



ELDERLY WOMEN'S WORK: NEGLECTED OR NOTICEABLE (A CASE STUDY OF SLUM AREAS OF ALIGARH CITY)

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Abstract

Nowadays, both in developed as well as in developing countries the topic of "ageing" requires special attention because the population of elderly people and the dependency ratio among them is high and continuously on the rise. This paper deals with the current condition of elderly women in the slum areas of Aligarh city, because these areas are the poorest and the most neglected segment of the society. The investigator has used a personal interview schedule from elderly women of these areas to know their participation in the economy. Due to lack of employment and lesser income, the young generation of these areas leaves their elder parents in a helpless condition. That is why they have no choice but to work and earn money for their basic needs i.e., food, shelter and clothes. The situation is even worst for women because they are illiterate so there is a slim chance of them getting respectable jobs, and they have to compromise to work as a domestic labourer, a bagger, a constructor, etc. Usually, elderly women of these areas take care of their grandchildren, and they help in domestic activities. As per the definition given by sociologists and theorists this work is not considered as productive. In this study, it is concluded that the elderly women are engaged in some activities but their participation in the rising economy is always neglected and people think that their contribution is not worth discussing.

Key words: Ageing, Elderly Women, Economy, Neglected, Slums

Introduction

Not only in developed countries but also in developing countries the topic of "ageing" is worth discussion because the population of aged is growing faster all over the world. In India the population of elderly people constitutes 8.1% of the total population in rural areas. The elderly population among female is high in most of the Indian States except Assam, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh Jammu and Kashmir and Jharkhand. It is expected that the population of senior citizens will increase from 5% to 14%, while the population of oldest old will

reach triple from 1% to 3% in between 40 years from 2010 to 2050 respectively. As per the data released by United Nations Population Fund and Help Age, India; in 2011 India has 90 million elderly persons, and it is expected that this will rise to 173 million in 2026. Out of 90 million elderly people, 30 million are living alone (United Nations Population Fund, 2012). The dependency ratio among elderly people shows an increasing trend, and the ratio has risen from 10.9% to 14.2% from 1961 to 2011 respectively (Joseph, 2017). As per 2011 data, the gap between female and male old age dependency ratio has also shown an increasing trend and currently stands at 14.9% and 13.65% respectively (Population Census, 2011) (Central Statistics Office, 2016). The situation was worse for elderly females about only 14 per cent and 17 per cent being economically independent in rural and urban areas respectively while the remaining are dependent on others, either partially or fully. In rural areas, Assam (81%) has the highest dependency ratio among elderly females and in urban areas Jammu and Kashmir (83%) has the highest dependency ratio among elderly females. In India 72% elderly women are fully dependent on others. In rural areas, 16% elderly women are dependent on their spouses, 75% on their children, 3% on grandchildren and 6% on others, while in urban areas 19% dependent on their spouses, 71% on their children, 3% on grandchildren and 7% on others (Central Statistics Office, 2016).

Ageing presents both challenges and opportunities. But most of the elderly people and especially, elderly women are an extremely isolated group of the society, who hardly get any attention of others. Being a woman, they occupy a position which is more disadvantaged and face triple jeopardy *i.e.* age, gender and poverty (Tondon, 2001).

In Indian society, it is expected that domestic activities are the responsibilities of women that is why they remain illiterate and cannot participate in economic activities. Thus they have to depend on others. Firstly, they are dependent on their father and after marriage their husband and after husband's death or old age they have to depend on children or others (Kumar and Bhargava, 2014).

This paper is dealing with elderly women's work that is why there is a need to understand the concept of 'work'. Many theorists and researchers agreed that the concept of 'work' is divided into two separate and discrete activities- paid employment and unpaid domestic employment. Paid employment is associated with public sphere while the unpaid domestic labor is associated with private sphere. There is

another important category called voluntary work. It takes place in the public sphere but this work is unpaid as well (Taylor, 2004).

The second wave feminism questioned the assumption of not considering the unpaid work in the private sphere as a 'work' was the time when the dichotomy was not challenged, i.e., in the late 1960s. Beechey argued that '*a major theoretical breakthrough involved the recognition that housework, the "labor of love" performed by women in the home, was a form of work*' (Beechey, 1987). The kind of labour, that was not directly economic, was included in the concept of work by the extension of new focus (Glucksmann, 1995) and also enabled Marxist feminism (Hartman, 1981) and labour economists (Becker, 1991) to explore the hidden economic value of this work.

In a developing country like India, it is common thinking that the public sphere is the male domain because it is the site of economically productive industrial labor and private sphere is the female domain because it is the site of family and reproduction activities, which are best suited for women. Domestic activities are not regarded as work (Taylor, 2004). These domains are divided on the following basis-

<i>Public Sphere Work</i>	<i>Private Sphere Work</i>
Mainly men's paid employment within the formal economy theorized within economies	Women's unremunerated reproductive and domestic labour not theorized within economies

Workforce participation rate among senior citizens is less, but this participation rate among male is high as compared elderly women that is 13% and 3% respectively. The reason behind is that women are always regarded as a home maker. It was noticed that elderly people have to engage in any type of productive work to fulfill their daily requirements. They do not want to work but they have to because they have no choice. Elderly people are self-employed. Poverty and illiteracy are two important factors for increasing the work force participation rate (Singh, 2013).

