

# The Journal of Population Research



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## **Eldery in joint family: a Sociological exegesis of intergenerational connectivity in urban India**

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### ***Abstract***

*In an era of increasing elderly population and living household arrangement of the aged people pose an emergent challenge in contemporary society for the present as well as for the future. It is further problematized by the fact of greater density of population and scarcity of living space accompanied by the mushrooming of old age homes in urban areas. In an overarching post –industrial and individuating social relationships, family as the primary institution of social organization is perceived by social scientists. Such an emergent social reality not only questions the structural integration of the family but also the functionality of the family relationships. In the backdrop of ever increasing elderly population and their integration in social system, this paper is an attempt to synthesize the theoretical and empirical propositions on the intergenerational relationships in urban families with special reference to the inclusion of the elderly in urban society.*

**Key words:** 1.Ageing, 2.Elderly, 3.Intergenerational relationships, 4.Joint family, 5.Urban family.

### **Background and Conceptual overview**

The family is an institution that simultaneously envelops and unfolds the ideal and normative on the one hand and actual behavior on the other. It works as conduit, and sanctions and provides the potential for continuity as well as change in structures of kinship, marriage and reorganization of living arrangements in accordance with the times (Tulsipatel,2005).

Nimkoff saw the Indological influences in the use of the term ‘joint family’ for the household that is both structurally and functionally joint. Concurrently, I.P. Desai’s empirical evidence of the multiplicity of extant forms, ranging from functionally and residentially joint to residentially nuclear but functionally joint, had made its mark in sociology. Desai tried to overcome the complexity of defining the household according to jointness through the dual classification of jointness: one being jointness of residence and the other being jointness of responsibility and cooperation.

India is home to a rapidly growing population of elderly persons. Ageing is a biological process found in every class, caste, gender and place. Every individual learn the basic knowledge, culture & behavior from parents and elder member of society. So, the family plays an important role &

function in human life. In general, human being's entire life completed within the family structure (a person born in the family, socialize in family, got protection and security in the family and die in the family). Family assists as a connection for the people between the past life and the future. Family relations stay with individual all over their life, even if he discards them. Strength, intention & permanency are the main features of the family correlation and portray this group from all others, "of all the organizations, large or small, which society expand, none surpasses the family in the greatness of its sociological importance (Kumar, S.V. 1991). Family impact the whole society in number of process for continuity and change and repeat in all social system. However, the concept of family is not simple to describe. It has no customary and standard meaning from one culture to another. In traditional and social terms the family is well-defined by Murdock as:

"An association characterized by common dwelling, socio-economic cooperation and reproduction. It comprises members of both genders, at least two of whom maintain a socially accepted sexual relationship & reproduction, and one or more of their offspring of their own or adopted by the sexually cohabiting adults", while Giddens defines family as an assembly of people directly connected by kin networks, the grown-up members of which undertake accountability for caring for the offspring. With the social creation over time the above definition has extended to include new forms of a family unit. However, as a social institution, the family is the central unit of association in social structure and a wide set of rules, norms and procedures has been established to define both the bond between the family system and community in which it survives and the relationship between the members of the family system.

Three inter-related and overlying relationships are usually used, however, to designate the individuals instituting a family consist of common residence, consanguinity and marriage. The magnitude to which any one of these features impact and defines the family relationship varies from one culture of society to another.

In an overarching post-industrialising and individuating social relationships, family as the primary institution of social organization is perceived by social scientists to be detraditionalizing. Such an emergent social reality not only questions the structural integration of the family but also the functionality of the family relationships. In the backdrop of ever increasing elderly population and their integration in social system, this paper is an attempt to synthesize the theoretical and empirical propositions on the intergenerational relationships in urban families with special reference to the inclusion of the elderly in urban society.

