An Exploration of Problems Confronted by Elderly in Chakdara, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

Aftab Alam, M Phil Scholar, Bacha Khan University Charsadda, Pakistan

Abstract

Elderly includes in one of the neglected portion of modern societies (Germov, 2002; Kendall, 2007). The current study is an exploration of various problems to which elderly are confronted with. The study has been conducted in Chakdara, Khyber Pakhtunkhwah, Pakistan. The study is based on quantitative research design and is cross-sectional. Sampling for this study has been carried out in two phases; firstly, elderly population in the study area was identified through household survey; Secondly, a total of 200 elderly i.e. persons aging above 60 were interviewed through structured interview schedule. The collected information has been analyzed in shape tables including percentages and the application of chi-square test. Further, the tables are discussed in light of literary information for validation and precision. The study concludes that elderly in the area are confronted with various problems including familial, economic and health related problems

Key words: Ageism, Elderly, Health, Economic, Honor
1.1. Introduction

Industrialization brings advancement and perfection in human life and raised the life standard up to an extreme level in comparison to pre-industrial societies (Henslin, 2012; Zaslow, 2003). However, with increased industrialization various problem emerged i.e. increase in older age population. In addition, increased in number of older people gave rise to the concept of ageism (see Germov, 2002) which to Kornblum (2007) is prejudice and discrimination with people based upon age that defines elderly person as incapable and makes younger people to think about them as useless and themselves different from older people.

Elderly are exposed to many problems in modern societies including many aspects and forms. In this regard, familial problems are eminent to be considered whereby family is the most important sphere of life for an elderly person where they have spent their lives and given everything to it. However, with rise of industrialization and modernity the modern families are unable to fulfill needs of elderly. Interaction and grouping is one of the basic functions of family where social isolation is the core issue regarding elderly. An eminent cause of social isolation with regard to elderly within family is death of spouse, important people in their life as well as migration of children with whom they have spent their most part of life (Macionic, 2007; Sabzwari and Azhar, 2010). Women are predominantly more affected by such isolation and estrangement (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Following, isolation and estrangement causes certain other problems to elderly people including chronic stress as well as changes in their behavior (Henslin, 2012). In addition, studies indicate a significant decrease in honor and respect given by family to elderly. Such honor and respect was particularly provided to elderly in joint families whereas ascend in nuclear family has led to loss of honor and respect of elderly. As a result, elderly don’t avail the security and satisfaction provided to them by joint families (Alam et al, 2011; Itrat et al, 2007).

Poor health and disability problems are the major concerns regarding elderly. In explanation, such problems are the outcome of socio-economic inequalities (Kornblum, 2007; Himes, 2001). For instance, 25 % of elderly population is suffering from malnutrition due to poor economic conditions. Poor economic conditions do not allow elderly to avail balance diet (Kandell, 2007; New York Times, 1995). In addition, chronic illness is the most frequent health related issue faced by elderly population. Chronic illnesses which frequently attack elderly population include arthritis, heart diseases, hypertension, diabetes etc. according to statistics,
97% of elderly population aging over 65 suffers from at least one of the mentioned diseases (Trease, 1995; Metz & Miner, 1998; U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, 2003).

Older people are discriminated at work place. Employers prefer younger workers to older workers due to stereotype that older people always have health problems, decreased motivation and low ability. Younger people are considered to have more energy especially at time of demands that’s why most of the times older people are pushed out of their jobs (Kandell, 2007). Besides, retirement at older age means significant decline in income. People with low income also suffer from poverty in old age due to the fact that they are unable to save enough due to spending a lot on children and family (Himes, 2001). It is also evident that following the retirement, elderly are unable to find other sources of financial support. Such situation makes elderly incapable of attaining standard health services, housing as well as an increased vulnerability to poverty (Sabzwari and Azhar, 2010; Sanderson and Scherbov, 2008).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Internationally, there is an increase in unpleasant feelings about longevity and getting older whereas in traditional societies longevity and getting older was an indicator for honor and respect. In explanation, getting older means decrease in productivity, efficiency and capability. However, research indicates that such ideas about elderly are stereotypic in nature which has led to considering elderly as a social burden (Germov, 2002).

The world worldwide rise in the elderly population has also made its impact on Pakistan. Despite its political and economic instabilities; Pakistan has succeeded in improving lifespan, a fact clearly evident by its rising older population (Sabzwari and Azhar, 2010). Estimates show that six percent of Pakistan’s population is over 60, with a likelihood of doubling by 2025. Life expectancy has risen by almost three decades in last 50 years and will reach close to 72 years by 2023 (WHO, 1998). Thus, the current study is an effort to highlight various problems to which elderly population in the locality is exposed. These problems particularly include familial, health as well economic problems.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

- To explore the problems faced by elderly within the family
- To document various health related concerns of elderly people
- To explore economic problems confronted by elderly
1.4. Methodological Procedure

The current study is quantitative in nature and is cross-sectional. The study has been conducted in Chakdara, Khyber Pahtukhwah, Pakistan. Sampling for this study has been performed in two phases where firstly, a household survey was conducted to identify elderly in the study area. Secondly, 200 of the identified elderly were purposively interviewed through structured interview schedule. The collected data has been analyzed quantitatively i.e. cross-tabulation, percentages and along with the application of chi-square test.

