Social Support Provided to Old Age Adults in Varying Family Structures

Dr. Farah Iqbal, Samra Akhter & Dr. Humaira Iqbal

Abstract
The recent study intends to see the status of old age adults in terms of the social support which is provided to them within their family whether it is a joint family or a nuclear one. The research design we chose was basically explanatory in which we formulated a hypothesis by observation. Our hypothesis was that the old age adults residing in a joint family happen to get more social support than those who are living with nuclear family units. To test the hypothesis while using the convenient sampling technique a sample of Eighty-Seven old age adults out of which Forty-Seven elderly people belonged to the joint family structures and the rest (Forty One) resided in nuclear family units was selected. We provided our participants with the translated version of Social Provision Scale by Muhammad Rizwan and Neelma Syed (2010). The scale had a few subscales as well and variants which intended to measure provisions given to the elderly varied from guidance and opportunity of nurturance to attachment and reassurance of worth. The items also included variants like social integration and reliable alliance. The findings showed a clearly significant difference in the provision of social support within these two sorts of family units. Hence, the results visibly conformed to our formulated hypothesis.

Key words: Social support, Joint family, Nuclear family, Social Provision, Old aged adults

Throughout human history the family has been the safest haven for the aged. Its ties have been the most intimate and long lasting, And on them the aged have relied for greatest security (Simmons, 1995) Social support is defined as the resources provide to an individual from other (Cohen and Syme, 1985). The underlying idea of this stipulated definition is that the love, care, comfort and a helping hand which people provide to others can be tangible which means that they can support others monetarily and with physical substance whereas their support can be perfectly intangible which means that they can support others even with a good will. Everyone conceptualizes the probability that they can rely on others in time of need.

According to Terrance, Amick and Judith (1994), social support is the degree to which an individual’s basic needs are fulfilled through interacting with significant others. One of the basic elements in psychological and mental wellbeing is having someone to provide us with social support. That one person who can understand us thoroughly and can help us does our errands while we are having difficult times. This support can include suitable guidance when we are indecisive, it can further help us understand difficult concepts, and this support can stop us deviating from the right path. Moreover, this support can also make us realize our responsibilities in an appropriate way.

We crave for social support almost in every stage of our life. It gives us strength to deal with difficult situations and to tackle apparently insolvable problems. As growing kids need the support of love and care from their parents so do the parents need it when they are growing old. A time comes when the role of kids and their parents get reversed. Parents and elderly people who are once the paragon of love and care to their children need it back too when their old age arrives.

The structure of family unit decides it to a great deal that up to which extent social support can/will be provided to the elderly and old age adults who are living within the same family. The joint family system which usually includes two or more nuclear family units has been reportedly providing more social
support to their elderly in comparison with the nuclear family system which consists of parents and their dependent children. (Berkman, L. F., & Glass, T. 2000).

During their lives, people take in a great deal of roles and they behave accordingly with others. From the very beginning of our lives we keep assuming different roles starting from the role of a dependent child and then we gradually move towards the role of a learner, a friend, a parent, a professional and finally we end up on the role of an old age adult in the family. The old age brings with it many unwelcomed and unpleasant changes; one of the most unendurable changes includes retirement and this change is often accompanied by the loss of partner, too. Getting alone and loss of the partner is highly disturbing at any stage of life let alone the idea of becoming lonely when one needs one’s partner the most. The departure from the beloved is even more terrifying when the source of economic or emotional support happened to be the lost partner.

Support to the elderly can generally be provided in three different ways. You can provide physical help, or financial support as to provide them with the money they need or by spending on their basic needs like clothing, food and other necessities. Emotional support can include accompanying the elderly, listening to them when they feel like talking and showing your care to them. By physical help, we mean to provide our elderly with a helping hand in their errands which become difficult after a certain age. We can even help the old age adults in dressing or in eating upon their requirements.

