



Aged Women Are Agonised Women

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An Abstract

Indian society has traditionally considered women as non-working, in the pure monetary sense out of sheer ignorance and wicked habit. Mostly all their work, efforts, sacrifices are rarely obliged or rewarded even in educated modern families.

Mothers keep together different members in a family with a string of love and care like beads in a rosary. The disintegrating family affects women worst due to their inherent soft nature, loving maternal attachment within family. In family decisions they are seldom involved and remain helplessly mute to all cruel, inhumane exploitation.

Women have their own typical physiological, psychological and personal issues requiring help of trained care givers, family members or friends. Women remain ignored, left out completely as their crucial issues have scantily been studied or researched for drafting a women centric coping and care mechanism.

The caring attitude of the children towards their aging parents especially the aged mothers, grandmothers or aunts, matters the most. Luckily the younger generation knows that the aged people need more passionate care and patient handling. A careful, considerate study of women issues with a definite, realistic planning is needed to make arrangements for care of the elderly women.

Guru Nanak Dev emphasised on the equal status as well as a respectable position of woman in family and society, so we all need to adopt the ideals of moral living beginning from family by liberating and allowing women to live a decent life in every field of life.

Key Words: *Women, Age, Family, Care, Respect, Issues, Planning.*

The vast majority of females in the Indian society have been traditionally considered as non-working, since times immemorial, in the pure monetary sense out of sheer ignorance and habit. They are basically seen and accepted as more naturally attuned to and responsible for looking after their homes. The household chores like cooking, cleaning, washing and taking care of children and the aged in the family are 'only theirs' to do job. Everywhere the managing of house, family and even relationships are more relevant and essential duties for the womenfolk. Around 15 million elderly Indians live all alone and close to three-fourths are women. Out of nearly 250 million households in India, 31.3 percent have at least one elderly person (India 2011 Census).

Considering the work-hours put in all their productive lives by a majority of women, without any economical benefits, just out of love and responsibility, they are sadly the worst sufferers. Mostly all of their work, efforts, and sacrifices; due to feigned ignorance or out of male ego never are obliged or rewarded. In present times women are equally good at working out of homes in offices, factories and any sphere of life as valuable work force; still men undervalue the women at home and at work. This gross injustice continues sadly in educated and modern families as well, where women are taken for granted, least considered for any respect, love or care.

Guru Nanak Dev emphasised on the equal status as well as a respectable position for the woman who though bears the future kings yet gets exploited and treated like scum of earth by the same men folk who are born of her womb. World over 550th birth anniversary of the First Sikh Guru is being celebrated in 2019, and it is pertinent to confirm to the ideals of moral living beginning from family to liberate and allow women to live a decent life everywhere. Mothers especially the aged dependent ones

need and want more love, care and respect from their very own, begotten children who were brought up with utmost devotion, irrespective of the conditions in the family.

In an ideal world, the old people especially the aged women should never face any problems due to their physical decline or ailments, under loving care of family, surrounded by children and grandchildren. But the ageing women are treated quite differently in different societies, depending on the respective moral and social values followed. Women remain an integral part of religious practices and rituals in India and most divine entities worshipped are always depicted as a couple, even gods are incomplete without their goddess. Strangely same goddess worshippers exhibit dual standards when they ill-treat the women in their homes, torture and also disregard, exploit and kill them.

But in present scenario, this uncalled for inhuman disrespect of the old women brings a sense of anxiety and insecurity, which also relates to their health problems and reflects on meagre financial sources available for general or critical care. So, it does not matter if the aged are in a developed or under-developed nation, the perspective of younger generation towards the elderly is most important in elderly care provision. In developed Japan and even underdeveloped Nepal the aged are respected as living-gods in sharp contrast with materialistic ethics in United States, where the elderly are neglected and left alone as useless burden.

Moreover, the fear of impending death of self or spouse is the cruellest factor that brings in and further deepens emotional impairment among the aged. The cruel state of widowhood especially in rural areas destroys the lives of women who are treated most inhumanely, rather are made to suffer innumerable hardships and taken for granted. *Pappathi et al 2005*, studied the psycho-social perspectives, problems and the strategies for the rural women welfare that revealed only 30 percent were enjoying good health. ^[1]

A family comprises a social unit that tends to co-exist and depends on essential human relations making daily living cordial and amusing. On the contrary, when the aged wilfully abandoned by near ones are met with at old age homes and their respective relationships discussed, the decline of love, emotional detachment and unfulfilled familial duties is revealed. The caring attitude of the children towards their aging parents especially the aged mothers, grandmothers or aunts, matters the most and the younger generation must realise that the older people need more passionate care and patient handling. Hopefully some of the youth show interest in caring for the aged with the spread awareness and the youth icons exhibiting their loving relationship with their grandparents on social media.

