

Social Exclusion of Old Aged: A Sociological Study

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Abstract

Socially ageing refers to the change in roles and social habits of individuals with respect to other members of the society. The rapid increase in population ageing in India has contributed to multiple problems for the old aged. The weakening of social support and breaking of joint family system, in recent years have significantly contributed to the feeling of insecurity and subjection amongst the aged, particularly the aged women. Along with this, socio-economic changes often translate this socially excluded group of the aged into poorer levels of health and life conditions. The present study attempts to examine the social exclusion amongst the old aged from the social and political dimension in the Jhansi district of Uttar Pradesh, India. The data for the current study has been collected from a survey conducted in eight wards of Jhansi. The Sample consisted of 120 respondents, aged 60 and above. The findings of the data revealed that there were majority (especially women) of the old aged people who were facing social exclusion from these two dimensions. The processes of social exclusion have severely affected the lives and conditions of these old aged. The authors found that the economic dependency, lack of awareness, adjustment problems and low health are some of the main factors responsible for the social exclusion of the old aged.

Keywords: Old Aged, India, Social exclusion, Women

Introduction

Old age is a universal phenomenon of human life. It is a period of obvious changes, which is supplemented by deteriorative biological, psychological and sociological changes (Giddens 2006). The social perception of ageing emphasizes the change in behavioral pattern, cultural norms, values, status, role expectations and the societal allocation of resources and opportunities (Morgan and Kunkel 2001).

In the recent years, population ageing has become a global phenomenon. The global health improvement has resulted in longer life expectancy which in turn has led to the rise in the number of persons above 60 years. According to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division of United Nations (2009) the world population aged 60 and over is expected to increase from

21% in 2011 to 34% in 2050. India with a current aged population of 100 million is the second country after China with large number of people aged 60 and above in the world (Prashad 2011). The number of old aged in India (60+) has increased by 54.77% in the last 15 years (Mahajan and Ray 2013).

Social Exclusion

Social exclusion commonly referred to the process that denies the full or partial participation of an individual in the society. This leads to a weakening of social ties or complete collapse of social bonding between the individual and society. It is, “a dynamic process which prevents access to different elements of social, economic, political or cultural components of everyday life” (Walker and Walker 1997, 8). Social exclusion is a significant issue across many modern societies. In Indian society exclusion is an age-old problem but it has not been expressed in the definitive term (Kumar 2013).

In India it has assumed a broader implication since 1950s, and the conversation on it had a greater significance in political discourse and among academics. In 1990s this discourse has also gained new meaning with Prime Minister V. P. Singh’s decision to implement the Mandal Commission report, which intended to increase affirmative action programs for the disadvantaged. Over the years, many studies have been carried out on different aspects of social exclusion and on injustice of the historically marginalized social groups such as the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and Religious Minorities in India and other parts of the subcontinent (Govinda 2010) but the ways in which social exclusion may affect the old aged have been rarely examined.

Objectives of the study

The first objective of this study is to access the socio-economic status of the old aged respondents. The second objective is to explore the social exclusion of the old aged from the view point of social dimension and the third is to examine social exclusion of the old aged from the political dimension.

Research Methodology

The universe of the present study consists of people aged 60 years and above. Eight wards were randomly selected from Jhansi district in Uttar Pradesh (India) for the purpose of study, namely Bahar Sainyer Gate, Talpura-1st, Talpura-2nd, Khusipura-1st, Khusipura-2nd, Talaiya, Chaniyapura, and Bahar Orcha Gate. The author has chosen 120 old aged respondents of both the sexes, by using convenience sampling. The convenience sampling has been used due to its features of availability, convenience and accessibility (Bickman and Rog 1998).

This study is based on primary data collected from the above mentioned eight wards. Semi-structured interview schedule was constructed to tab the subjective opinions of the respondents. The authors also used observation method and in-depth interviews in case of selected number of old aged people to have richer and more exhaustive details of their life events.

