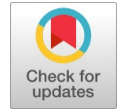


Understanding the Gender Concerns among Senior Citizens

Radhika Kapur



Abstract: *The main objective of this research paper is to acquire an efficient understanding of gender concerns among senior citizens. The senior citizens, belonging to all communities are different from each other in terms of number of factors. The men and women are engaged in similar as well as different occupations. In India, more than 70 percent of the population resides in rural communities, in these communities, both men and women are engaged in agriculture and farming practices. Furthermore, they are engaged in production of various types of artworks and handicrafts. On the other hand, within urban communities, senior citizen men are engaged in work as well as take retirement from work, whereas, women too are engaged in work as well as homemakers. One of the common factors among both senior citizens men and women is that in their old age, they get engaged in tasks, which are facilitating in promoting well-being and goodwill of family and community members. Therefore, among senior citizens, both men and women are engaged in various types of tasks and activities, which are facilitating in bringing about improvements in one's overall standards of living. As a consequence, there is prevalence of gender equality. The main concepts that are taken into account in this research paper are, factors highlighting gender concerns among senior citizens, impediments taking place within the course of implementation of gender equality among senior citizens and improving the status of women in rural areas.*

Keywords: *Communities, Gender Concerns, Implementation, Impediments, Policies, Programs, Senior Citizens*

I. INTRODUCTION

In order to respond to the demographic and societal changes, the effects of policies on men and women, belonging to various age groups, categories and backgrounds have to be considered. Gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications of men and women on any planned action, for instance, legislation policies and programs prior to implementation. This allows the development of strategies in which the issues, concerns and experiences, specific to men and women are an integral dimension of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs (Gender Equality, Work and Old Age, 2009). It is essential to formulate measures and programs that alleviate gender concerns among senior citizens and promote their well-being.

There is an interconnection between mainstreaming ageing and mainstreaming gender. Gender inequalities in old age primarily result from disadvantages within the course of implementation of tasks and activities. The need to adopt a life-course approach, when dealing with the interconnections of ageing and gender arises from the understanding that current circumstances of senior citizens can be understood with reference to their prior life-course. This requires connection between the socio-economic position, responsibilities, work duties and terms and relationships in later life (Gender Equality, Work and Old Age, 2009). In urban communities, senior citizen men and women normally enjoy equal rights and opportunities. These are in terms of various areas, such as, medical and health care facilities, banking transactions, investments, housing accommodation, pension and so forth.

In rural communities both men and women are engaged primarily in the agriculture and farming practices. Senior citizen women, who are unable to work may remain confined within the houses and get engaged in the implementation of household responsibilities in accordance to their capabilities. Tasks such as, production of handicrafts and food items mainly engage women. On the other hand, senior citizen men are also engaged in production of artworks, handicrafts, garments, and so forth. Hence, both men and women work on the basis of their capabilities and aptitude.

Women tend to live longer than men. Due to this reason, the senior citizen women are more as compared to senior citizen men. In 2012, for every 100 women, aged 60 and above, there are 84 men. The proportion of women rises further with age. For every 100 women, aged 80 and above, there are 61 men. This is termed as 'feminization of ageing'. There are differences among senior citizen men and women on the basis of various issues that are relevant for the ageing policies. The differences are on the basis of health and morbidity patterns. Women usually have lower income but larger family support. Senior citizen women are more likely subjected to isolation and loneliness as compared to men. Women are more likely to be widowed and are less likely to remarry (Chapter III, n.d.).

A. Factors Highlighting Gender Concerns among Senior Citizens

In both urban and rural communities, both men and women are engaged in various tasks and activities. They form the viewpoint that they will not let their old age give rise to barriers within the course of putting into operation various tasks and activities. In other words, they do not tend to become a burden on their family members (Depression, 2012).

Manuscript received on 12 September 2021 | Revised Manuscript received on 10 December 2021 | Manuscript Accepted on 15 December 2021 | Manuscript published on 15 November 2023.