Human companionship is vital for emotional and physical well-being. It is been reported that social support help in improving mental and health functioning among old age people in everyday life. (Baltes & Lang, 1997; Baltes & Smith, 2003; Fung, et al, 1999; Krause, et al 1995). Unfortunately, because of the absence of mere social provision, elderly often experience loneliness and stress (Cohen, 2004).

A large number of studies recommend that social support has valuable effect on wellness as eg. it is generally seen as a buffer for stresses (Cohen and Wills, 1985), or inadequate social support is associated with psychological illnesses, such as depression (Brown & Harris, 1978; et al). Others have found a negative connection between social support and mood disorders (Barrera, 2000; Berkman & Glass, 2000; Israel & Schurman, 1990). The elderly who receives adequate support from their families enjoy numerous benefits as less mood disorders, high self esteem, less anxiety disorder etc (Barrera, 1986; Cohen, et al 1985). An elderly having relationship that provides social support in terms of guidance, and concern promotes health by conveying the feelings that the person is been loved and admired, respected and has importance in a reciprocal group (Cutrona & Russell, 1990).

The social provision theory of Weiss (1974) has played a significant role in determining the role of social support in one’s life. The theorist believes that there are six preliminary things which ought to be provided to every old age adult by their close family members. These six social provisions include; (i) Reassurance of Worth, (ii) Attachment, (iii) Guidance, (iv) Opportunity for Nurturance, (v) Social Integration and (vi) Reliable Alliance. Relationships become really special for the elderly if they are being offered the above. The above social provisions are not very difficult to provide. Elderly people can get ‘attachment’ by having relationships with the other people of their age group, a compassionate family gives them the ‘sense of reliable alliance’, becoming a part of their group of friends provide them with idea of the ‘social integration’ whereas co-workers can provide elderly with the ‘reassurance of worth’, ‘guidance’ can be achieved by a mentor or advisor while and ‘opportunity of nurturance’ can be offered to the elderly by their offspring.
In order to find whether old age adults, in Pakistani Society; as participants have an insight of social support they get in differing family units. The hypothesis was phrased as; “Old age adults residing within the joint family system receive more social support than those living in nuclear family units.”

METHODOLOGY

**Sample:** The sample size for the study was consisted of eighty-seven (N=87) elderly participants among whom forty-six old age adults (n=46) belonged to joint families and forty-one elderly people (n=41) belonged to nuclear families from different areas of Karachi city. Participants were selected from both the genders. Convenient sampling was the technique used for the study.

**Material:**

The Demographic Form:

It includes questions regarding age, gender and family structure of the participants.

Social Provisions Scale:

The basic tool which was used to collect data was the scale for social provision by Mohammad Rizwan, and Neelma Syed. This scale was actually the translated one from the scale of Social Provisions by Cutrona & Russel (1987). This scale consisted of 24 items and assesses the provisions within six categories of social relationships described by Weiss (1974). These provisions include Guidance (advice or information), Reliable Alliance (assurance that others can be counted on in times of stress), Reassurance of Worth (recognition of one’s competence), Attachment (emotional closeness), Social Integration (a sense of belonging to a group of friends), and Opportunity for Nurturance (providing assistance to others).

Procedure: In the first step, the formal consent was taken by the family members of the participants and by the participants themselves. The purpose and objectives of the study were disclosed to the participants. The participants were given a briefing about their rights such as they can leave or withdraw from the research any time if they wish to. They participated in the study completely voluntarily and they were not forced by any means. They were assured of the confidentiality and about the fact that data collected from them will only be used for the purpose of research. After they gave their formal consent, we gave them a questionnaire along with the demographic sheet. Participants were thanked after they provided us with their precious time and valuable information.