### **Elderly in contemporary society**

Elderly life in contemporary society presents greater prospects and scope as well as new and unique challenges. Sociological study of aging is concerned with the social aspects of both individual aging and an aging society. Although individual experience of aging depends on a variety of social factors, including public policies and programs, economic status, social support, and health status (Behura and Mohanty, 2000). Sociological perspective of ageing largely emphasizes on the roles and relationship of the elderly with their offspring, kins, friends and so on in social organizations and social Structure.

"Old Age" is generally connected with decreasing abilities, both mental and physical, and a decrease in social role & commitments (including participation in sport) of any person. The specific arrival of old age differs culturally, socially, ethnically and historically. It is a social construct or paradigm, rather than a biological point. The individuals in India, who have reached the age of 60 years and above, are demarcated as aged or elderly for the determination of availing senior citizen welfares and assistances.

The 'National Policy on Older Persons' announced by Government of India in January, 1999 in the wake of the growing importance of the subject, lays down action strategies suggested by its aims at

the 'quality of life of the elderly population'. In the developing societies, the welfare measures and infrastructures for the elderly population are poor. In the urban areas, where the infrastructural facilities are better than their rural counterpart, there is a gradual but definite withering of the joint family system, as a result of which the old people are exposed to emotional neglect and the lack of physical support. The elderly people are mostly economically dependent. The government needs to provide economic incentives/support and other such helps for the wellbeing of the aged. It also needs to create many geriatric department and centers for the specialized health care of elderly population. For those elderly whose families have neglected them, whom are too poor to look after themselves, many old age homes are required where many infrastructural facilities of high quality are needed. In sum, the investment in social sector by government will take a shift, where by earlier focus on 0-14 year old population is will now be diverted for the sixty plus age group population. For this a whole new range of investment is required for providing welfare facilities and infrastructure for the quality of life of the elderly population. And obviously, this all will have its consequences on social and economic sectors. These rural areas are still strong in the joint family system and in the value of family life but it do not have the basic infrastructural facilities owing to which the people of old age are living on the Almighty's mercy. The status of women in particular, in the developing societies is poor and that of elderly women is pathetic. Widowhood of women in the old age is due to the following reasons:

- substantial age differences between marriage partners;
- the differential life expectancy between male and female; and
- the differing proportion of men and women who remarry

### **Aging and urbanization in india**

Comparable to several countries in the globe, India has an ageing population and its ratio is growing speedily. India presently has around a 104 million elder individuals that constitute 9% of total population size (Census 2011). The ratio of India's elderly people is expected to rise to 18.3% by 2050 and cross 30% by 2100 (United Nations 2013). The decadal progress rate for the elderly people in India for the period of 1991-2001 was 40%, i.e. nearly twice the growth rate of overall population i.e. 21%. The growing rates for total population in India, for the period of 2000-2050 is expected to rise by 60% while for elderly population, it would shoot up by 360% (United Nations, 2002). India alone will house 15.8% i.e. 323 million, of the whole elderly population of the globe, by 2050. The proportion of the aged is consequently progressively scaling up in the total population. Following chart-2 shows that there is rapid growth of elderly population in India.

**Chart-2: Percentage of elderly population growth (1901-2011)**

Year	No. Of older persons (in millions)	Percentage	Year	No. Of older persons (in millions)	Percentage
1901	12.06	5.06	1961	24.71	5.63
1911	13.17	5.22	1971	32.70	5.97
1921	13.48	5.37	1981	43.98	6.42
1931	14.21	5.09	1991	55.31	6.55
1941	18.04	5.66	2001	75.93	7.70
1951	19.61	5.43	2011	104	9%

Source: Census commissioner, Government of india.

While the elderly population has register a steady increase in India, according to the 2011 Census data, urbanization has demonstrated similar trend. Evidently, for the first time since 1951, the absolute growth in the urban population was greater than that in the rural population. This has massive consequences for providing infrastructure and other civic facilities in urban pockets.