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Furthermore, they will contribute efficiently in promoting well-being of their families and communities. Throughout their lives, they prepare themselves adequately in carrying out their jobs in a well-ordered manner. In addition, they need to ensure, they contribute significantly in managing resources in a satisfactory manner. Furthermore, there are certain factors which highlight the gender concerns among senior citizens, i.e. job duties, management of household responsibilities, gender gap narrows in migration for employment opportunities, family support networks and labor force participation and social security. These have been stated as follows:

B. Job Duties

The job duties of senior citizen men and women are different in urban and rural areas. They may get engaged in either paid or honorary work. When they are engaged in paid work and employed in various industries, institutions or organizations, they need to work in accordance to their skills and abilities. An important aspect that needs to be taken into account is, both men and women should be given equal pay for the same job duties performed. There should not be any type of discrimination on the basis of factors, such as, caste, creed, ethnicity, race, religion, gender, educational qualification, and socio-economic background. In urban areas, senior citizen women may get engaged in number of activities, such as, production of artworks, handicrafts, garments, food items, or they may make provision of coaching classes to children, belonging to poverty stricken, deprived, marginalized and economically backward sections of the society. Whereas, senior citizen men may provide medical treatment, if they are from medical background, or they develop interest in astrology and palmistry. The individuals, residing in urban communities are well-educated and aware. They possess the viewpoint that if they work even after retirement, they will keep themselves occupied and generate a source of income. On the other hand, in rural communities, the individuals, both men and women are engaged in agriculture and farming practices. The senior citizen men and women are also engaged in them in accordance to their capacities. In addition, these individuals are involved in the rearing of livestock. The women are engaged in the management of household responsibilities and training of children. The girls are trained from the initial stage in terms of implementation of household responsibilities and their mothers and grandmothers are the ones, who need to provide them training. On the other hand, fathers and grandfathers provide training to their grandchildren in terms of agriculture and farming practices and how to market their produce.

II. MANAGEMENT OF HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES

In urban and rural areas, women are the ones, who are vested with the responsibilities of management of household. Though in urban areas, helpers and service providers are hired, but in rural areas, they need to carry out the household chores on their own. In the management of household responsibilities in urban areas, the main tasks that the individuals need to put into operation include cleaning, sweeping, gardening, preparation of meals and taking into consideration other aspects, such as, repair work, electric

work, painting, plumbing and so forth. There are differences in the job duties of men and women with regards to the implementation of household responsibilities. The job duties of repair work, electric work, painting of the house, plumbing, carpentry and so forth are performed by men. Even men, who are 60 years of age and above carry out these tasks to earn their living. On the other hand, senior citizen women usually carry out the job duties of cleaning and preparation of meals. In rural areas, there are certain additional tasks, the individuals are engaged in, i.e. the rearing of livestock and they need to fetch water from the wells and water bodies, as they experience scarcity of water in their houses. The men are normally engaged in tasks that are to be implemented outside the homes. On the other hand, women carry out the tasks within the homes. The senior citizen women usually remain confine within the houses and provide assistance to the family members in the implementation of household responsibilities. The contribution of men and women in urban and rural areas towards the implementation of household responsibilities are in accordance to their needs and capacities. It is essential for them to upgrade their competencies and maintain health conditions to get engaged in any kind of productive work.

A. Gender Gap Narrows in Migration for Employment Opportunities

There are sufficient accounts available in terms of senior citizen women, who are not willing to move to other places for employment opportunities. In rural communities, the individuals are residing in the conditions of poverty and backwardness. In order to alleviate the conditions of poverty, it is vital for the individuals to get engaged in some kind of work and generate a source of income. But senior citizen women are either not allowed to or they are hesitant to move to other places. On the other hand, men are more likely to move to other regions or cities for employment opportunities. Apart from agriculture and farming practices, rural men train themselves in various other fields as well, such as, painting, plumbing, repair work, electric work, carpentry, production of handicrafts, artworks, weaving, pottery making and so forth. When they are skilled in terms of one or more of these aspects, they have the primary objective of making use of their skills and abilities to enhance their living conditions. Therefore, men are more likely to move to other regions, where they can obtain employment opportunities. The gap between number of men and women migrating to other regions for work reduced between the 2001 and 2011 census. In rural communities, men and women either possess low literacy skills or no literacy skills at all. In the present existence, there have been establishment of adult education centres, which are making provision of literacy skills and information to the senior citizens and other adults. The individuals who have either not been enrolled in schools before or dropped out prematurely are the ones, who seek admission. Therefore, when the senior citizen men and women acquire literacy skills, they usually form the viewpoint that they can make their lives productive.