Socio-economic status of the Respondents

	Male	(%)	Female	(%)	Total	(%)
Respondents	60	50	60	50	120	
Age						
60-69	30	50	34	56.66	64	53.33
70-79	22	36.66	20	33.33	42	35
80 years & above	08	13.33	06	10	14	11.66
Educational Attainment						
Primary	15	25	11	18.33	26	21.66
Secondary	08	13.33	04	6.66	12	10
High School	04	6.66	01	1.66	05	4.16
College & above	02	3.33	00	00	02	1.66
Illiterate	31	51.66	44	73.33	75	62.5
Marital Status						
Married	39	65	24	40	63	52.5
Unmarried	00	00	01	1.66	01	0.83
Divorced	02	3.33	04	6.66	06	05
Widowed	19	31.66	31	51.66	50	41.66
Living Arrangements						
Alone	17	28.33	25	41.66	42	35
With Spouse	22	36.66	18	30	40	33.33
With Children	16	26.66	15	25	31	25.83
With Others *	05	8.33	02	3.33	07	5.83
Economic dependency						
Completely dependent	17	28.33	36	60	52	43.33
Partially dependent	19	31.66	18	30	37	30.83
Not dependent	24	40	07	11.66	31	25.83
Income						
1000-3000	20	33.33	41	68.33	61	50.83
3000-6000	21	35	09	15	30	25
6000 & above	08	13.33	03	05	11	9.16
No Income	11	18.33	07	11.66	18	15

*Relatives, friends, and neighbors

Findings and Discussion

The first part of this section discusses and analyses the socio-economic profile of the old aged people in eight wards of Jhansi district. While the second part discuss that how the lives and condition of the old aged are affected from the social and political dimensions of social exclusion. The study also analyses that how the male and female old aged differ in experiencing social exclusion.

While analyzing the socio-economic status of the respondents from the above table it was found that majority of the old aged respondents (53.33%) fell in the age group of (60-69) years and the gender distribution of the respondents also shows that there were higher numbers of male (50.6%) and female (56.66%) respondents in the age group of (60-69) years. In context of educational background, significant percentage of respondents (62.5%) was illiterates. On comparing the educational qualification among the male and female respondents is it was found that there were more female respondents (73.33%) than the male respondents (51.66%) who were illiterate. Therefore the overall educational attainment of females was found to be much lower than their male counterparts.

As far as the marital status of the respondents is concerned, large percentage of respondents (52.5%) were married and widowed constituted the second highest percentage (41.66%) in all of the four groups. The data also shows that the percentage of widow (51.66%) was found to be higher than the widowers (31.66%). It is because in India there are higher incidences of widowhood among the female respondents than among the male respondents. Thus the considerable age difference between the couples, differing proportion of old men and women who marry and the increased life expectancy in the case of women give rise to a large proportion of widows in a society (Bharti 2011).

In terms of living arrangements it was found that majority of the respondents (35%) were living alone and out of these 35% again there were high percentage of female respondents (41.66%) in comparison to male respondents (28.33%) who were living alone. It was found that most of the female after the death of their husband started living alone due to adjustment problems and lack of recognition and abuse by their children.

Regarding the economic dependency status, out of the total respondents the largest percentage of respondents (43.33%) were found to be completely dependent. Many of these respondents were dependent on their family members or on some of the government run institution. Moreover most of the old aged men and women who had to depend on others for their daily maintenance reported that

their situation was not better and they were more excluded economically in comparison to the respondents who were independent. When the dependency status of the male and female respondents was compared, the analysis of the data clearly shows that there were more females (60%) in comparison to male respondents (30%) who were completely dependent. Such being the case, women without husband, had to face additional problems and sufferings, making it difficult for many widowed women to carry the burden of looking after themselves, especially during their old age.

The income data of the respondents shows that there were half of the respondents (50.83%) earning a monthly income between (1000 to 3000 Rupees) but in terms of gender distribution significant percentage of respondents (68.33%) were female in comparison male respondents (33.33) who were earning a monthly income between (1000 to 3000 Rupees). Moreover there were also 15% of respondents who were not having any income. Thus it can be concluded that the old aged with lowest or no income was found to be economically excluded than those having an average or above Rupees 6000 income per month. It is obvious that monthly income ranging from Rupees 1000 – Rupees 3000 is quite scanty to sustain a normal life in present scenario.

Old aged Exclusion from Social Dimension

To examine the old aged exclusion from the view point of social dimension the author looks into the interpersonal relations of the respondents with the children in family, the feeling of getting care and respect from their children and opinions regarding frequency of mutual visits.

The analyses of the study revealed that the respondents who were satisfied with interpersonal relationship they had with their children, constitute a low percentage (38.8%) and the majority of the respondents (64.16%) were not satisfied with the interpersonal relationship with their children. Many of these respondents replied that they were not happy with the kind of communication their children keeps with them in this old age. They reported that their children neglect them as they had grown older and they were abused or mistreated either by their sons or daughters-in-law or both. Some of the respondents felt that it was the inability of the old aged parents to contribute to the family income that resulted in strained relationship with the children. In terms of gender there were significant percentage of old aged females (68.3%) in comparison to males (60%) who were dissatisfied in their relationship with their children. Majority of these females stated that after son's marriage it is difficult for the son's new family to adjust with the old aged parents thus the relationships become increasingly brittle.

