

Understanding the Family System and its role in providing Psycho-Social Support to the Elderly during COVID-19 Pandemic

PROF.KALAM NARREN, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Social Work Jnana Bharathi Campus, Bangalore University, Bangalore

E-mail: vedacv.msw@gmail.com

Abstract

Families are the foundation of every human society which has been found in every human culture. Family as a social institution provided care and security to their members especially children, women and aged. The objectives of the paper are to analyse the family as a system in different contexts and to understand the changing role of family as an institution in providing psycho-social support to elderly. The present paper is based on a historic cum exploratory research design and data was collected through various secondary sources such as books, journals, website and so on. The major findings of the paper are that the age-old customs and traditions of family provided care and protection to the elderly. However, these family system, family ties, values and norms are being eroded under the influence of urbanization, modernization, and globalization by leaving elderly in psychological trauma, loneliness, emotional and economic insecurity, lack of care and protection especially during this COVID-19 period.

Keywords: Family, Elderly, Psycho-social Support and COVID-19

Introduction

In India, the family is the most vital establishment for supporting elderly people in their propelled age. The Indian family, like most families in oriental societies, is thought to be solid, strong and persevering. The standards and qualities identified with family life change as per religion, station, social class and residential patterns (Druvarajan, 1988). In India, still a higher extent of elderly people living with their families. There are changes in both synthesis and nature of communications among the individuals. The age gap is enlarging because of a quick evolving way of life, globalization, and movement of youths and impact of different belief systems. There are confirmations that between generational relations are experiencing advances because of social changes. Young people uncommonly see their grandparents in an unexpected way (Gayatri Devi, 2004) and (Prakash, 2004).

Objectives:

The objectives of the paper are to analyse the family as a system in different contexts and to understand the role of family in providing psycho-social support to elderly during COVID-19.

Review of Literature

This part reviews literature on ageing, elderly and family system in Asian context.

Concept of Ageing and Elderly

Ageing is a universal and natural process. Gerontologists have attempted to deal with these age-related differences among the elderly by dividing old age into two groups: the young-old, from age 65 to 74 years, and the old-old, from 75 years and above (Hall, 1980). WHO recognized that the developing world often defined old age, not by years, but by new roles, loss of previous roles or inability to make active contribution to the society (WHO, 2002).

Ageing is, no doubt, a physiological phenomenon, which is accompanied by some complex progressive changes in an organism. Various scientists have attempted defining ageing from time to time. Few are given below:

Hess (1966) defines Ageing as “an inevitable and irreversible biological process of life”. Handler (1960) defined as “the deterioration of a mature organism resulting from the dependent essential irreversible changes, intrinsic to all members of a species, such that with the passage of time they become increasing the probability of death” found in (Loucks, 1981)

Muttagi defines “Ageing as a multi-dimensional process and specifies that ageing in its demographic sense is not the same as the biological process of ageing which is dynamic and continuous. According to him, ageing is decline in functional capacity of organs of the body, decrease of ability to cope with the stress of disease of trauma” (Muttagi, 1997).

Concept of elderly : According to WHO, Most developed world countries have accepted the chronological age of 65 years as a definition of “elderly”, at the moment, there is no United Nations standard numerical criterion, but the UN agreed cut off is 60+ years to

refer to the elderly population (Health statistics and information systems -World Health Survey, 2004).

Concept of Family

The family is perhaps the most vital personal care network in human society. From different perspectives many people have tried to define the family but failed to give a definition that could be applied to all societies (United Nations, 1996).

George Murdock (1949) (socqr, 2015) indicated that “the family is a social group which includes at least two person members who live together, share resources, work as a unit and rear children” (Haralambos, 2000).

“Relationships or social groups are perceived to be a family; it has generally been assumed that family is the most natural and fundamental group unit of society” (United Nations, 1948).

“With the rise of modernity rapid changes have been seen in many aspects of social life which have altered the roles and functions of the family” (Hareven, 1976) and (Haralambos, 2000). However, families continue to provide “the natural framework for the emotional and material support essential to the growth and well-being of their members” (United Nations, 1996).

Joint Family System

Iravati Karve defines joint family as “a group of people who generally live under one roof, who eat food cooked at one hearth, who hold property in common and who participate in common family worship and are related to each other as some particular type of kindred” (Karve, 1965).

According to Henry Maine, “The Hindu joint family is a group consisting of known ancestors and adopted sons and relatives related to these sons through marriage”, quoted by Shelly Shah. (shah, 2014).