With the nuclear family system gradually becoming the order of the day, essentially due to economic and social reasons, a piquant situation has emerged in a few past decades with respect to elderly living and care. Sometimes elderly women are separated from their husbands, brought to cities by children and compelled to live sadly like unpaid maids in nuclear dwellings. And they surprisingly, just out of love and attachment, or no other way out, perform all menial jobs for the working daughter-in-law, with not much respect or care being reciprocated. The aged women think it as their prime, ritualistic duty which has been carried forward from generations. They are actually unaware of their sad situation and have little knowledge of their constitutional rights of graceful elderly living, nutritious food, timely medical help, freedom and happiness.

Now the sociologists, social workers as well as the governments fear whether there would be enough youngsters available in future to look after and care for the elderly when women in old age are registering ever increasing numbers. Smaller family structures, migration and individualistic existence preferences in modern industrialised society are detrimental to aged people. *Dannefer and Philipson 2010* emphasising on the need of elderly care as integral part of senior health care in modern societies whether at home or cared for in homes. ^[2]

Men in their ripe age still manage to maintain social and economic matters, but women are used to leading a life of dependency throughout their lives, first at their parents home, then at the in-laws, and lastly with their children or grandchildren. Women have been intently left out, their inherent health, social and financial issues scantily been studied or researched which might have helped in drafting a women centric coping and care mechanism.

In the Indian families mostly the women have to depend on their husband and son for their survival. Evidently, the men folk have been exploiting the good nature of womankind in order to get their needs easily fulfilled by selfless women of the house. When the women suffer or require care and comfort, they have no one to ask for or depend upon. Women have their own typical physiological, psychological and personal issues that can be solved or handled by trained care givers or some understanding family members or friends.

Ajay, Abhay et al 2010 studying the morbidity profiles of OAH residents listed many common age related ailments caused due to economic dependence, neglect and living alone. It points to an urgent need to address this familial, social issue with desirable, helpful solutions. ^[3] Not only the respective governments but social organisations, researchers and youth must act now.

Even though the women home workers do not earn money, or paid anything for their lifelong services to the family, yet it cannot be denied that they contribute their whole life time, energy all through their existence in managing their household affairs. When they become physically incapable they continue to do whatever she can, anyhow, somehow. On the contrary the same families

pay handsomely to the maids hired for chores but show little regard and value for their respective mothers, wives or other female relations performing many tasks at home, without any monetary consideration.

The modern working couple scenario in management of household requires women going out of homes to earn to supplement their husband's income and then also expected as well as required to perform the homely tasks later in the day. *Alam et al 2013* found that increasing adversity in old age is becoming a global problem, affecting honourable status of elderly, reducing their financial independence too. ^[4] This familial, social, and economic exploitation has been breeding in society since ages and might continue unless women themselves try to break free from emotional, traditional shackles.

Due to modernisation and jobs shift, an absolute necessity of migration to towns and cities with small dwellings, high rents, costly living has emerged, and the care of the aged in their sore needs has turned a non-priority. Elderly mothers or aunts are only brought into homes when there is a need to help in household chores or look after the small kids. The critical conditions of the aged women in such dwellings are deplorable, heart-rending and several NGOs are trying to do whatever to save and provide good care to such pained old women.

Nowadays, stung and influenced by the fast life, modern youth exhibit a lifestyle full of pomp and show, and the unreal trends and goals they pursue, leave them with no time, money and energy to express emotions for the aged. The modern consumerism promotes expensive living; latest socio-economic factors create self-centred individuals concerned more with their personal needs and life only. Such a problem already exists and is creating problems in the developed countries which face a higher ratio of the old people in sharp contrast to lesser numbers of youngsters to take care of them.

Universally women outlive the men folk and their life expectancy is around 81 years and Asian women live up to 87 to 90 years according to *womenshealth.gov 2019*. Therefore, it not only spells trouble for the aged men and women but definitely creates more pressure on the young generation also to look after them when they are not able to even perform ADLs. In many families the aged are wilfully ignored and grossly neglected taking it as fashionable or modern essentiality. Strangely the children who throw their aged parents out, do not realise this grim reality or envision a very dark future, they would themselves face some day from their very own.

Young couples prefer living separately in apartments without parents or sending the elderly of the family to OAH. This desire to live independently, enjoying the new found freedom, with no interference of the elderly grandparents or parents is actually the bane of modern lifestyle. With this much needed shade of experienced and matured aged parents or grandparents not available anymore, the youth are scorched in the charming heat of westernised living. So, sending off the aged to OAH is not only considered a modern life style but shamefully, deliberately being followed in principle also.