Though their children living with them under the same roof but have separate kitchens and separate living arrangements due to stiff relationships.

In terms of care and respect more than half of the respondents (66.66%) felt that they did not get care and respect as they deserve from their children. Many of these respondents opined that the younger children had neglecting and unfavorable attitude towards the old aged. They were not at all happy with the attitude of their children. Their children, especially sons and daughters-in-law, did not respect them and invariably ill-treated them. Mostly they were made to feel that they were reiterating because of their old age.

Most of the old aged mentioned that earlier the old aged people commanded a lot of respect and attention. Their guidance was sought in all matters, including religious ceremonies and marriages. But now due to the decline of joint family, technological changes and due to existence of individualism children are becoming selfish and disobedient day by day. Similar features were also discussed by Nasreen (2010) in her study on family transition and challenges for elderly persons. She stated that society is undergoing transitional changes due to evolving nuclear families, modernization, industrialization, etc, where the respect for old aged is no longer the uniformly adhered criterion.

However, four respondents (3.33%) remained silent regarding the question of care and respect provided by their children. But the closer examination revealed that these silent respondents were the depressed and isolated people who were left alone by their children or who had no children. Meanwhile when the overall male and female respondents were compared it was found that more percentage (78.33%) of female respondents did not get the kind of care and respect as expected compared to male respondents (55%). They reported that their children were reluctant to pay any respect to them. Many female respondents revealed that due to their old age they were being humiliated occasionally and were being treated disrespectfully. Some of them cited that this is because of their economic and physical dependency on the children and due to brittleness in the interpersonal relationships the children were not concerned about the due care and respect for them. .

Regarding the frequency of mutual visits between parents and children there are 51.66% of the old aged respondents in the study who were staying away from their children. As per mutual visits of left-behind old aged and their children, 20.96% of the respondents said that they visit their children in every few months or their children come to meet them, 27.41% of the aged answered that they rarely visit their

children but their children pay a visit to them in one or two years during some occasion or festivals celebration.

It is noteworthy that the large majority of the respondents (51.61%) never visited their children and also did not receive any visit from their children. Out of these 51.61% of respondents, (71.87%) respondents stated that their children did not like them and their children felt ashamed of their presence. They also found it difficult to adjust with them because children had different life style that's why they never visited their children. There were another (28.12%) respondents who mentioned that they were unable to visit children because their children were staying quite far and they were too poor to manage the transport fair.

Regarding the gender differences, it was noticed that the percentage of female respondents was slightly more (46.87%) than the male respondents (53.12%) who never made any visits to their children and their children also did not come to meet them. Most of these women mentioned that their children did not keep any contacts or attachment with them. They did not even exchange formal greetings with them on telephone and ignored them as if they were non-living beings so it's all useless to make any visits to the children. Few of the women respondents stated that they unable to visit anywhere due to their busy schedule of routine work, restrained in a particular area and also due to the fact that they had lack of financial resource.

The finding indicates that the interpersonal relationship among the children and most of the old aged respondents were deteriorating. In comparison to male mostly female respondents was suffering from the pain of strained relationship with their children because of their economic dependency on their children for their daily maintenance and also due to the adjustment problems with their grown-up children. Gradually the capability of the families in the modern urban set-up to provide care and respect to the old aged people in the family is reducing. Thus one can infer that in spite of living with the children in the same house the old aged were not getting love and respect from the children. This goes on to show the social exclusion of old aged respondents in their day-to-day life from the social dimension. Theobald (2005) in his study on social exclusion and care for elderly also mentioned that the elderly receiving low or no support from their families can be exposed to higher risk of social exclusion.

The mutual visits between the parents and children were also seems to be very less. Though the old aged parents desire to visit their children but it does not actually happen. Either the children are not at all concerned about the idea of their parents coming over or in some cases the respondents are too old

and physically weak to mobilize anywhere or they had no economic resource to afford the fair of the conveyance. Such forced and unforced factors reduced the frequency of social contacts and turned these old aged to socially excluded position. Consequently the frequency of contact between the old aged respondents and their children is found to be dissatisfied. It was observed that the availability of social contact could sometime be restricted for the respondents especially for the old aged women due to no social support at their children behest and also due to shortage of monetary resources.

