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Loneliness among elderly persons: A case study of Rajasthan

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Abstract

The changing socio-economic and cultural fabric of Rajasthan is affecting the Elderly people in many respects and it is creating a vacuum in generations and this leads the elderly towards loneliness. It is a variant of several factors from place of residence to sex to caste. Elderly education, work status and family structure play major role in curing the loneliness.

Keywords: Elderly, Loneliness, Family, Rajasthan

1. Introduction

Loneliness is a major problem of the old age among other physical, psychological and social problems. It impacts their living with happiness and they ultimately succumb to depression. This loneliness and depression results from staying aloof or in case of dearth of close familial ties and decreasing interaction with the cultural traditions or due to inability of active participation in the community activities. With growing age, it is expected that people lose connection with their friends and that they find it more difficult to initiate new friendships and to belong to new networks. (Archana Singh and Nishi Misra, 2009) The elders suffer loneliness to an extreme level in the dearth of any company to share their thoughts and burden of their day. In the hustle bustle of the city life the elderly feel a lot secluded because of dearth of friends or relatives or neighbors. In such a deserted situation elders have no option of than to resort to television or community service or the more intellectual ones to writing. Despite the above mentioned means ultimately what they are left feeling depressed and are seen longing for a company, a need for someone to talk to. Then they decide that there is no purpose in living because, "to be forgotten by everybody is worse than death." When such thoughts affect them deeply, a prolonged life becomes deadweight and not a blessing (Rasheed). The objectives of this paper are follow

1. To analysis the proportion of elderly feeling lonely and study the same under different categories.
2. To study the reasons behind loneliness feel by the elderly and the activity undertaken by them in those hours.
3. To make a holistic analysis of the causes and consequences behind this phenomenon of loneliness being felt by them.

Data source of this paper is primary survey. This primary survey was conducted in six districts of Rajasthan. These districts were selected on the basis of composite index of elderly and development. The total sample size is 600. For this paper various quantitative techniques are used to understand the plight of the elderly in a holistic manner and to make it representative tables and bar graphs are made.

2. Discussion of Results

In the primary field survey of Rajasthan, it is found that 28.6 percent elderly feel lonely which is more or less similar in both rural and urban areas. But there is great difference between male and female. Female are more susceptible to loneliness as 43.2 percent female elderly feel lonely in comparison to only 15.9 percent of male elderly.

Table 1: Feeling Loneliness by the Elderly Persons

	Total	Rural	Urban	Male	Female	Gen	OBC	SC	ST
Yes	28.6	29.4	27.8	15.9	43.2	27.7	26.7	28.5	33.1
No	71.4	70.6	72.2	84.1	56.8	72.3	73.3	71.5	66.9

Source: Primary Field Survey of Elderly, Rajasthan, 2013

It is due to “*Empty Nest Syndrome*” and *lack of interaction* with outsider like male who can go out and have interaction. The empty nest syndrome has been described as a ‘mother’s depressive reaction to the loss of children.’ This transition takes place in women’s lives when their children have grown up and leave home consequent upon their marriage and set up their own independent homes. It is held that women are so bound up with domestic responsibilities that when their children leave, depression and other loss related symptoms are inevitable. For traditionally oriented women who lose their maternal role, in which they were over protective or over involved, the experience of having to adjust to children leaving is often traumatic. For most women ‘the mother role is expected to take priority over all other, the perceived of

this believed to cause a loose of identity and self-esteem, and to be responsible for declining mental and physical in middle aged women’ (Arun P Bali, 2001, pp 145)

According to this survey, the main reason of loneliness is absence of their partner as 73.8 percent elderly responded to this reason. The absence of work is a cause of loneliness for 6.4 percent and nearly 20 percent due to other reason like poor health status, lack of mobility etc. the absence of spouse is the prime cause across place of residence, sex of respondent and social group. Due to long life expectancy, women feel more loneliness in absence of spouse. In India, generally wives are 5-10 years younger to their husbands. So husbands die early and women have to suffer loneliness more than the male elderly.

Table 2: Reasons for Feeling Loneliness

	Total	Rural	Urban	Male	Female	Gen	OBC	SC	ST
No spouse	73.8	68.1	80.8	56.9	81.0	61.4	76.9	85.7	73.2
No work	6.4	6.4	6.4	11.8	4.1	13.6	3.8	5.7	2.4
Other	19.8	25.5	12.8	31.4	14.9	25.0	19.2	8.6	24.4

Source: Primary Field Survey of Elderly, Rajasthan, 2013

When it is examined what an elderly does at the time of loneliness to defeat the loneliness? It is found that for around 38 percent elderly it is recitation of God’s name, around 34 percent remember the past days of life and 10.5 percent elderly remember their life partner who is not with them. In rural areas (41.5 percent) more elderly recite God’s name in comparison to their urban counterparts (33.3 percent), while in urban areas maximum elderly remembers the heydays of

their own life (38.5 percent). The same situation is also in female and male respectively. The interesting fact is that females remember their own partner more than male doing ‘Nothing’ at the time of loneliness is a frequent answer for females as compared to the males. In social groups, highest OBC elderly remember their life partner (15.4 percent), SC elderly remembers the past days of life (42.9 percent), OBC elderly remembers the name of god (42.3 percent).