Review of Literature

Vincent (2003) mentioned in his book *Old Age* that no proper work opportunities among female is a major issue of gender inequalities in old age. Due to globalization, women, elderly person and those people who live in rural areas are systematically neglected. A limited number of elderly women work as a labourer as against men. It does not mean that they do not want to work but in reality they involved in agricultural

work, childcare and household duties as small-scale trading which is associated with the informal sector.

Chakraborti (2004) discussed in his book *The Greying of India: Population Ageing in the Context of Asia* that 60 years is expected to retirement age in all formal sectors that is why elderly are involved in informal sector mostly. Now a days occupation requires modern skills, elderly people have less knowledge about it that is why they are not able to do these type of jobs. Most of the time transport facilities are not in favor of elderly people, and this is also one of the causes of their unemployment. Agricultural is the dominant occupation where elderly people easily engage in any type of activities. Participation of elderly women is less as compared to male counterparts. In reality they are involved many kinds of activities in agricultural but their work are not view as productive.

Singh, (2013) analyzed in his article 'Ageing Population in India: Select Economic Issues' that usually it is considered that older people are less productive as against younger generation. In this age older people dependent on others. Workforce participation rate is very low among oldest old people but it relatively high among older males as against older females while the dependency ratio among elderly female is higher than the elderly males. Even in this age people engage in some type of productive work in order to fulfill their basic needs, not by their own choice.

Gopal (2006) mentioned in her article 'Ageing and Social Security' that in Indian society the work of domestic labour and family tasks are always associated with unpaid work that is why majority of women in productive labour in unorganized sector hardly get any protection. She said that elderly people continue to work till they are totally unable to do so. Their work, usually lasting from morning to till evening is not considered worth a paid.

Significance of the Study

The population of elderly people in India is increasing very fast and has reached approx. 104 million of which around 53 million are female and 51 million are males in 2011 (Hashmi, 2007). Elderly females are always marginalized and isolated in all spheres of their lives as compared to their male counterparts. Most of the time they have to work all the day but it is not considered as productive work, and their work is always neglected. The situation of elderly females residing in slums is getting worst day by day. The present study tries to analyze

the condition of elderly women who live in slum areas of Aligarh city and also analyze the problems they are facing to get employment. Is their work included as productive or not? This study will be helpful in changing the perception of work of elderly females in society.

Objectives of the Study

- To know the status of elderly women of slum areas of Aligarh City.
- To know about those activities in which elderly women of these areas are involved to earn money or get something.
- To change the stereotypical images by the society concerning work.

Research Methodology

Universe and Sample

All the elderly women residing in slum areas of Aligarh City were constituted in the universe of study. All the respondents for this study were randomly selected.

Research Design

The research design was descriptive.

Tools for Data Collection

Personal interview schedule was used for the data collection.

Sampling

In this study researcher used stratified sampling which is probability based sampling. Though the selected sampling for collecting the data is Stratified Sampling but for the selection of slums, researcher had to use snowball sampling because without any reference resulted nil or zero. So, researcher had to find certain references to approach her respondents so that she may get the appropriate information needed for this study.

Sources of Data

Both primary as well as secondary data were used for data collection. Primary data was collected from personal interview schedule and case study while secondary data was collected from articles, journals, books, census handbook, newspapers and magazines.

Delimitations of the Study

- The study was limited to only 50 elderly women in slums areas of Aligarh city.

- The study was limited only on one aspect i.e. elderly women's employment.
- The research had to limit the data collection period to only 2 months due to shortages of time.

Results and Discussion

This paper primarily deals with the issues related to the elderly women who are residing in slum areas of Aligarh city and as a part of a marginalized section of the society. Most of the time elderly women have to live in these areas as they have no other option of residence. These women migrate from their native places to urban areas in search of livelihood. Usually, they find themselves in rough situations, where they maintain certain quality of lives. The condition of the elderly women is miserable beyond imagination in these corner cases (slums) of our society. They do not have access to the most fundamental requirements like food, shelter, clothing and even basic demands like sanitation, hygiene, access to potable water, etc. (Hashmi, 2018). Most of the time elderly women of these areas depend on others for their above mentioned needs as slums are deprived of them. Even their children do not take care of them and treat them as an extra member or as a burden on the family. That is why they have to do some types of productive work for their daily requirements while they are not physically and mentally capable of performing it. If these women cannot earn money, they have to raise their grandchildren or sometimes they have to collect grass or woods for their family only after which they will get two square meals from their family. And the interesting thing to note is that all these work which are done by elderly women of slum areas are not associated as productive.