They make use of their literacy skills and education not only to sustain their living conditions, but also acquire employment opportunities. But the rate of migration to other cities is high among men as compared to women.

III. FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORKS

In urban areas, senior citizen women are more likely to have stronger family support networks as compared to senior citizen men. The adult children in rural communities do not live with their parents. They have the main objective of enhancing their livelihoods. Therefore, they usually move out of their homes and migrate to urban areas to get enrolled in higher educational institutions to acquire education and to obtain employment opportunities. These aspects would not only help them to enhance their living conditions but also promote well-being of their families and communities. In this manner, the senior citizens in rural areas are living alone or with other relatives. The senior citizen women have high family support networks as compared to men. The main reason is, women are responsible for the function of child development and upbringing of the family. Therefore, the individuals are more likely to obtain guidance and direction from their mothers in order to carry out their tasks and activities and achievement of personal and professional goals.

In most cases, when senior citizen women are widows, their children usually want them to come and live with them. In this way, they are obtaining support and care from their children. On the other hand, senior citizen men usually keep to themselves, they have their own routine and are less likely to get involved in family matters. When they are living alone, they usually hire domestic helpers and caregivers, who would help them in the implementation of household responsibilities. They participate in social, cultural, religious, political and economic activities to keep themselves occupied. When their children are living at a distance from them, they usually communicate with them over the phone or make visits. Therefore, having own daily life routine and social circle enable them to cause a decline in the family support networks.

A. Labor Force Participation and Social Security

The differences in the socio-economic conditions is apparent. The senior citizen women are more likely to reside in the conditions of poverty and get effected by disability and health problems then senior citizen men. The senior citizen women are more represented and are more subjected to abuse and mistreatment. Many senior citizen women are widows and experience financial problems because of low income. Financial and social security of men and women in old age is associated with the present and previous participation in the labor market. Gender differences in the socio-economic status are partially ingrained in the traditional gender division of labor. Men are meant to get engaged in work, whereas, women are meant to carry out the household chores and look after the needs and requirements of their family members. The work duties of men and women have an influence on their abilities to accumulate the social security entitlements for their pension age (Gender Equality, Work and Old Age, 2009). It is apparent that men and women were able to carry out their personal and professional responsibilities in the past years in the manner that is best suitable to them without

risking their security in old age. To shape the political framework for gender equality throughout the lives of the individuals, three strategies are important. These are, first, encourage women to participate in the labor market and augment their career prospects. Second, women should enjoy social security in old age. Third, it should be acknowledged that support from family members should render an important contribution in the care of senior citizens. Therefore, the family members, who are working age need to ensure they do not exploit the elderly family members of financial resources, and property and take care of their needs and requirements satisfactorily.

B. Impediments taking place within the course of implementation of Gender Equality among Senior Citizens

The senior citizens are in all communities throughout the country. They are different from each other in terms of various factors, i.e. castes, creeds, races, religions, ethnicities, occupations, genders, cultures, personality traits, communities and socio-economic backgrounds. It is apparently understood that in their old age, they are overwhelmed by different types of health problems and illnesses. As a consequence, they are overwhelmed by impediments within the course of putting into operation various types of job duties and responsibilities. Furthermore, they are overwhelmed by different types of psychological problems of anger, stress, anxiety, frustration and depression. The main reason being, they experience decline in capabilities and aptitude and as a consequence are required to be dependent on others (Coughlin, Ambrosio, Reimer, & Pratt, n.d.). In rural communities, they are dependent on family members, whereas, in urban communities, apart from family members, help is taken from domestic helpers and caregivers. It is unfortunate to note that there are occurrences of impediments within the course of implementation of gender equality among senior citizens. These are, scarcity of resources; occurrences of health problems and illnesses; being overwhelmed by psychological problems; experiencing decline in capabilities and aptitude; unawareness in terms of various areas and lack of knowledge and competencies. These are stated as follows:

IV. SCARCITY OF RESOURCES

The individuals, belonging to deprived, marginalized and economically weaker sections of the society experience scarcity of resources. These are, financial, technical, material and information. The financial resources are the monetary resources. These are utilized to make purchases of various items, to bring about changes in various factors and lead to up-gradation of overall standards of living. Technical resources are various types of technologies, i.e. computers, lap-tops, I pads, scanners, printers, photo-copiers, audio-visual aids, smartphones and so forth. Material resources are, tools, devices, apparatus, equipment and machinery. Information resources are, books, articles, reports, projects, other reading materials and internet.



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As a consequence of experiencing scarcity of resources, individuals experience impediments within the course of implementation of various tasks and activities. Furthermore, gender inequality prevails among senior citizens. Therefore, scarcity of resources is regarded as one of the critical impediments taking place within the course of implementation of gender equality among senior citizens.

A. Occurrences of Health Problems and Illnesses

In old age, individuals are overwhelmed by different types of health problems and illnesses. Some of these are, pain in the joints, high blood pressure, low blood pressure, kidney disorders, heart problems, visual impairments, hearing impairments, diabetes and so forth. In some cases, they are not ambulatory and need to be dependent on others for activities of daily living of eating, bathing, dressing, toileting and transferring. As a consequence of these, they experience decline in capability levels. Hence, they may not be able to carry out certain tasks or assist others in putting into operation various types of job duties. In some cases, those elderly members are discarded and are not treated with respect and courtesy. Hence, there is prevalence of gender inequality. Therefore, occurrences of health problems and illnesses is one of the severe impediments taking place within the course of implementation of gender equality among senior citizens.

B. Being overwhelmed by Psychological Problems

The senior citizens are overwhelmed by different types of psychological problems of anger, stress, anxiety, frustration and depression. There are number of reasons due to which these are experienced, i.e. being overwhelmed by different types of health problems and illnesses; occurrences of social problems of poverty, illiteracy, homelessness, crime and violence and gender inequality; experiencing scarcity of financial, technical, material and information resources; inability to get things done on their own; experiencing decline in capabilities and aptitude; being dependent on others and so forth. The psychological problems are experienced in a major or minor form. The elderly individuals are required to cope with them in an effective manner. On the other hand, inability to solve them enables them to be looked down upon others with distrust. The main reason being, they are unable to depict usefulness and co-operation. Therefore, being overwhelmed by psychological problems is a disadvantageous impediment taking place within the course of implementation of gender equality among senior citizens.

C. Experiencing decline in Capabilities and Aptitude

In old age, due to occurrences of various types of health problems and illnesses and psychological problems of anger, stress, anxiety, frustration and depression, the individuals experience decline in capabilities and aptitude. Furthermore, they are dependent on others to carry out their tasks and activities in a well-ordered manner. The senior citizens usually due to this factor are unable to carry out different tasks and activities. These are particularly manual tasks, but they are able to give useful ideas and suggestions for promoting well-being of their family members. For this purpose, effective communication processes needs to be implemented with. As a consequence of experiencing decline in capabilities and aptitude, there is prevalence of gender

inequality, because family members form the viewpoint that they are liabilities. Furthermore, they will only make demands and will not be of any use to them. Therefore, experiencing decline in capabilities and aptitude is an unfavorable impediment taking place within the course of implementation of gender equality among senior citizens.