India's four urban cities such as Mumbai, Surat, Ahmadabad, and Jaipur are placed at the world's most dense urban area among the top ten. As for the 2011 Census, the urban population raised to 377 million displaying an increase rate of 2.76% per annum during 2001-2011. The level of urbanization in India as a whole increased from 27.7% in 2001 to 31.1% in 2011 – a growth of 3.3 percentage points during 2001-2011 compared to an increase of 2.1 percentage points during 1991-2001. The Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India expected the urban population for the year 2011 to 358 million, and projected that urban population growth rates would drop from 2.75% per annum noticed during 1991-2001 to 2.23 during 2001-2011. Urban experts also thought that India's urbanization would slow down since its exclusionary nature and its inability to spur rural-to-urban migration (Kundu, 2011). However, the 2011 Census shows some unpredicted results as in chart-1 and graph-1.

**Chart-1: Trends in urbanization in india (1961-2011)**

<b>Census year Of urban</b>	<b>Urban population (In millions)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>1961</b>	17.97	78.94
<b>1971</b>	19.91	109.11
<b>1981</b>	23.34	159.46
<b>1991</b>	25.72	217.18
<b>2001</b>	27.86	286.12
<b>2011</b>	31.16	377.10

Source: Census of india

Thus, greater urbanization latently invites higher focus towards the issues and challenges of inclusion vs. exclusion of the elderly in urban India.

### **Elderly in urban family**

In all kinds of families, the prominent feature is the interrelationships between the family members. Based on this assumption, the family's functions are identified as the establishment of emotional, social and economic bonds between the spouses; procreation and sexual relations between the spouses; giving name and status, especially to the children; basic care of the children and of the elderly and relatives with disability; socialization and education of the children and even of the parents; protection of the family members; emotional care and recreation of the family members.

Aging is a natural phenomenon. It is any change in an organism over time. Aging also refers to a process of physical, mental, biological and social change respect increase in age (Hultsch & Deutsch, 1981). Age is a way of marking human events and experiences. In our society, we have specific age and norms about entry into role (e.g., driving, voting, marrying, and working) and exit from role (child bearing, retirement). Aging consists of the forces that govern the course of life of an organism and how well one survives. Aging can also be defined as the maximization and attainment of positive outcomes, and the minimization and avoidance of negative outcomes (Baltes & Carstensen, 1996). It can also be seen as the cumulative, progressive and degenerative changes that occur over a period of life (Ramamurti, 1995).

The literature on Sociology of Ageing in India abounds with the quantitative and qualitative descriptions of elderly. Literature review is focused on the Elderly in modern family; Elderly in Urban family in India; Gender Analysis of Ageing; Inclusion Vs Exclusion of Elderly in Urban Family; Quality of Life in Old Age; Institutional Framework for Social development of the Elderly; Role of Elderly in Modern Society; and Functionality of the Elderly in contemporary society.

**Panda, A.K. (2006)** detailed the significant role of elderly women in socialization of their grandchildren, home management and participation in decision making process. She found that, storytelling by grandmothers used to be not only a recreation for grandchildren but also an important instrument of inculcating manners and values among children. During marriage-fixation and performance and also functions associates with new born like *annaprassana* (rice-eating ceremony), their advice and contribution were often considered as pivotal. Their involvement in these activities helped them in social integration. However, in modern times, social matrix has undergone changes due to many factors such as commercialization, industrialization and urbanization. Along with, modernization has profoundly influenced the values like inter-dependence, co-operation and self-sacrifice giving way to independence, personal mobility and personal care.

She explored that elderly females are playing active role in performance of cultural and traditional practices, sacraments and duties. How they were often consulted in matters related to childbirth and minor health care not only by females of the family but also in the neighborhood of that community or village.

