the district has a population of 1,327,748 persons (male 680,114 and female 647,634). Population density is 393 per sq.km. According to 2011 census; average literacy rate of Dibrugarh in 2011 was 76.22%. The male literacy rate was 82.59% and female literacy rate was 69.52%.

(i). Kapahua village is located in Tengakhat circle of Dibrugarh district of Assam. The village Kapahua is situated at a distance of 3 kilometres from the Tengakhat town. The northern boundary of the village is identified by the Chakolibhuriya village, southern by the Choyang village, eastern by the Tengakhat block development office, western by the Nakhangia village. The word 'Kapa' is derived from Assamese word Kapah (cotton). As the implied, once upon a time in that locality the people cultivated good number of cotton trees which gave them better productions. So, the name 'Kapahua' was given to the village and later on in course of time the word 'Kapah' in practice becomes 'Kapa' and the village was named as Kapahua (Kapa means Cotton and Hua means to grow). Assamese is the local language in this village. The village has population of 1129 of which 574(51%) are males while 555 (49%) are females as per population census 2011. Population density of the village is 559 persons per sq.km. Kapahua is known as a sonowal kachari village because of predominance of sonowal kachari population. They all are the same religious group, i.e. Hinduism. In 2011, literacy rate of Kapahua village was 90.20%. In Kapahua village male literacy stands at 94.64% while female literacy rate was 85.45%. As regards to educational facilities, there are four anganwadi schools, one L.P. school. Coming to medical facilities there is only one primary health centre, where minimum facilities for health care are not available. Most of the people of this village depend on the agriculture.

(ii). Barbam no. 1 is one of the village located in Tengakhat circle of Dibrugarh district of Assam. The northern boundary of the village is identified by the Chenibill village, southern by the Telpani village, eastern by the Hatibondha village, western by the Belbari village. The village is situated at a distance of 8 km from the Tengakhat town. The village is dominated by Other Backward Class (OBC) population. Only one religious group i.e. Hinduism found in this village. The word 'Barbam' is derived from Assamese word Bar (Big) and Bam (Shallow). It is said that, once upon a time the soil of that particular region was shallow enough in comparison with surrounding areas and that was why it was not suitable for paddy cultivation. So the name 'Barbam' (Bar means Big and Bam means Shallow) was given to the village. Population density of the village is 384 persons per sq km. The Barbam no.1 village has population of 1197 of which 612 (52%) are male while 585 (49%) are females as per population census of 2011.

Average sex ratio of Barbam no.1 village is 956. As regards to educational facilities there are three L.P. schools in the village and two Anganwadi centre. In 2011, literacy rate of Barbam no.1 village was 74.68%. In Barbam no. 1 village male literacy rate stands at 83.88% while female literacy rate was 65.17%. Assamese is the local language in this village. There is not a single primary health centre. People have to travel several kilometres to reach hospital which is located at Tengakhat town for treatment of patients. The economy of the Barbam no. 1 village is dominated by agriculture for their livelihood.

In this study, out of total 1140 female population, from two villages i.e., Kapahua and Barbam No. 1 village of Dibrugarh district of Assam, 118 women have been found who crossed the age of 60 years and all of them were purposefully considered as respondent by employing census survey method. The data of this study have been collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected with the help of interview schedule, field observation and case studies. On the other hand secondary data were collected from census report, various books, journals, official reports and records, newspapers and internet etc.

ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY

Social background of the individual plays a very significant role in the formulation of an individual personality in both the patriarchal and matriarchal societies. In this study out of 118 respondents, the maximum numbers of respondents 52(44.06%) were within the age group of 60-64. Again 36 (30.50%) were between 65-69 years and 14 (11.86%) were between 70-74 years, 7 (5.9%) were between 75-79 years, 7 (5.9%) were between 80-84 years while 2 (1.6%) of them were above 85 years.

Furthermore, the highest number, i.e., 56 (47.45%) of respondents are illiterate, 40 (33.89%) are read up to primary level, 15 (12.71%) are read up to secondary level, 5 (4.2%) are read up to higher secondary level, while only 2 (1.6%) of them have graduation and above qualification.

In addition, out of total respondents 87 (73.72%) are live in joint families followed by 31 (26.27%) in nuclear families. So far as the family members by exact relationship is concerned, highest percentage of respondents i.e., 96 (81.35%) of them are living with their married son. They are followed by 6 (5.08%) who living only with husband, 5 (4.2%) who living alone, 3 (2.5%) who living with siblings, 2 (1.6%) who living with nephew, 3 (2.5%) who living only with unmarried children, and an equal number of respondents i.e., 1 (0.84%) of them who living with married daughter, unmarried sister, and grandchildren, respectively.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGED WOMEN AND THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS

With the changes in the structure and functions of the family certain changes have taken place in the relationship between aged women and their family members in the study village. Findings show that majority of the respondents i.e., 106 (89.83%) were feel happy at home while only 12 (10.16%) respondents felt unhappy at home, among them (12), 6 (50%) respondents felt unhappy at home due to negative perception of the family members towards them, 4 (33.33%) respondents felt unhappy because family members are not supportive in their activities and 2 (16.67%) respondents felt unhappy because they felt uncomfortable.

