

Understanding the plight of elderly women in Manipur -A case study

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ABSTRACT

In every part of the world population, ageing is a vast demographic phenomenon. The study of the elderly is a rising area of interest for all disciplines worldwide. As the elderly population increases, enhancing their life in every ways becomes a crucial goal in every society. Within the elderly population, in certain societies, elderly women sometimes face double disadvantages of being old and of being a woman. So, in this paper, an wholly qualitative study is conducted on elderly women of Manipur belonging to Meitei community focusing mainly on their socio psychological issues concerned to them.

Keywords: Ageing, Case study, Elderly women, Socio-psychological issues.

INTRODUCTION

Increasing life expectancy has led to an increase in life span and an increase in the number of elderly people in the world. The increase in the number of elderly people has been accompanied by changes in social values and lifestyles, which in some cases have led to the rejection of the elderly by family members and their turning to the choice of living alone and independently. As people get older, they experience physical deterioration, social isolation, and loneliness due to various factors, such as retirement, the death of a partner or friends, the deteriorating financial condition, and loss of self-worth due to loss of social roles and confidence, etc. (A Singh 2009). So, the life quality in the period of old age is uninsurable. Basically, within a family a number of issues has been arise when the aged persons becomes physically, psychologically weak which becomes too much dependable.

Definition of old age: Old age has been divided into three age groups; the young-old (65-74 years): this is a transition period marked by many adjustments such as

retirement, declining strength, and a sharp reduction in expectation and behaviors; Middle-aged old (75-84); this period has characterized by increasing deaths of spouse or friends, reduced participation in the home and in many community activities, increasing health problems, contracting social world; Oldest-old (85 years and above): in this period, may need assistance in the maintenance of social contacts, health problems may be more severe

Elderly women in Indian scenario: Elderly women are a growing presence in developing countries. Indian elderly women face triple threats: that of being of old, of being women, and of being poor (Chowdhury, 2012). Women in all cultures, religions, classes and ethnic groups suffer from violence carried out against them. Violence against elderly women is usually hidden. The problem has become more visible and indeed urgent attention is needed for the fast graying Indian society.

The problems of elderly women are worsened by a lifetime of gender based discrimination, often stemming from deep-rooted cultural and social biases. It is compounded by other forms of discrimination based on class, caste, disability, illiteracy, unemployment and marital status. Patriarchal hierarchy and access to property rights are also discriminatory. Burdened with household chores for a longer span of time compared to older men, older women have no time for leisure or recreational activity. Elderly women and their problems need special attention as their numbers are likely to increase in the future and, given the multiple disadvantages they face in life, they are likely to be grossly unprepared to tackle this issue.

Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to focus mainly on socio-psychological issues concerned to the elderly women of Manipur where old age has never been a problem because of highly cultural value based system prevailed.

METHODOLOGY

Case study which is one of the most significant method for this study because this study is wholly based on qualitative in nature. Using case study will help in investigating and gaining concrete, contextual, in-depth knowledge about the underlying principles of an occurrence within a real life context. Case study also

ensures to reveal the natural manifestation of the subjective emotions in the participants. According to MWPS Act, 2007, 60yrs. and above are taken into consideration for this study. Detailed interview scheduled has been used as a tool for this case study. In-depth interviews of the elderly women are recorded despite difference in financial conditions to bring out the heterogeneity of the cases. Snowball sampling is used for this study. The purpose of the study was explained to them and care was taken for privacy to avoid interference and influence of others. For each interview, the duration is nearly 30-40 min.

DISCUSSION

Deteriorating expectations from family member: Many elders felt that old age is the time for them to relax and enjoy their life as they always wished to. When people gets old, they get sensitive and even the slightest of things hurt them. They have lived a full life, worked, earned respect. Time, without a doubt, is the biggest asset. Most elderly persons have want their children to give them respect, time and emotional affection and attention. Changes in elderly person's role and position within family like changes in the roles like an active parent, whether spouse or friend, and the loss of specific parts—the loss of role as loss of identity, authority, autonomy, respectability, and productivity reflect on elderly persons' emotions negatively, which damage their life satisfaction.