Types of Families in India

Reeta Sonawat (2001) cited in her study, The Indian family is by and large patriarchal in structure (Kapadia, 1982). In a patriarchal family set up, all male members, that is, husband, elder brother and father, perform duties like decision making for the rest of the family, and their physical and moral protection. This patriarchal set up is changing slowly towards equalitarian interaction among the educated, urban middle classes, and also among some rural set ups (Mullatti, 1995) and (Sonawat, 2001)

Patriarchal centric families keep on being patrilineal and patrilocal; and the heredity depends on the father's family. The Hindu Code Bill of 1954-1956 (as referred to in Pylee, 1979) has presented a couple of changes in this framework by enabling some offer of the property to the women, between religion and position marriage rights, meet rights to females regarding appropriation, separation, and remarriage. One of only a handful few surviving bastions of ladies control are the Khasis of Meghalaya with a matrilineal policy of family. The influence, riches, and privileges of legacy are vested in the ladies.

Basaiawmoit (1987), found that with entry of time the matrilineal framework has experienced sensational change because of training, innovation and legislative issues. The more youthful age is raising the issue to move towards some type of patrilineal framework however the elderly people feel the current matrilineal shape should proceed with (Saiborne, 1995). Mullatti (1995) states, in provincial/rural India, however agribusiness is the fundamental occupation, there are relatively few extensive land properties. The component such as fragmentation of land, make it hard to keep up joint families, (Sonawat, 2001).

Family System in Asian Continent

It is now widely recognized that the demographic trends of the past decades in many developing countries, and particularly those in Asia, are leading to unprecedented increases not only in the absolute numbers of elderly but also in the relative share of the population that belong to the elderly age groups. These changes include declines in the number of children couples have, greater longevity, increased involvement of women (the predominant providers of care) in economic activities outside the home, physical separation of parents and person children associated with urbanization and age-selective rural-to-urban migration, and ideational change, especially the spread of western-style individualism through the mass media and public education (Martin, 1989 and 1990; Caldwell, 1982) (Debavalya). Even

when the children are all adults, elderly parents often continue to make valuable contributions in the form of services, such as child care, house-keeping, cooking and house caring, many of which are facilitated by co-residence.

Chinese family System: Through taking an authentic point of view on the event of formative patterns in the Chinese family it can be seen that the procedures of progress may not be as short-sighted as they may show up. The term Confucianism is utilized to the well-known esteem policy of China, Korea, and Japan. Both the presence of variations between various social strata or gatherings and the nearness of regular qualities can be found in each successive recorded time. We can watch conventional male centric culture in China. In Confucius Chinese family esteems, relatives living under a similar rooftop are required to administer to each other, particularly when elderly parents are as yet alive. Isolated lodging is by all accounts related with offended parent-children connections which could prompt issues in the help of parents in their seniority. On account of this reason expansive families in stem and stretched out sorts were accepted to be the perfect for this period. From one perspective, more distant family ties gave fundamental assurance to people in the midst of social change. On the other, when the state couldn't stand to help the old, fragile, youthful, and sick, common guide and participation among relatives could be utilized as a methods diminishing the financial weights of nearby and local governments, and simplicity clashes among social classes (Ting, 2012).

Japanese family System: There have dependably been an assortment of family shapes in Japan, yet the model held as a perfect all through the vast majority of the twentieth century has been the rural family unit, The principle highlights of this sort of family unit were a strict sexual orientation based part division with a man centric head and a pecking order by birth, The members in the family dwelling to a similar family unit, even those not related by blood, in this manner giving a model to family-style relations stretching out past the family. A third element of the family was its "stem" family framework, in which one children (as a rule the oldest child) stayed in the family unit to assume control over the privately-run company and look after his matured parents. Alternate children moved out and at times built up branch families which stayed in a subordinate relationship to the primary family. Little girls wedded into different families. Daughter-in-law was additionally anticipated that would participate in the privately-owned company and at last to be the essential guardian for her elderly parent-in-laws. The most imperative part of the family was

to protect the family unit assets and pass them on to the people to come while respecting the family predecessors through family based religious practices (Imamura, 1990).

Korean family System: The family is the fundamental part of social life in Korea. In a Confucian man centric family, the family as an element outweighs its individuals, and the family bunch is indistinguishably related to the group. The most essential capacity of relatives is to keep up and safeguard the family unit inside the conventional Confucian framework (Lee, 2005). “Society became organized around two principles: that males shall dominate females and that elderly shall dominate the young” (Kim, 1998). Developing old in Korea had preferences for women and men, for age was regarded. As indicated by this viewpoint, Women were regularly self-emphatic and profoundly esteemed, as the family finance managers, decision makers in family matters, and educators of children (Brandt 1971; Osgood 1951). “Traditionally, the ideal family type in Korea was a patrilocal stem family. The stem family typically consists of two families in successive generation, a father and mother living in the same household with married oldest son, his wife, and their children. The eldest son generally inherited the family estates. The other sons were expected to live in separate residences after their marriages” (Shin, 1996).