D. Unawareness in terms of various Areas

The senior citizens, belonging to rural communities and in urban communities as well, among disadvantaged sections of the society are overwhelmed by the problems of illiteracy and unawareness. As a consequence, they remain uninformed in terms of all factors that are necessary in promoting well-being and goodwill of themselves, families and communities. The research studies have indicated that grandchildren of elderly individuals, migrate to urban communities. They get enrolled in educational institutions to acquire good-quality education. As a consequence, they are able to contribute efficiently in augmenting their competencies, capabilities and aptitude. They make use of their educational qualifications, competencies and capabilities in promoting well-being of their families and communities. It is a disadvantage that senior citizens are not aware in terms of important areas even in the present existence. Furthermore, there is prevalence of gender inequality, because family members in some cases form negative viewpoints against them. Therefore, unawareness in terms of various areas is a disapproving impediment taking place within the course of implementation of gender equality among senior citizens.

E. Lack of Knowledge and Competencies

In the present existence, with advancements taking place and with the advent of modernization and globalization, it is necessary for all individuals, irrespective of their age groups to be well-versed in terms of various subjects. These include, art, history, culture, economy, politics, sports, development and so forth. The senior citizens, belonging to both urban and rural communities are normally unaware in terms of different subjects. In other words, they lack knowledge and competencies, which are necessary in promoting well-being and goodwill. Furthermore, there is prevalence of gender inequality, because family members in some cases are unable to obtain any ideas and suggestions from senior citizens. In rural communities, when elderly families lack knowledge and competencies, they will experience impediments within the course of giving any useful ideas and suggestions. Therefore, lack of knowledge and competencies is a negative impediment taking place within the course of implementation of gender equality among senior citizens.

F. Improving the Status of Women in Rural Areas

Women form about half of the population of the country, but their situation is in a deprived state. For centuries, they have been deprived of opportunities of growth and development. Before the country achieved its independence in 1947, the conditions of women were in a deprived state. The major problems that they experienced were child marriage, sati, purdah system, widow-hood, rigidity of fidelity and opposition of remarriage of widows.



Furthermore, women also became victims of humiliation, torture and abuse.

There have been number of cases of women, who have experienced criminal and violent acts, such as, sexual harassment, rape, verbal abuse, physical abuse, dowry deaths and discriminatory treatment regarding acquisition of education, and migration to urban areas to get engaged in employment opportunities and participation in other activities. The rural individuals possess the viewpoint that male members are assets. When they are provided education, they would render a significant contribution in promoting well-being of their families and communities. Therefore, males are provided with good quality education and they also migrate to urban areas to get engaged in employment opportunities (Yasaswini, Tharaka, & Bhagavanulu, 2017).

In rural areas, the problems of poverty, violence, economic exploitation and illiteracy are the major barriers within the course of promoting better livelihoods. There have been formulation of measures and programs, which have the major objective of eradicating the problems of poverty, violence, economic exploitation and illiteracy. The rural individuals that account for 45 percent are living below the poverty line. In most cases, they are employed in the agricultural sector and survive on day to day earnings. The women and girls are the ones, who are effected to a major extent by the conditions of poverty.

The major cause of violence is, discrimination against girls and desire for the male child. Senior citizen women experience violence and mistreatment from male members of the household regarding issues, such as, health, household chores, other activities and so forth. Women form 40 percent of the paid labor force. Though women constitute half of the world's population, yet they own less than one percent of the world's property (Yasaswini, Tharaka, & Bhagavanulu, 2017). In some cases, in rural communities too, when individuals are not earning, they are dependent upon their elderly parents for financial resources, hence, causing economic exploitation.