**RESULTS**

The following results were obtained as we calculated that T-test after going through a certain procedure.
Table: Showing the Difference between Joint Family and Nuclear Family System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Calculated Value of T-Test</th>
<th>Alpha Level (0.05)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total of JFS and NFS</td>
<td>8.02</td>
<td>P&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reassurance of Worth</td>
<td>2.202</td>
<td>P&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>P&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>1.697</td>
<td>P&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for Nurturance</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>P&gt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Integration</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>P&gt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliable Alliance</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>P&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DISCUSSION
Our country holds many auspicious values and traditions as part of our rich cultural heritage which we have obtained from our history and maintained since then. Certain norms and values can be found embedded in our conduct and lifestyle. The strong bond that we form with our family is highly commendable in terms of the impacts that it has on one’s life. This bond of love and care influences one’s life, professional abilities, the role that we play in society and the quality of being decisive. The old age people that we have in our family are surely a role model for us in our traditional families. They are respected and esteemed to the heights. They hold a dominant position in our families and they are consulted by younger ones for guidance and advices.

As mentioned earlier, the purpose and significance of our study was to analyze the social support which an elderly attains while living in varying family structures. As per our hypothesis, old age adults living in the joint family system receives more social support than those who are living with in nuclear family unit. The hypothesis was proved as p< 0.05 which implies that a huge discrepancy lies between the social support which is obtained by old age adults residing in joint families and nuclear family units.

Hobfoll & Vaux (1993) & Cohen, Doyl, & Skoner (1997) found out those who had fewer friends in their life tend to catch cold and flu viruses more frequently than those who enjoy a large group of friends and their support. Support system forms a convoy, which follow people over their life course. The scale that we administered imparted to us the data of old age adults in terms of provision of social supports. The notable differences were found between the elderly living in atomic family units and those living in joint family structures in terms of guidance, attachment, reliable alliance, guidance and reassurance of worth. A joint family has to offer more to the elderly living within them. In such family units, people of old age are needed for their experiences and support. They enrich their children and grand children with such guidance and advice which can not be obtained from elsewhere and in turn they are loaded with love and care from the whole family. Their company is preferred and the members in such strong family bonds have the feeling that they can always depend on one another whenever they need it.

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Elderly living in the joint family systems are supported morally and emotionally. According to the results of Mason KO's. (1992) study joint family system provides more social support to adults of old age rather than nuclear family system hence adults living in the joint family system are at low risk of having depression.

A joint family can be described as one which comprises of parents, their children, their partners and grand children living within the premises of same house. In such family, living together actually lessens the expenses and the family is usually stable economically so they can easily support their old age parents in terms of finances. Such families have clearly defined the role of each member in the family there is an equal distribution of the resources available to the family that includes money, food, and other requirements of life Eckenrode, J. E. et al, (1990)& Randel et al., (1999), found out the adults above the age of 60 receives more financial support while living in a joint family structure than in nuclear family structure. In yet another research, it was found out women receives more economic support from their families comparatively to man in old age (Tout, K., 1989). Joint family which has greater number of people is sure to provide its members with more love, care and attention due to the fact that its burden is divided among many, in comparison with the family which contains fewer people who are already burdened with routine tasks.

Bowlby (1969, 1979) emphasized that attachment is especially evident in periods of illness or loss of loved one, circumstances that become more likely and/or frequent with aging. Under circumstances of risk, the need to seek intimacy and proximity to attachment figures will often re-emerge and the need of attachment behavior will increase which is natural. He further explained that in later life, attachment behavior is no longer directed towards members of the same age group and instead directed towards the younger generation. Care giving behavior or a protective role is usually played by an adult in the life of an elderly (Bowlby’s, 1980) Antonucci (1994) recommended that an increase in the number of attachment relationship in one’s life compose a convoy that accompanies the person throughout his life which provides the individual with security and protection one need to confront life challenges. A great deal of studies supports the idea that relationships having attachment play a vital part in keeping an elderly in the best state of psychological well-being. Joint family systems provide the elderly more opportunities to share their experiences with younger ones and guide them accordingly which is motivating for the elderly themselves and they are reassured of their worth. They are respected, in turn. High level of social support is been found to reduce negative impact of life stressor on mental health whereas physical health was directly related to the social provision of reliable alliance (Cutrona, C. et al, 1986).