The study significantly depicts that majority of the respondents 90 (76.27%) do not felt loneliness at home which is positive aspects in present day society and only a very meagre percentage of respondents with 28 or 23.72% felt loneliness. Out of 28, 19 (67.86%) respondents opined that they felt loneliness due to family members were busy at their work, 6 (21.42%) respondents felt loneliness because they were neglected by the family members, and 3 (10.71%) respondents felt loneliness as they can't move as they like.

In this study it is found that majority of aged women 90 (76.27%) viewed that they do not felt loneliness at home because they have to opportunity to spend their leisure time with grandchildren. Out of 90, 23 (25.55%) respondents were playing with grandchild, 20 (22.22%) respondents were spend their time with grandchild by telling story, 13 (14.44%) respondents were spend their time by walking with grandchild and 34 (37.77%) respondents spend their time watching TV with grandchild. It is reflect that there are strong emotional bonding between the respondents and their grandchildren.

Most grandparents engage in activities with their grandchildren that they find meaningful, feel close to close their grandchildren, consider the grandparent role important (Mahne & Huxhold, 2015; Swartz, 2009), and experience lower well being if they lose contact with their grandchildren (Drew & Sillverstein, 2007). Significantly this study also reveals that 28 (23.72%) respondents have not any opportunity to spend the time with their grandchild. Out of 28 respondents, the grandchildren of 5 (17.85%) respondents were not interested to spend their time with their grandmother. While 23 (82.14%) respondents grandchild have no time because they were busy at their routine activities.

The study also reveals that 112 (94.91%) respondents do not consider themselves as burden of family because of their children respect them and discuss all family matters with them, on the other hand only 6 (5.08%) respondents felt disrespect by the family members and out of 6, 3 (50%) respondents felt disrespect for negligence of family members, 1 (16.67%) respondents felt disrespect due to their family members did not cooperate them in daily activities, 2 (33.33%)

respondents felt disrespect because family members did not want respondents involvement in any family matter.

Significantly the study reveals that out of 118 aged women 96 (81.35%) respondents living with their children. Out of these respondents (96), it is found that 54 (56.25%) respondents have evaluate their relationship with the children living with them as satisfactory, 42 (43.75%) respondents have evaluate their relationship with the children living with them as unsatisfactory. They expressed that though they are living with their children but they do not get proper care and respect from their children.

In this study it is found that out of 118 aged women, highest number of respondents i.e., 98 (83.05%) respondent's family members were discussing all domestic purpose with them. While 20 (16.94%) respondents expressed that their family members were not discussing all domestic purpose with the respondents. Among the 20 , 4 (20%) respondents family members ignore the respondents while discussing domestic purpose, 6 (30%) respondents family members do not want their participation and 10 (50%) respondents expressed that they were unable to participate due to their inactivity.

In the earlier study by Kaur and Kaur (1987) mentioned that the younger generation treats the aged people as a burden and their presence in the family irks most of the family members. Results found in the present study however indicate that the aged women are not ignored by the younger generation and majority of respondents opined that they are treated by young members in their families as friend. Significantly this study reveals that majority of the respondents, i.e., 73 or 61.86% respondents expressed that they got complete cooperation from young generation of their families and they have not feel generation gap between them. While only 45 (38.13%) respondents expressed that they have feel generation gap between the respondents and young generation. Out of 45, 27 (60%) respondents experience of generation gap in understanding, 10 (22.22%) respondents in communication, 4 (8.88%) respondents in affection and an equal number of respondents i.e., 2 (4.44%) respondents in free discussion and morale value, respectively. But it was clearly noticed that there are very comfortable and good relationship and interaction of aged women with young generation in the study area.

In a study Mishra (1987) examined that majority of the respondents have evaluate their relationship with the family members living with them as good, and a smaller portion of them are having conflicts quite often with their family members and differences of opinion and financial problems are the most prevalent reasons for the conflict. The findings of the study also reveal that out of 118, only 38 (32.20%) respondents have conflicts with the family members. Out of these (38), a very meagre percentage of respondents (8 or 21.05%) were experiencing conflict quite often, 10 or 26.31% were sometimes and 20 or 52.63% were experiencing conflict rarely in

their relationship with family members. Significantly among them majority of the respondents were reported that indiscipline as the main reason of conflict quite often among the aged women.

CONCLUSION

Old age is being considered as social problem all over the world and most of the time the aged parents are left behind to live alone in present day society. On the other hand many of the aged women are compelled to sacrifice self interests and like to adjust for the well being of the whole family members though they are discriminated by their family members in comparison to their counter parts.

But this study significantly depicts that they are still a very respectable position and the aged women acknowledged and celebrated their relationship with their family members. They are active and able to render their advice and expertise in important family matters. They never feel problems in their interactions with family members, but experience some new and unexpected challenges in their daily lives. The relationship of the aged women with their family members is manifested in beatific manner. They even expressed their contentment for getting economic and social security from their family members as well as others. Therefore from this study it is clear that though the aged women have economic hardship but they are respected as an aged person within the family, community and society and their needs are not ignored and they are given full co-operation by their family members.

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