Old aged Exclusion from political Dimension

To access the old aged exclusion from political dimension the author considered the involvement of the respondents in political processes at local level. Participation of the respondents in community or ward level meetings and access to membership of different organizations such as, club, environmental, peasant organization, etc, are vital indicators in this regard.

On evaluating the participation of the old aged respondents in attending meetings at ward or community level, more than seventy percentage of the old aged (77.5%) in the sample responded in a adverse. Majority of the respondents stated that nowadays in this fast pace of life and in modern-urban set-up no importance is given to their decisions in family as well as in community. Their contribution and participation is not recognized anywhere. Moreover they keep keen interest in attending these meeting but their views and suggestions were not at all deliberated upon in the meetings. The modern culture and disobedient behavior of the youngster also restrict their involvement in these meetings. Few of the respondents replied that due to their declined functional abilities and poor health they were unable to take part in such kind of activities.

As far as the question of respondent's access to membership of different organization is concerned, significant percentage of respondents (79.16%) was not the member of any organization. Out of these total respondents (86.31%) of them reported that it's useless to be a member of any organization because nobody listens to them, their idea and thoughts were not at all considered. Being senior, most of the young ones in the group did not pay any respect and honor. Further they responded that in present scenario whole politics is a game of money. Now there are bunch of criminals involved in political process. Therefore, financial crises and lack of opportunities also denied their involvement in any of the political process. However some of the respondents mentioned that due to poverty and

denial of family or other support they have to still engage in earning for their livelihood so they did not get time for all this.

When over all male and female difference regarding the participation in political processes at local level is taken into account not much difference is found. It was noted that there were (80%) of female respondents who were not the active participant in the meetings comparable to male respondents (75%).

The old aged women access to membership of different organization was almost zero. There were (93.33%) old aged women in comparison to old aged man (65%) who were not the member of any organization. Most of the old aged women particularly widow old aged contented that even their children or male member in the family did not listens to them in any family matter. If they disagreed with family decisions, they will be subject to humiliation and subjugation. They were not permitted to have any say in the decision making process of their own families then the question of attending meetings or to be a member of any organization and representing themselves in the local level political process did not arise at all. Few of them reported that they were not aware of these political activities as they were illiterate and most of the time they were confined to the household chores. Also due to certain social and religious taboos they were not allowed to participate in such kind of political activities.

Further the findings demonstrate that both the male and female old aged were excluded from this dimension as their involvement in all these political processes was found to be very limited. It can be inferred that lack of involvement in the political processes by the old aged people at the local level not only decrease the civic structure but also constitutes their exclusion from political embodiment and from the process of development. However Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) (2007) while studying social exclusion in ESCWA Region also mentioned that lack of access to participation in the political processes and in membership of popular organizations such as trade unions and associations establishes exclusion from social rights and developmental processes.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study indicate that no or lesser monetary support and the dependency status have affected the lives and interrelations of the old aged particularly the women old aged. Economic weakness and lack of familial support makes their life more vulnerable. The decreasing social ties and lesser frequency of mutual visits of the old aged with the children is clear due to impassive nature or lack of concerns for the parents from children side. The study observed that with the changing

social scenario, not much importance is attached to opinions of the old aged in the meetings by the youth groups which exclude them to participate in these political processes at local levels to a large extent. Hence directly affects their impoverishment to receive the services for themselves at the community or ward level.

Moreover, in comparison to gender difference old aged women had to face many difficulties like adjustment problems, absolute dependence especially due to loss of their husbands and so on. Across the social and political dimension of exclusion the old aged women are almost completely excluded from political process due to lack of awareness, education, opportunities and their dependency for survival on male member of the family. Their suggestions were not even accepted or appreciated in their own families, consequently exacerbate their level of political exclusion. Therefore the combined effects of ageing, gender and widowhood aggravate the miseries of women and reduced them to disempowered persons, further resulted in the social exclusion of the old aged.

Suggestions

In the light of above discussions the authors attempt to make some suggestions regarding the improvement of socio-economic status of the old aged respondents.

Efforts need to be made to open community based employment centers to impart skill training to the old aged. Such training will enable the old aged to take up employment as diverse as jam, pickle and rope making, teaching, office and administrative work, etc, which may help them to tackle poverty and financial reliance on family members to greater extent. The young members within the family as well as in society need to be sensitized to the problems and feelings of the old aged. This will foster intergenerational bond and will help the old aged get rid of depression and isolation. Concrete efforts should be made to initiate intervention programs at grass-root level for generating awareness among the old aged about their rights and needs. The government both at the center as well as at the state level should consider revising the old age pension given to the poor old aged.

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