The Concept of Family System: Indian Perspective

Indian culture regards the entire world as one human family, i.e., “*Vasudeva Kutumbakam.*” “*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*” is a Sanskrit phrase which means that the whole world is one single family (ias, 2014). The excellence about the Indian culture lies in its age-long winning custom of the joint family framework. It's a framework under which even expanded individuals from a family like one's parents, children, the children's spouses and their offspring, etc. live together. The senior most, for the most part the male part is the head in the joint Indian family framework that settles on terrifically vital choices and standards, though other relatives comply with it obediently with full regard (ManaPSC, 2015). “The Indian family has been a dominant institution in the life of the individual and in the life of the community” (Mullatti, 1992). In India, families adhere to a patriarchal ideology, follow the patrilineal rule of descent, are patrilocal, have familial value orientations, and endorse traditional gender role preferences (Sharma, 2017). The Indian family is considered strong, stable, close, resilient, and enduring (Mullatti, Families in India: Beliefs and Realities, 1995).

The family in India is frequently comprehended as a perfect homogenous unit with solid methods for dealing with stress. It is a fundamental, strong, and vital unit of the bigger social frameworks. In addition, families in a huge and socially various nations, for example, India have majority of structures that shift with class, ethnicity, and individual decisions. Its individuals are bound by relational connections in a more extensive system of part and social relations. The family is the essential and imperative unit of society due to the part it plays in age of human capital assets and the power that is vested in it to impact individual, family unit, and group conduct (Sriram, 1993) and (Sonawat, 2001).

The southern locale includes states like Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala where the Dravidian dialects are talked. Hindu joint family is for the most part of two sorts, in particular, the matrilineal joint family and the patrilineal joint family. The majority of the parts of the Southern district aside from a few, similar to the Malabar, take after the patrilineal family framework. In any case, there are numerous locales where families are matrilineal in which the headship plunges in the female line, for example, in Kerala and the north eastern district of Nagaland and Meghalaya (Jayaprakashnaryana, 2008). While the matrilineal joint family is found among the nayars of Kerala, Mangloreans of Karnataka in Malabar part of south India. The patrilineal joint family is predominantly found among the rest of the Hindu community. The bond between the individuals from the family gave a feeling of social security to its members especially for vulnerable (Jayaprakashnaryana, 2008).

The traditional South Indian culture as well and the deep rooted joint family framework have been instrumental in shielding the social and financial security of the elderly people in the nation. Be that as it may, with the fast changes in the social situation and the rising pervasiveness of atomic family set-ups in India lately the elderly are presented to passionate, physical and monetary instability (Mehrotra, 2013). Southern Indian kinship systems are endogamous in terms of preferring cross-cousin or uncle–niece marriage in many communities, and southern women therefore maintain comparatively more ties with their natal families after marriage (Sarma, 2007).

Role of Family System in providing Psycho-Social Support to Elderly during COVID-19

Elderly people are more vulnerable to the coronavirus. Aged people with pre-existing medical conditions such as heart disease, lung disease or tuberculosis are having chances of facing severe to deadly situation of COVID-19. Elderly people are under unprecedented fear and uncertainty due to coronavirus infection and social distancing. In this critical situation, family need to extend their support to boost their psycho- social health. Family members can actively involve the elderly persons in leisure activities like playing games, watching television and having dinner together with family discussion helps them to overcome from boredom, and feeling of loneliness as well as it strengthens the intergenerational bondage in family system. “To ensure elderly citizens have access to the care and support they need during the COVID-19 outbreak, their families and caregivers have to be supported as a priority. Home care, nutritious food, toiletries, medicine, and social support and information for mental and emotional well-being have to be ensured. Elderly people also need tailored and accurate information on how to stay healthy during the pandemic” (WHO-Europe, 2020).

“Caregivers should be aware of their elderly family member’s medical and mobility needs, and be aware of how to handle cognitive impairments, she said. People with cognitive dysfunction due to Alzheimer’s disease or other dementia especially struggle during times of change” (Bhanoo, 2020). Elderly adults may be experiencing significant isolation already, and social distancing may worsen complications. Reduced care-giving time may also place elderly adults at risk, due to missed opportunities to catch cognitive or general health decline (Regenstrief Institute, 2020).

The elderly people who are living lonely can connect with their children, relatives and friends through social media, phone or video call. Being far also family members need to connect and spend quality time with their elderly parents. Surly it brings lot of smile on their faces and motivates them to be active. Family members need to take care and guide the older persons in the family to follow safety measures like using masks, sanitizing their hands often and share simple facts about what is going on and give clear information about how to reduce risk of coronavirus infection (World Health Organization, 2020).

“Elder adults, especially in isolation and those with cognitive decline/dementia, may become more anxious, angry, stressed, agitated and withdrawn during the outbreak or while in quarantine. Provide practical and emotional support through informal networks (families) and health professionals” (World Health Organization, 2020). “It is critical that elderly people can access health-care services during the pandemic for both emergency and primary health care. Health-care workers, social service providers, family members and community members who provide care for elderly people must also be supported with the resources they need” (WHO-Europe, 2020).