In addition to that, the care of most of the aged parents somehow is not being taken altogether or continued as it used to be in past few decades of new millennium. New generation has forgotten that the old people seem to be happier and more satisfied with their company, love, affection, respect. When children care for their aged parents realising their sense of duty, and express emotional attachment, the parents especially the elderly women feel happy and satisfied. Unfortunately, all these values are being lost in the maze of modern fast life, where live-in is followed and throwing out parents to OAH is shamelessly adopted.

The ever-widening generation gap is no longer an issue, there are no generations staying together to face each other and experience the issues or benefits, whatever, of a joint family system. *Ramamurthi 2002* related ageism as perceived and understood differently by the young and old, with old being stereotypical and the young rash. ^[5] Mothers used to be the hub of family and keep together the different members with a string of love and care like in a rosary. And many mothers suffer innumerable hardships at home from the hands of family or face harsh life in ripe age at some ashram or live poorly in some old age home, in isolation and ill-health with not much help.

The elderly face dramatic and sudden changes in their family life after son's marriage which was reported at 74 percent, and the shift from family to the old age home was though apparently with consent yet forcibly imposed on the helpless old parents recorded at 86 percent. Not only because the son got married and the family structure changed, but with that the son's attitude altogether reversed also. But daughter-in-law is squarely blamed and just out of love the son still is not a factor in the awkward happenings in elderly lives. Oddly, the women are the worst sufferers in the breaking family due to their inherent soft, loving natural attachment with respective family. They have no say in family decisions and are mute to all the cruel and inhumane exploitation.

Many times they suffer as they have nowhere to go, no one to rescue them from the hellish conditions. OAH remains the only recourse to lead the last years of life. *Wason and Jain (2011)* related that for the aged women with no source of income or right to property, relationship with son or daughter-in-law decides her fate. ^[6] This is a trend now and accepted norm to throw out or shift the dependent old parents to old age homes as children no longer want to keep, serve and look after their aged folks.

Moreover, next to kin or relatives also usually shirk away from their responsibility. Sometimes friends or relatives look after the needy aged but they also due to many compulsions are forced to abandon them. The urgent need for the welfare departments and

NGOs to step in and work for the establishment of better facilities like senior citizens homes, ashrams and also proper upkeep of the senior citizens therein, is felt acutely. *Alam et al, 2013* stressed that media and government along with family, society should promote a proper status and caring attitude for the elderly. ^[4]

With the better medical facilities available to the aged people in developed and developing nations the society and the government finds the aged living longer nowadays. It is something very positive yet laden with newer challenges for elderly care and housing in near future. And if no remedial steps are taken, the lives of the greying population mostly women will definitely be affected. All research and suggestions point out to systematic planning and laying of substantial budgetary allocation for the elderly care especially ageing women. Ageing should be considered a priority and a social responsibility by the governments and individuals in developing countries as well.

Money is essentially the root cause of most problems faced by the elderly especially dependent old women and inevitably also the only solution available. In a developing country like India this has gotten acuter and more alarming within two decades of the millennium. *Bevinamar 2012* pointed out that elderly women rather the widows remain vulnerable sufferers requiring urgent need to create health and financial schemes for them exclusively. ^[7] The ever growing critical situation thus requires a careful, considerate study of the issue with women at centre as well as a definite, realistic and proper planning to make arrangements to take care of the urban as well as the rural elderly women. Old are better off in the nuclear families which realise the need to take good care of their ageing parents especially mother as who else is there to serve them.