“Even though I am physically good, I faced a lot of emptiness, loneliness, discomfort and emotional breakdown after my spouse died. I feel that my happy time ended. I have lost in my family. There was no one for me to spare time to support me and comfort my emotions and loneliness. Suddenly, I feel like I am no one in the family. Even my children didn't treat me with respect as before. After struggling with frequent emotional distress, I decided to shift to an old age home to find some inner peace in my remaining life.”-Ibemhal, 75 yrs. Old (not real name)

Emotional insecurity from mistreatment and abuse: Mistreatment and abuse is a huge social issues. Psychological or emotional abuse like verbal harassment or humiliation is the most common issue of the older women in this study. They face family problems like uncomfortable relations with son & daughter-in-law, limited interaction with children, grand-children. Their daughters-in-law don't like their interference in family matters, children are busy with their jobs. Most old women are

self conscious. Since women have been emotionally attached to their near and dear ones throughout their life, in old age when they mistreat them, they are emotionally devastated a lot. Emotional support is much needed in old age of women.

“I have been fed up of mistreatment by my daughter-in-law with me. She abuses me verbally constantly. Even my sons forget that I am their mother who struggles a lot in upbringing them. As a mother and elder of the house, I have distributed all the properties in their own names as I think it was the right time to exchange the responsibilities to my children. But when I am old, physically weak, they treat me as a parasite. They use hard words to scold me. So, I left my home to spare my remaining life but I am a mother I will forgive and forget their wrong doings and will return home.”-Tombi, 69 yrs. Old (not real name)

“Living with my separated non-responsible alcohol addiction son, my life becomes horrible day by day. I have to look after my little grandchildren all the time with no time for myself at all. After death of my husband I am being marginalized in my own house. My son constantly abuses me with verbally. He did not care for anything except his addiction for alcohol. Sometimes it seems that I am not living anymore.”-Sakhi, 64 yrs. Old (not real name)

Marginalization/Isolation: Marginalization/isolation in old age is among the most common issues that are affecting older women constantly in families of Manipur. Older women, who are still living with their sons/daughters and grand-children are also suffering from emotional alienation. Due to fast changing socioeconomic scenario of the country, fast paced modern life style & rapid urbanization across the country younger generations hardly interact with their elderly family members. Popularity of nuclear family system has virtually crushed strong traditional bond between grand-children & grandmothers.

“Actually, no one mistreat and abuse me literally. But I feel isolated and lonely all the time even though I have been living with my large numbers of family members. They did not give me any importance of my existence. Nobody accompanied me in my own house. Even my grandchildren have always engage in mobile phones all the time. There is no close relation like old times between grandparents and grandchildren at all. So, for some company I left my house to live in old age home. I will not return again. I want to die in this old age home.”-Angoubi, 76 yrs.old(not real name)

“My son & daughter-in-law, both are working. They have been living outside for so long along with my grandchildren. I have no one to look after me. They want to live in their world separately. I think. Old age is nothing but waiting for last moment. there is no reason to live my life.”-Tamphamani, 97 yrs. Old(not real name)

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The main issues faced by the elderly women in this study are basically arising within their family itself. The role of some elderly women in this study decreases up to the negligible extent. It is when women need stronger security cover, instead their support infrastructure, emotional connects and security cover gets thinner by every passing day. Their family members don't understand their own responsibilities towards old women and their presence in the family/society is often ignored, they invariably become redundant for all concerned. With children settled in their own lives, their husbands remain mostly aloof primarily because of their own per-occupation and or die before them. This is the age, when they need a lot; instead they sometimes suffer a lot. With no social security, no gainful engagement opportunities, no old age related support no shelter, no or fewer rights and above all, no awareness of their life is full of social and emotional insecurity they suffer silently but cannot afford to complain, essentially because there is usually no one to listen to their complaints. Many older women suffer destitution of loneliness and heartfelt sense of redundancy. Since there is no ray of hope in their present life and a long life ahead, they find themselves completely lost. At this juncture, they have no option but to adjust themselves in whatever circumstances. In these adverse circumstances, older women want to remain useful within the four walls of their own families till the last breath. For the sake of a peaceful and respectful life, they have to compromise with all odd situations and never complaint about anything.

So, now with the fast growing elderly population, increased life expectancy and rise of elderly women in our state , issues concerning to them in different areas cannot be ignored any longer. If ignored today, this may turn into a major social development challenge. Therefore, focus should be shifted on older women since they have specific need of attention.

LIMITATIONS

Only the elderly women belonging to Meitei community is taken for this study as for convenience and only the subjective viewpoint of the participant is taken into consideration as this study is employed case study method.

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