As per data received by the investigator it is depicted in Table 1 that 31 elderly women out of 50 are engaged in some kind of productive work to fulfill their basic needs while they are hardly able to do it. Also, they have to work because their children do not fulfill their basic needs or leave them in a pathetic condition due to changing pattern of the families or less earning. While the rest of the respondents i.e., 11 do not engage in any productive work because they are the oldest-old of these areas and are not capable of performing any laborious activity. These 11 respondents are engaged in rearing and caring for their grandchildren and household activities when their children go out from home. But as per the work defined by the sociologists and theorists, this work is not considered as work.

These 31 elderly women are found working in unorganized sectors. 11 out of 31 elderly women are working as domestic labourers. They have to work 3-4 hours a day as a domestic labourer in addition to that they have to carry all the responsibilities of their own homes, they earn only 1000-1500 rupees per month. This income is not sufficient to meet their daily requirements. They work hard only to maintain their daily requirements or sometimes to maintain their family income.

Seven respondents out of 31 are beggars. In a day they earn 150-200 rupees. These elderly women said that when they fall ill, they have to remain hungry for the entire length of the day and, quite unfortunately, this period might extend to a number of days. They do not want to beg but due to the circumstances, they have to do it. Actually, all these women are illiterate and that is why they are devoid of knowledge and skill.

Three elderly women out of 31 of these areas collect wood and grass all the day and at the end of the day they sell it and earn some money to fulfill their fundamental needs. All these women stated that collecting woods and grass is a better option for them than to beg. Everyone sees beggars as a set of "Evil Eyes" and they are frequently disrespected. And the most important question is that since all these women are illiterate so what kind of work can they do? They do not know how to get employment. These respondents thought that there is no work for uneducated people.

Two respondents were found by the investigator working in a lock factory. These women told that they earn less as compare to men in this factory. In this industry there is a huge wage gap. They work 07 hours a day same as men after that they are paid less than men. While as per Article 39 (d) of Constitution of India, every citizen has a right to receive equal pay for equal work. Yet they are deprived of their right. All these laws are not implemented properly and are functional only on paper. Women are confined to only packing the locks in this industry. Lack of proper work opportunities among female is a major issue of gender inequalities in old age (Vincent, 2003). Privatization, liberalization and globalization of economy and the concept of individualism and materialism affects the net worth and the lives of people of this country in general especially the elderly (Agewell Foundation, 2011).

Two elderly women out of 31 of the slum areas of Aligarh city have their own shops. One respondent sells gutka, pan masala etc. in her shop. A small push-cart is her home where she sleeps and cooks. Her

husband divorced her approx. 22 years ago and after the divorce, her children left her alone uncared. That is why she had to move on another city for in search of work, because she has no choice except it. To live alone in the same place where her husband and children were living, was very difficult for her. She did not want to face all those people after this tragedy. So she started to spend all her daily life in a small cart.

01 respondent of the study area sells locks in train or buses. She earns 80-90 rupees per day. She buys these lock from shops and then sells it. She said it is very painful for her to travel all the day in trains or buses due to her age but she has no other option. She depends on it to fulfill her daily livelihood.

Investigator got only one respondent who works in a hotel to wash utensils. She told that she receives 1500 rupees per month for it. She also told that hotel owner gave her two meals free of cost. She is happy with it and said these rupees are enough for her to spend her life because she lives alone in a jhuggi (local term for a temporary thatch-roofed hut). Her husband died 6 years ago, and her children have deserted her.

Table 1 listed that among the women respondents of slums areas, one older female was found to be a teacher, one had a tea stall, one is hired as a care taker of children of a family, and one was a sweeper. Mostly older female of study area engage in such kind of activities as their

Table 1

<i>Work Involvement</i>	
Domestic	11
Beggar	07
Shopkeeper	02
Lock factory	02
Collect wood	03
Teacher	01
Tea stall	01
Saleswoman	01
Work in a hotel	01
Taking care of children	01
sweeper	01
No work	19
TOTAL	50

work are always neglected from the participation of economy. Their domestic work is not considered as a paid work. That is why in general the workforce participation rate among female is low against male and in particular these ratio among older female are also very low as compared to older male.

There is another reason to analyze by the investigator, that nowadays occupation requires modern skills. Elderly people have less knowledge about it that is why they are not able to do these types of jobs. Most of the time transport facilities are not in favor of elderly people. This is also one of the biggest issue for elderly people; particularly elderly women; to remain without occupation. Agricultural is the dominant occupation where elderly women easily engage in any type of activity. We all know that this work is not associated as productive work. Participation of elderly women is less when compared to male counterparts (Chakraborti, 2004).

Conclusion

The study shows that the occupation of the elderly women, residing in slum areas are based on their educational level, family background, employment facilities in their vicinity and skills. The reality is that these elderly women do not want to engage in productive work, but the circumstances force them to do so. Also, the participation of these elderly women in the economy is marginalized, and it is not considered as an economically productive work. They face a lot of difficulties in search of employment due to less knowledge and less skills. The income of every elderly woman of these areas varies on the basis of their choice of occupation. Government should start awareness and skill development programs in slum areas to improve the condition of these women and especially to enhance their skills so they can effectively participate in building the economy of the society. There is a need to change the definition of work so that their hard work could be recognized as productive work.

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