The sense of reliable alliance makes one feel that he could rely on others in times of need. Rameriz-Bararnti (1985) found out the quality of the relationship grandparents and grandchildren shares helps in developing the positive attitude towards an aging which in results help an elderly to find social support in the family. Yet another social provision that can be achieved by the elderly is guidance while they spend time with their grand children. Kornhaber and Woodward (1981) found out in Guidance Based interview of three hundred participants that adults play different roles in the lives of their grandchildren. These roles includes a family historian that links the future generation to the past, a mentor and a role model for the family, a nurturer for the family of physical and emotional well being and at last the hero who can be looked up to for guidance and reassurance. The joint family system makes it possible for children and grandchildren to experience such relationships with their adults in the house. The joint family structure offers one with maximum opportunities for personal growth while living in a matrix of relationships- spouse, siblings, children, grandchildren.
Social integration refers to the structure and quantity of social relationships, such as the amount and density of social networks, frequency of interaction. Community-based prospective epidemiological studies have documented a link between lack of social integration on the one hand and morbidity and all-cause mortality on the other. Lack of social integration in a person’s relationships has a diverse effect on one’s health (Aruna. D. et al., 2011). In a study about 60 percent of the elderly women living in the families had a positive attitude towards old age, while negative views regarding old age and the perception of old age as last stage of life which lacked in social security was observed in the views of elderly residing in both the different family structures (Aruna. D, et al. 2011).

Corty and Young (1980) found out evidence regarding family support being related to many factors including loneliness, social disintegration and isolation (Leighton, 1959). Evidently, there are greater possibilities that the old age adults living within a joint family face lesser problems as loneliness and social alienation when compared with elderly people living in atomic families. The apparent reason is presence of more number of people and their divided burdens in joint families while it is the opposite in the case of nuclear families. The attachment of elderly with their grand children also has a miraculous effect on the mood of elderly and their company is very much energizing for old age people. They acquire the feeling of social integration and nurturance while being with the grand children.

A study assessed the level of satisfaction among elderly living in joint family system and nuclear family system. It was observed that adults living in joint family structure are more satisfied with their lives. The major reason behind their satisfaction is the general support they receive everyday from their family. The support includes all the three aspects that are emotional, financial and social (Ahmed Itrat, et al. 2007).

In our study opportunity of nurturance and social integration as social provisions did not show notable discrepancy for the elderly living in varying family systems. There is a clear possibility that old age adults living in nuclear family units can get equal opportunities of getting nurturance and social integration as those of joint family system since children can always give their parents the opportunity to nurture. Social integration can be achieved by casual visit from relatives as it is part of our culture that we do not just stay in connection with our clan but we like to meet other relatives too which can include neighbors, cousins and their families, etc. The ability to yield nurturance seems to be vital to function better in society whereas the feeling of self-respect and capability is essential for existence and liveliness, our old age adults tend to show both whether they are living in nuclear unit or joint one.

In our society, great care and full support is provided to the old age adults who live with their children and grand-children. They are supported emotionally, morally, physically and socially by their children on whom they fully depend and rely on. Their children offer them security of close relationships and the opportunity of nurturance. Conclusively, it was observed that the old age adults who are provided with social provisions have positive self image, they tend to enjoy their life and show an urge to live with exquisite health conditions.

The study intended to examine the social support which is given to the old age adults within varying family units. The research conducted on a sample size of 87 participants (N=87) revealed that old age adults residing with a joint family receives more social support in comparison with those who resides with a nuclear family unit as per our hypothesis. Hence, our formulated hypothesis was proved with p>0.05 which implies that there is a marked difference in the quantity and quality of social support given to those old age adults who are living within a joint family and those who are living within a nuclear family unit.
REFERENCES


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