**Riley(1986)** highlighted the sociology of aging provides an analytical framework for considerate the relationship between human lives and altering social structures. Family relations are seen as increasing and hence suitable to sustaining the individual throughout the life cycle. Studies reveal that presence of strong family ties serves to buffer the stress of isolation and deprivation and the way in which support of the family and social system can be mobilized to reduce or eliminate both risks. However, she argues that lately, there has been a general feeling that in the modern industrial world, the family is undergoing change in structure and function and attempts at understanding the importance of the family for the elderly and nap the changes taking place.

**SavitaVermani (1997)** proved that the elderly people take care of their grandchildren of their working daughter in law despite their ill health condition. She throws light on the cherished perception of working women who consider the aged people as an assistant of their children.

**Obioha and Tsoeunyane (2012)** examined the roles of the elderly in the Sotho family in general and society in particular. In contradiction of this contextual, the author examined the roles of the elderly in the Sotho family in general and society in particular in order to document & record it subsequently. The researcher found that the elderly were actively engaged in certain specific roles within their families and community. Their roles comprise socialization of young child, provide traditional knowledge & information, caring and mystical functions, therapeutic and medicinal functions, guidance & social occupations and many contributions to the economic development of the Sotho community. They are specialized, that are limited for the elderly only. For example, providing sacrifice to appease the gods can only be performed by the elderly since they are considered as a connection between the existing and the past generations. Their study concluded that these roles played by the elderly keep them purposefully in structure of things, which means the acknowledgement of their significance to the society still continues, even though they might look physically weak and frail.

**Roberto (1992)** in examining the family relationships in later life, elucidate the role and function of Grandparent with respect to grandchildren. He found that, it is a reciprocal, social and psychological relationship between a new generation and an old generation. The aged grandparent taught about basic institution of social system. And grandchildren's company to the elderly brings happiness and successful in end of life. Since, other members of family engaged in other kind of

economic and household activity, it became necessity and useful for both to spent time. Similar to that, Gurumurthy (1998) critically examined on the financial condition of the aged, be it income, pension, expenditure, savings, pastime activities, housing, medical facilities etc., how forms an important aspect of study on them. He highlighted in a family, depending upon its type and form, there will be grandparents, parents, children and grandchildren and dependents.

**Bahadur and Dhawan (2008)** elucidate the importance of the family in making and molding an individual on the one hand and influencing social groups and patterns on the other. The study focused on individual level changes affected by the modifications that are taking place in the family under rapid on-going socio-cultural changes in contemporary Indian society. Social relationships and participation in social activities are tried to learn health of elderly individuals through psycho-social pathways. Varied alternative studies furthermore brought out long-standing implications between social participation and superficiality among elder individuals particularly if relationships were reciprocal.

**Malhotra and Chadha (1997)** have endeavored to conclude the physical actions and interaction of the aged after retirement. The result of their research came to conclusion that non-pensioners have larger problem of their circumstances. Also, widowers narrated the problems and difficulty in daily occurring. After retirement, an aged one occupies time in his family system and with friend circles. But, health problems may mark adaptation to retirement problematic due to physical and mental boundaries.

**Willson (2006)** concerned with the social aspects of both individual aging in family structure in particular and an aging society in general. The individual experience of aging depends on a variety of social factors, including public policies and programs, social security, economic status, social support, and Physical and psychological status. The importance of the field, and much of the theory and research in this area, is either directly or indirectly influenced by a concern with population aging. Difficulties confronted by senior citizens are possible to be particularly acute.