Table 1 Age and Educational Level

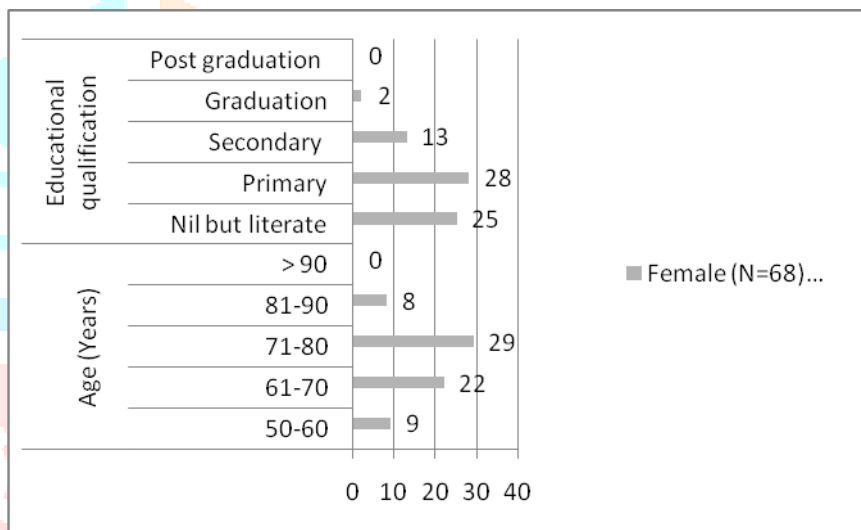


Table 2 Residence, Religion & Family Type

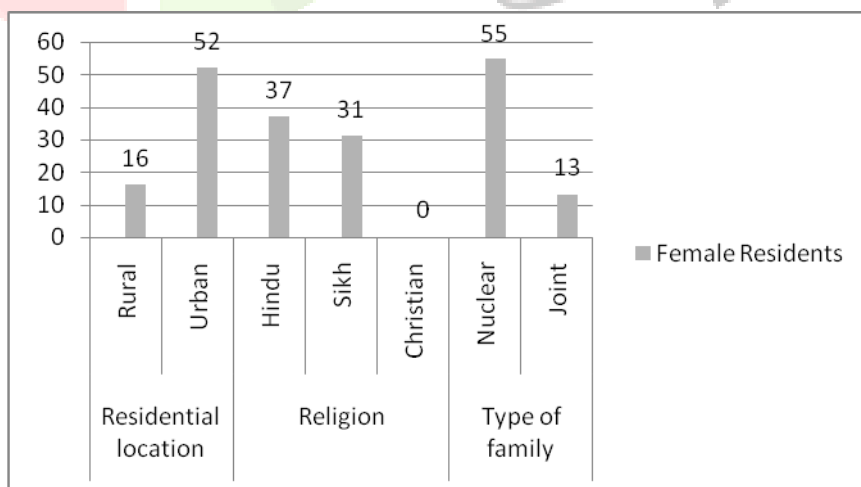


Table 3 Marital Status & Occupation

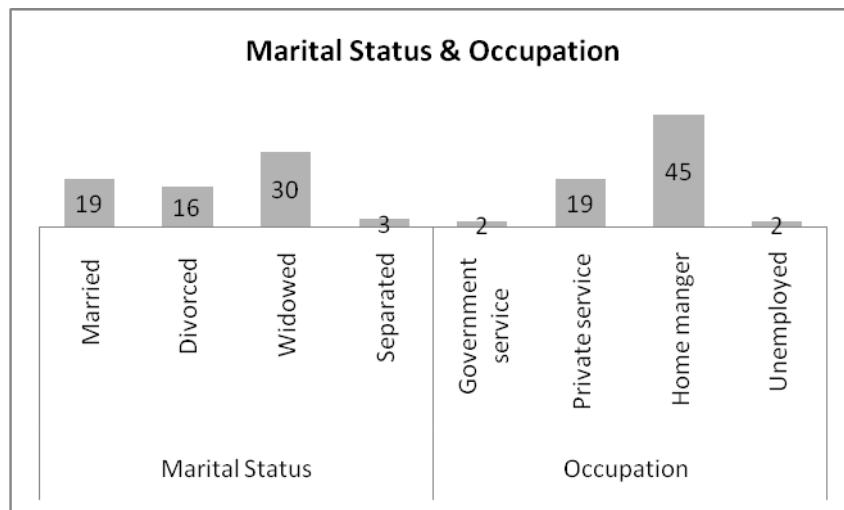
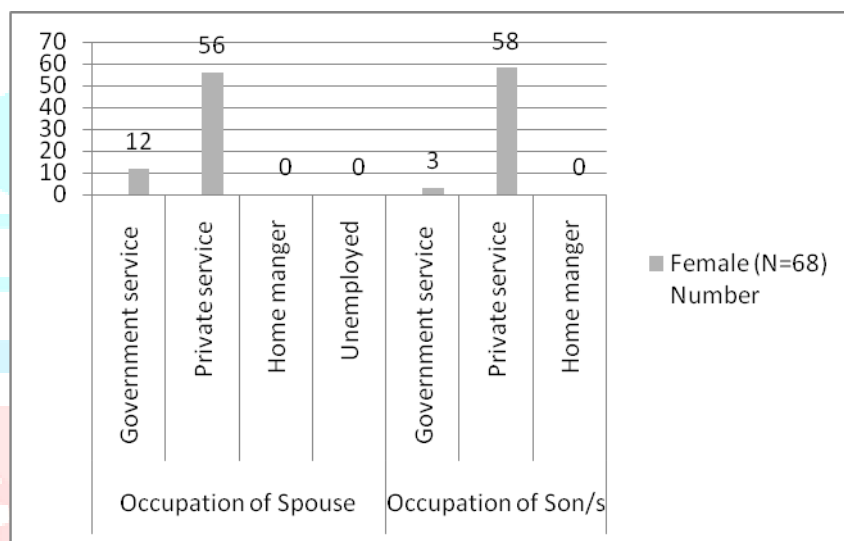


Table 4 Occupation of Spouse & Son/s



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