The other problem is illiteracy, which influences the living conditions of the individuals in a negative manner. When senior citizen women are non-literates, they not only are unable to read and write, but are not even aware of certain factors. Hence, it is vital for them to upgrade their basic literacy skills of reading, writing and numeracy. The elderly women too have recognized the significance of education and are getting enrolled in educational institutions and training centres. They have formed the viewpoint that in their youth, they have not acquired the opportunities to get enrolled in educational institutions, but in their old age, they should acquire education. This will be facilitating in promoting well-being of their families and communities. Acquisition of education help them to carry out various tasks and functions in an appropriate manner, these include, management of household responsibilities, carrying out marketing of products, implementing the function of child development appropriately, taking care of needs and requirements of family members and bringing about improvements in their overall quality of lives. The individuals, belonging to rural areas are dependent upon the natural environmental conditions such as, obtaining water from the water bodies in case of scarcity of water. Acquisition of education also helps the individuals to preserve the environmental conditions and eliminate pollution.

In rural areas in some cases, women did not enjoy equal rights and opportunities as compared to their male counterparts. It was believed that women are meant to perform the household chores and take care of the needs and requirements of their family members. In some cases, they were discouraged from participating in various types of social, economic, political, cultural and religious activities. They were discouraged from acquisition of education or getting engaged in employment opportunities.

Lack of education and participation in various activities were regarded as major barriers, within the course of their empowerment. Furthermore, they were not allowed to make decisions and were meant to follow the rules and obey the decisions that were made by the male members of the household. Due to the prevalence of these factors, the status of women deteriorated and they were regarded as subordinates to men. In old age, women were dependent upon their adult children to take care of their needs and requirements. In some cases, they were fortunate enough to be treated with respect and courtesy, whereas, in other cases, they experienced abuse and mistreatment as well from family members.

Rural women are regarded as key agents for achieving the transformational, economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. But limited access to credit, health care and education are among the many challenges they experience, which are further aggravated by globalization, economic crisis and changes in the climatic conditions. Promoting empowerment opportunities among rural women is not only regarded as key aspects in leading to well-being of the communities and individuals, but women can render an effective contribution towards up-grading their livelihoods opportunities. When they attain empowerment opportunities, then in old age, they do not have to feel overwhelmed or concerned. Hence, women, who are senior citizens can promote well-being of themselves and their families and communities, particularly when they are empowered. Rural women, who are senior citizens can work as active agents of social and economic changes and environmental protection. They are performing the roles of farmers, producers, investors, caregivers and consumers. They render an important contribution in promoting food and nutrition security, eradicating rural poverty and promoting well-being of their families. As a consequence, they are not only incurring the feelings of pleasure and contentment, but also are rendering an important contribution in promoting well-being and goodwill of their families and communities. As it has been stated above that apart from being employed in the agriculture sector and farming practices, rural women are engaged in the production of handicrafts, baskets, jewelry, artworks and food items. The senior citizens and elderly family members, who are experienced in the production and manufacturing of these items provide them training. The other important aspects are management of household responsibilities and preparation of meals. The women and girls acquire training in terms of these aspects from the elderly women of the households.

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In the present existence, the individuals aspire to enhance their products. They aim to make use of modern, scientific and innovative methods to bring about improvements in productivity. There have been establishment of training centers in rural communities as well, in which individuals are getting enrolled to acquire knowledge in terms of production of artworks, handicrafts, garments, pottery and so forth. In this manner, senior citizens, who are involved in the production processes also acquire information in terms of modern, scientific and innovative methods.

V. CONCLUSION

Within all communities, there are occurrences of gender concerns among senior citizens. Factors highlighting gender concerns among senior citizens are, job duties, management of household responsibilities, gender gap narrows in migration for employment opportunities, family support networks and labor force participation and social security. Impediments taking place within the course of implementation of gender equality among senior citizens are, job duties, management of household responsibilities, gender gap narrows in migration for employment opportunities, family support networks and labor force participation and social security. Measures need to be formulated to improve status of women in rural areas. Finally, it can be stated, both senior citizen men and women needs to be given equal treatment within all communities.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

Funding	No, I did not receive.
Conflicts of Interest	No conflicts of interest to the best of our knowledge.
Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate	No, the article does not require ethical approval and consent to participate with evidence.
Availability of Data and Material	Not relevant.
Authors Contributions	I am only the sole author of the article.

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