**Pellisery and Rajan (2010)** expounded the economic security in later life emerged as a crucial determinant of ageing particularly among older women in associate level of urban setting in developing countries. Empirical proof clearly recommend that there's a desire for universal coverage of Social Security schemes for older persons. Besides, economic security, awareness concerning social support systems other factor such as legal and constitutional status of older groups (Gupta, 2001). Within the developing countries, the family remains the mainstay of care and support to the older individuals. Organization of the aged individual with the members of the family is incredibly essential for a satisfactory life, and stronger emotional bonding of the fogeys with their kids (Vatuk, 1990). Attribute to cultural context of Indian society, it's a social expectation that the adult son(s) pay attention of the aged groups and also the daughter(s) lead of the fogeys given that the aged failed to have son(s). Education is important factor related to quality of life and functional role of older populations (Zhou, et al., 2011; Jose & Sekher, 2013) particularly in rural areas. During a study in India, similar findings were reflected that higher years of education and higher economic standing measure absolutely associated with higher health standard, and high standard of life. Health with age, each physical and psychological health standard, looks to assume bigger significance and has been indicated as a crucial determinant of role of elderly in numerous studies. Utilization of health care has been determined to own a positive relationship with individual's age (Alam, 2006). It's additional been established that, social and economic factors verify the kind of medical building utilized by older groups.

**Butterill and Fithry (2012)** highlighted the support and care given to the elderly males and females in rural Indonesia. Shah A.M. (1999) elucidated that though domestic institution in India is undergoing strain and stresses, the forthcoming safety and care of the mass of the elderly lies in their dwelling in the joint family system. For this, a practice of adjustment between the senior and the new younger

generation necessities to be connect so that they arrive at the new considerate of their mutual necessities, concurrently, Bose (1986) captured the shifting position and status of the elderly people in social structure and within the family system.

### **Conclusion**

The jointness of family in general and urban family in particular is engendered by the inclusion of the elderly, which in term determined by their functionality and utility in urban household. Accordingly, with increasing proportion of elderly population as well as greater urban growth, the joint-family system is not the verge of mitigation rather than it is more likely to persist assuming new forms and functions resilient to requisite of contemporary society.

The dramatic increase in the number and proportion of older persons has been one of the most significant developments of the twentieth century. This increase in the number of older persons in society has had far reaching consequences for the family. Urbanization, modernization, industrialization, migration and the increasing participation of elderly in the labor force are also greatly modifying the traditional structure of family. A common form of joint family is the three-generation family where grandparents, parents and children live together. The three generation family, where the elderly are respected and cared for, is the most desirable form of the family.

In modern context, family interaction and cooperation was valued above everything, and the primary duty of the head of the family was to ensure that family traditions in all matters relating to life were perpetuated by their solemn observance, however meaningless they might begin to appear as conditions changed. The joint-family system has been the third potent factor in the continuance of cultural traditions. The traditional authority of the head over the young members of the family was so awe-inspiring that the young never thought of expressing their differences, whatever their convictions might be. The subordination and super ordination designed to regulate the lives of the different members in the hierarchy of the joint household, recognition of the family as a unit for all social relationships, the place assigned to the family as a judicial unit in family quarrels- all tended to give the family such enormous influence that the individual lost his identity in it (Kapadia, 1992). The social environment never provided any opportunity to the individual to feel that he had interests apart from those of the family.

Industrialization and urbanization serves to strengthen the joint family because a commercial base has been provided to support it or more hands are required in a reintroduced family enterprise or because kin can help one another in the striving for upward mobility. Elderly support is tinier through women side and grandchildren also customarily bond or link is more strengthen.

Joint family in urban is more integrated joint functionally rather than structurally. India is a predominantly agrarian society. That agrarian society creates social joint institution to carry out all agricultural activity with free family labour. When industrialization and urbanization came to India, the joint family system started break. But joint family arrangement still continues in urban India. Urban setting in India is again functionally arrangement with offspring and elderly.

Since the cost of living of urban setting is more than rural; so, the functional joint family based on contextual requisite e.g. economic based greater accent on minimizing and mitigating expenditure by urban middle class family such as expenditure in rent, child care, domestic work etc.

As for the demographic trends of the contemporary society, there is an increase in elderly population. Accordingly the elderly proportion is on an increase; therefore, inevitable growth of the elderly population is more likely to be livability with if the elderly are not functional. Therefore sociological inquiry is essential to locate the factors facilitating towards enhancing the utility, functionality and integration of the elderly in modern society.



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