1.5. Results and Discussions

The field information and the secondary data have been elaborated in the following pages considering the statistical analysis and their link with secondary sources as well. The discussion has been made in three main headings with respect to the order of analysis and even secondary information (where found necessary). The overall discussion can be seen in the following pages:

Familial Problems to Elderly Persons

Elderly are facing various problems in their families (see for example Macionic 2007, U.S. Census Bureau 2001, Alam et al., 2011, Itrat et al 2007, and Sabzwari & Azhar, 2010) where according to their studies elderly are facing various problems within their families. Among such problems the most important are social isolation, estrangement, loneliness, powerlessness and ignorance in decision making as well as loss of respect. The field information and its analysis in the form of various extent or pre-determined scale i.e. not at all, to some extent, and greater extent as well as the obtained information have also been given in the form of percentages with respect to the various aspects of problems faced by elderly within their families.

The tabulated information as mentioned in the following table (See table-1) indicates that elderly persons are confronted with various problems within their families. In this regard, the statistics as obtained from the field data and its analysis assert that majority of the respondents are facing various problems within their families. For example, 101 (50.5%) and 74 (37%) respondents marked to some extent and to greater extent respectively that they are not respected. Further, 121 (60.5%) and 35 (17.5%) respondents replied with to some extent and to greater extent respectively that elderly are facing social isolation, estrangement and loneliness. In a similar
context, the secondary source as asserted by Macionis (2007) confirm the field data that social isolation is core issue regarding elderly and its major cause is death of spouse and other significant people in their life with whom they have spent their adulthood leading to loneliness. In terms of decline on the power and decision making, findings show that 19 (9.5 %) respondents opined that there is no decline in power and decision making power of elderly, however, 69 (34.5%) respondents revealed that the power and decision making power of elderly has declined to some extent while majority e.g. 112 (56 %) respondents asserted that the power and decision making power of elderly has declined to greater extent.

Table-1: Familial Problems to Elderly Persons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>To Some Extent</th>
<th>To Greater Extent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loss of Respect</td>
<td>25 (14.5 %)</td>
<td>101 (50.5%)</td>
<td>74 (37%)</td>
<td>200 (100 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation and Loneliness (primarily due to death of spouse)</td>
<td>44 (22%)</td>
<td>121 (60.5%)</td>
<td>35 (17.5%)</td>
<td>200 (100 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerlessness and Ignorance in Decision Making</td>
<td>19 (9.5 %)</td>
<td>69 (34.5%)</td>
<td>112 (56 %)</td>
<td>200 (100 %)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(χ² = 18.28, d.f. = 6, Highly Significance = .001**)

Besides, the data has been tested through statistical tests in the form of chi-square test with a level of confidence i.e. .5% in a cross tabulation. The test statistics indicates that elderly are facing various problems within their families. The supposed hypothesis has been found as valid one where the validity has been given for the chi-square value on the given ratio of 18.28 with Degree of freedom=06 which shows a highly significant relation i.e. .001**. The discussion of the statistics with the ratio mentioned against the data in the tabular form (see table above) confirms that elderly are facing various problems within their families.

Health Problems Faced by Elderly

Health is one of the major concerns to elderly persons (see for example Trease 1995, Metz & Miner 1998, Kandell 2004, Himes 2001, National Center for Health Statistics 2003) where according to their studies elderly person suffers from various health problems i.e. disability, chronic and life threatening illnesses, and psychological problems.
The tabulated information as mentioned in the following table (See table-2) indicates that elderly are confronted with significant health related problems. In terms of malnutrition, 60 (30%) respondents were of the opinion that elderly are not confronted with malnutrition while majority such as 113 (56.5%) respondents revealed that elderly are suffering from malnutrition up to some extent. 27 (13.5 %) respondents stated that elderly are suffering from malnutrition up to greater extent. Further, with regard to chronic and life threatening illness i.e. arthritis, heart diseases, 49 (24.5%) respondents argued that elderly are confronting chronic illness up to some extent while majority 148 (74%) respondents asserted that elderly are confronting chronic illness up to greater extent. In addition to it, 12 (6 %) respondent opted for not at all with regard to the statement that elderly are suffering from mental illnesses, however, 74 (37 %) and 114  (57%) respondents marked to some extent and to greater extent respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>To Some Extent</th>
<th>To Greater Extent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malnutrition</td>
<td>60 (30%)</td>
<td>113 (56.5%)</td>
<td>27 (13.5%)</td>
<td>200 (100 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic and Life Threatening Illness i.e. arthritis, heart diseases etc.</td>
<td>03 (1.5 %)</td>
<td>49 (24.5%)</td>
<td>148 (74%)</td>
<td>200 (100 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Illness i.e. Anxiety, Stress, Depression etc.</td>
<td>12 (6 %)</td>
<td>74 (37 %)</td>
<td>114 (57%)</td>
<td>200 (100 %)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