Table 3: Activity by the Elderly Persons during Loneliness

	Total	Rural	Urban	Male	Female	Gen	OBC	SC	ST
Remembering spouse	10.5	11.7	9.0	5.9	12.4	11.4	15.4	5.7	7.3
Remembering past days	33.7	29.8	38.5	33.3	33.9	38.6	26.9	42.9	29.3
Remembering God	37.8	41.5	33.3	29.4	41.3	31.8	42.3	40.0	36.6
Nothing	13.4	10.6	16.7	21.6	9.9	18.2	13.5	11.4	9.8
Other	4.7	6.4	2.6	9.8	2.5	0.0	1.9	0.0	17.1

Source: Primary Field Survey of Elderly, Rajasthan, 2013

3. Loneliness and Different Aspect of Elderly Life

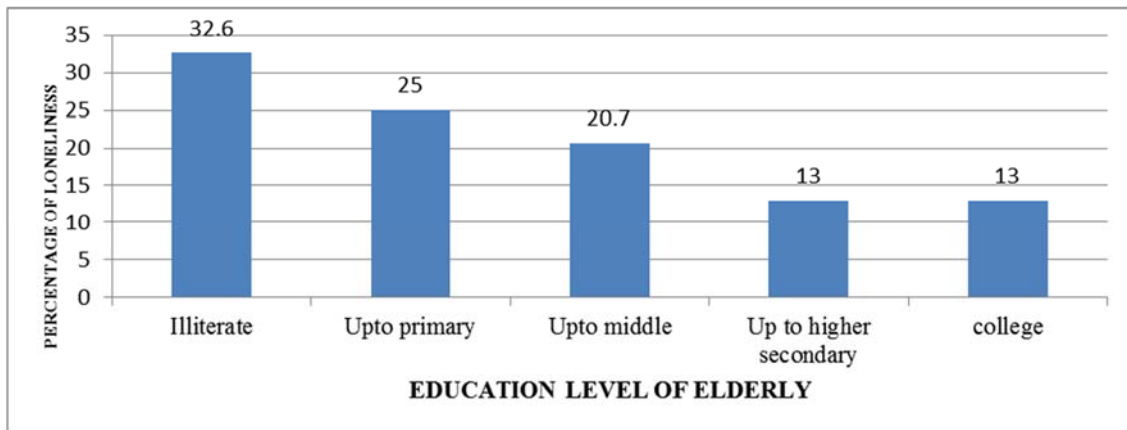
Even if children live within the country, due to the spread of Western ideas such as “spacing, privacy, individualism and non-interference,” the nuclear families are becoming the norm even in villages. Love marriages have further aggravated the breakup of the joint family system. Yet within joint families, the elders feel lonely owing to the denial of due respect, concern and care by youngsters. The younger generation generally lacks sensitivity towards elders’ along with emotional support. All these factors have contributed to the psychological trauma called “loneliness.” Here again loneliness is examined in the light of different aspects of

elderly. An effort has been made to find out that which things are aggravating the loneliness.

In the primary field survey of Rajasthan, it is found that nuclear family elderly (34.4 percent) is suffering more from loneliness than joint family elderly (25.6 percent). It is evident that nuclear family member are busy in their own activity so they have less time to interact with elderly. And joint family has many members so there is more chance of family members to interact with elderly. Further, widow elderly (55.9 percent) suffer this pathetic situation more in the later years of life because they have lost their life partners. Life partner are always a pillar wherein a person

shares his or her emotion and this sharing lightens their hearts and avoids the gap of communication and loneliness. Never married elderly (33.3 percent) also suffers with loneliness. They are alone in this world or be with other

member of family or with relatives. So there is less chance of enough communication with never married elderly and this situation leads them to loneliness.



Graph 1: Loneliness in Elderly According To Education Level

Loneliness and education level of elderly have a negative relation, as education is seen to be increasing the loneliness of elderly is seen going down. Where 32.6 percent of illiterate elderly respond that they face loneliness and 13 percent each of up to higher secondary and college educated elderly suffer loneliness.

Table 4: Loneliness and Different Aspects of Elderly

Family Type	Yes	No
Nuclear	34.4	65.6
Joint	25.6	74.4
Extended	0.0	100
Marital Status		
Married	12	88
Widow	55.9	44.1
Never married	33.3	66.7
Divorced/separated	100	0.0
Education		
Illiterate	32.6	67.4
Upto primary	25	75
Upto middle	20.7	79.3
Up to higher secondary	13	87
College	13	87
Role in Family		
Head of family	25.5	73.5
Respected elderly of the family	31	69
An elderly who is not in the affairs of the family	30	70
A neglected elderly	50	50
Elderly does work at Family		
Nothing	21.1	78.9
Child caring	22.2	77.8
Animal rearing	10.5	89.5
Household work	39.6	60.4
Crafting	25.9	74.1

Source: Primary Field Survey of Elderly, Rajasthan, 2013

As far as the role of elderly in family is concerned, head of family members (25.5 percent) show less loneliness in comparison to other sections. A neglected elderly (50 percent) feels lonelier as obvious. When elderly is busy in

different types of family works, the interesting thing observed is that those who are busy in household work, are feeling more loneliness that is 39.6 percent elderly. The probable cause of this may be that women are prominent in household work section and they suffer the empty nest syndrome which leads them to loneliness. Again busy in crafting also feel loneliness that is 25.9 percent elderly. The least in this section is animal rearing; the elderly who are busy in such a work, 10.5 percent of elderly feels loneliness. Therefore from the above stated analysis, certain known facts are further validated. The elderly residing in the joint family system are less susceptible to loneliness to those living in nuclear families. Likewise those educated, married or being considered head of the household find themselves occupied and hence do not complain of being lonely. Hence the feeling of ‘being needed have’ or still contributing to the family or society in any possible way is the prime factor in inculcating the aged population into the social matrix.

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