Method: The present study is based on a historic research design. The source for the present paper was based on secondary data.

Operational Definitions

Family: In this paper family represents all the members who were living with elderly as a unit.

Elderly: In this study "Elderly" defined as those men and women aged 60 years and above.

Support: In this paper, support refers the psycho-social caring of elderly.

Psycho-social issues: Psycho-social issues are the negative effects of COVID-19 impact on elderly.

Joint family: is a type of extended family composed of grandparents, parents, their children, and the children's spouses and offspring in one household.

COVID-19 pandemic: The corona virus COVID-19 pandemic is the defining global health crisis.

Major findings

Among all the institutions that mankind has built for its survival and progress, the best institution is family. A happy family is one in which the young and old live together, sharing the bond of love and mutual care. The needs for family life are even greater for elderly persons. The age-old customs and traditions of family provided care and protection to the elderly. In more than one sense caring the elderly by children is a sort of a reciprocation of the care of the children by the parents. It is this reciprocity that binds the generation together to make the family as a functional unit. Many parents in the Indian culture expect that their children would care for them in their old age. The culture belief and the duties of the son towards his parents in the old age largely necessitate co-residence of the elderly with their married children and grandchildren. The three-generational households were the norm

which helps to intergenerational interaction which ultimately determines the quality of elderly care. However, these values and norms are being eroded under the influence of urbanization, modernization, and globalization.

The shift in the family system from joint and extended families to nuclear family is also having deleterious effects on the lives of the elderly as the married sons get separated leaving the elderly to their own fate. Further, the rampant ongoing developments such as urbanization, industrialization and consequent migration and erosion in value systems due to the impact of a market economy have brought structural and functional changes in the family which is the primary care agency (Vijay Kumar, 1995).

Elderly are at elevated risk for complications from COVID-19 and are dying at a higher rate than younger patients. (Regenstrief Institute, 2020). In the context, family is being as a primary care agency to elderly in providing psycho-social support during this COVID-19 period. With the support of family elderly can maintain daily routines which keeps them active. Due to COVID-19, adverse psycho-social impacts on elderly such as angry, fear, depression, burnout, anxiety and fear of infection, loneliness and insomnia and so on can occurred. In such situation, the presence, support and guidance of family members helps elderly to keep their morale high. During this COVID-19 pandemic, supporting and caregiving can also be a huge task for a family and for many family members, the routine tasks they perform to care and support the elderly are more complex. Because the family members who are also need to take additional steps to safeguard their own health as well as extra safety concerns.

Research in the various cultural setting shows that elderly prefers to be in their own homes and communities (Organization, 2011). But in the present pandemic circumstances, if elderly get infected they need to be in COVID care centre far away from family. Its largely effects the mental and social health. One common assumption about the elderly is that they are 'dependants', and consumers and not producers. All these developments have to lead to several changes in the living arrangements of elderly and have resulted in declining possibilities of family care and greater need for self and formal care services. The family and the community have tended to shift the blame on the decline physical and mental health of the elderly rather than on behavioural deviance/intolerance/greed among the care providers themselves. Blame is also laid on the tough socio-economic conditions faced both by the family and the community. In this modern society and technological advancement leads joint families into nuclear families. Along with the decline in a joint family system,

family ties, the cultural values, norms, understanding, adjustments, respecting elderly parents are also declined.

Suggestions:

1. Families need to understand that respect the worth and dignity of the individual irrespective of their age and gender.
2. Strengthen the intergenerational ties in family by resolving the issues with the professional help through family counselling.
3. Family need to support elderly in maintaining their regular activities and added to that recreational activities with family members also helps elderly to be positive and happy especially during COVID-19.
4. Families need to aware about physical, psychological, emotional problems related to old age which helps to extend effective care giving and psycho-social support during this pandemic.
5. Family-centered care helps elderly with Coronavirus positive to recover quickly and involvement of family in caring process reduces the stress of elderly.

Conclusion

As a society, we have consistently relied upon families to offer protection in terms of financial, emotional support, care to their aged parents, grandparents when they can no longer function independently. However, these values and norms are being eroded under the influence of urbanization, modernization, and globalization. Along with the decline in a joint family system, family ties, the cultural values, norms, understanding, adjustments, respecting elderly parents and care giving are also declined by leaving them economic insufficiency, psychological trauma, loneliness, emotional insecurity and lack of care and protection. Family is being as a primary care agency to elderly in providing psycho-social support during this COVID-19 period. Due to COVID-19, adverse psycho-social impacts on elderly such as angry, fear, depression, burnout, anxiety, fear of infection, loneliness, insomnia and so on can occurred. In such situation, the presence, support and guidance of family members helps elderly to keep themselves positive.

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