($\chi^2 = 21.27$, d.f. = 6, Highly Significance = .000**)  

Besides, the data has been tested through statistical tests in the form of chi-square test with a level of confidence i.e. .5% in a cross tabulation. The test statistics indicates that elderly are facing various problems regarding their health. The supposed hypothesis has been found as valid one where the validity has been given for the chi-square value on the given ratio of 21.27 with Degree of freedom=06 which shows a highly significant relation i.e. .000**. The discussion of the statistics with the ration mentioned against the data in the tabular form (see table above) confirms that elderly are facing various problems regarding their health.

**Economic Problems to Elderly Persons**

according to these studies elderly persons are discriminated at work place, ignored by their children in context of economic support along with no alternative way of income at older age. The tabulated information as mentioned in the following table (See table-3) indicates that elderly persons are facing various economic problems.

In this context, in terms of alternative source of income, 10 (5%) respondents stated that elderly are not facing any problem with regard to alternative source of income, however, 44 (22 %) respondents argued that elderly are facing problems regarding alternative source of income to some extent while 146 (73 %) respondents revealed that elderly are facing problems regarding alternative source of income to greater extent. With regard to lack of economic support from children, 33 (16.5%) respondent said that elderly are confronted with lack of economic support from children to some extent while majority e.g. 163 (81.5 %) opted for to greater extent. In addition, 154 (77 %) respondent replied with not at all regarding the statement that elderly are discriminated at work place while 12 (6%) respondent marked to some extent and 26 (13%) respondents marked to greater extent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>To Some Extent</th>
<th>To Greater Extent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Alternative Source of Income</td>
<td>10 (5%)</td>
<td>44 (22 %)</td>
<td>146 (73 %)</td>
<td>200 (100 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Economic Support from Children</td>
<td>04 (2 %)</td>
<td>33 (16.5%)</td>
<td>163 (81.5 %)</td>
<td>200 (100 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination at Work Place</td>
<td>154 (77 %)</td>
<td>12 (6%)</td>
<td>26 (13%)</td>
<td>200 (100 %)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[(\chi^2 = 2.002, \text{d.f.} = 6, \text{Highly Significance} = .000**\)]

Besides, the data has been tested through statistical tests in the form of chi-square test with a level of confidence i.e. .5% in a cross tabulation. The test statistics indicates that elderly are facing various problems economic problems. The supposed hypothesis has been found as valid one where the validity has been given for the chi-square value on the given ratio of 2.002with Degree of freedom=06 which shows a highly significant relation i.e. .000**. The discussion of the statistics with the ration mentioned against the data in the tabular form (see table above) confirms that elderly are facing various economic problems.

1.6. Discussion
Elderly includes in one of the neglected portion of modern societies. Elderly are confronted with many socio-economic problems. In this regard, first, elderly are facing various problems within their families. Among such problems the most important are social isolation, estrangement, loneliness, powerlessness and ignorance in decision making as well as loss of respect. These findings are in line with the studies of Macionic (2007), U.S. Census Bureau (2001), Alam et al (2011), Itrat et al (2007), and Sabzwari & Azhar (2010). Second, health problems are the major concerns to elderly persons, for instance, malnutrition, disability, chronic and life threatening illnesses, and psychological problems are the major health concerns of elderly. These findings are in line with the studies of Trease (1995), Metz & Miner (1998), Kandell (2004), Himes (2001) and National Center for Health Statistics (2003) where according to their studies elderly person suffers from various health problems such as malnutrition disability, chronic and life threatening illnesses, and psychological problems. Third, elderly are confronted with significant economic problems such as elderly are ignored by their children in context of economic support; there is no alternative way of income at older age as well as discrimination at work place. These findings are similar to the findings of Germov (2002), Kandell (2007), Himes (2001), Sabzwari & Azhar (2010), and U.S. Census Bureau (2005).

1.7. Conclusion

The reviewed and statistical analysis of this particular research shows that elderly persons are facing various problems i.e. familial problems, health problems, and economic problems. The study concludes that within family, the most common problem faced by elderly persons is social isolation, estrangement and loneliness, powerlessness and loss of respect. Further, regarding health problems, the study found that majority of elder persons suffer from chronic illness i.e. chronic and life threatening illness such as arthritis, heart diseases etc. Moreover, persons with old suffer from malnutrition, as well as mental illness such as depression and anxiety. Finally, the research activity concludes that elderly person faces various economic problems primarily including lack of economic support from children. In addition, economic problems like having no alternative source of income after retirement or subsiding from any other income source and discrimination at work place are faced by elderly people.

References
• Alam et al. (2013). Socio-Economic Problems of Persons with Old Age in District Dir Lower Khayber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan. SAVAP International ISSN 2223-9944 Vol. 4.


