

Presence of Grandparents in Families: A Blessing for Grand Children



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Abstract

Traditionally in India, the aged enjoyed place of honour and respect in the family and community and were treated as repositories of experience, skill and wisdom. They were earlier a store house of anecdotes and stories for grand children before TV, Video games, and comics took away this role from them. With the breaking up of joint family system, the knowledge and experience of the old people lost significance in the proper functioning of society. Commercialization, Industrialization and modernization have influenced, modified or even altered many social values and traditions particularly relating to older persons. Nowadays it has been again observed that as women are taking up dual career the need for an elderly member in the home to take care of children is felt. The hired help to take care of household and children was taken as a resort in dual career families. The higher remuneration demanded by such service providers has made the people think of the importance of presence of some elderly person in the home who unselfishly and with love takes care of the household functions and of children. Such changing thoughts have made the grand parents also valuable asset of the family. It becomes important to make them realize their worth and give them due respect which is very much in the Indian philosophy. Taking all this into consideration a multidimensional study on three generation families was conducted on 60 households. The present study proved that the grand parents and children are sharing a special bond especially in dual career families. The young grand children receive benefit from having close and supportive relation and the grand parents can serve as advisor of adult grand children as well as and they can provide help in various areas of life transitions. In general if the grand children's contact with their grand parents is maintained both can live a contented life. Grand children can indeed act as a resource in helping to care for grand parents and the grand parents enjoy more with grand children. The present study throws light on the place of communication for the purpose of healthy relation. This has widened the data base. The experts from various field concerned with interpersonal relations can provide counseling to the families to allow the grand children to respect their grand parents and spend time with them so that interpersonal communication can be strengthened between family members.

Keywords: Grandparents, Grandchildren, Interpersonal Communication.

Introduction

History has always shown changing social patterns affecting the lives of people and the homes in which they live such as the family. Although the family has survived thousands of years, withstanding odds of the highest order, it has not remained untouched by social change. This is largely due to the process of modernization bringing with it a breaking way from accepted family controls and increasing opportunities for social mobility, fast changing technologies, easy and fast communication, better educational opportunities and changing attitude. A peculiar feature of Indian Society has always been the joint family system. In ancient time, India was the home of joint family. Social traditions sustained and reinforced joint family system as primary social groupings. These joint family traditions preserved the position of elderly in the family and society as well. The three generations lived together under the same roof and all social and economic affairs were controlled and managed within the domain of the household. But in the modern times, the social matrix has however, not remained what it used to be. Now a days the other major change observed is the joint family system being replaced by nuclear families. Increased communication with outer world and education has brought about change in the attitude and values of family members which led to value conflicts among generations leading to breaking down of joint family and the nuclear family came into existence in the society. In the

past, the elder member of the family was the breadwinner but now-a-days the trend is changing. The women also have started entering the dual career and all this has led to generation gap and has affected the situation of the elderly in society. A research was preliminarily conducted on 40 homemakers belonging to nuclear families to find out the extent of problems experienced by them regarding child rearing. The findings revealed that majority of homemakers felt that children feel dissatisfied with the amount of attention and time given to them, and they frequently fight with siblings on small issues. Some homemakers who were employed felt that children remain alone at home for most of the time as parents went out to work. Nearly half of them felt that children feel neglected as parents were not able to spend much time with them. They also felt that in the absence of parents children do other activities which are not good for them such as watching TV, making lots of phone calls, inviting friends at home or going out with friends etc. As the homemakers lived in nuclear families they were not able to help children in studies due to several responsibilities, and in turn children become disobedient and arrogant in behavior as the parents are not able to devote enough time and attention in training them.

Gangrade (1999) asserts that Indian Society is undergoing transformation under the impact of industrialization, urbanization, commercialization, individualism, etc. Consequently, the traditional values and institutions are under the process of adoption and have often led to sharpening of inter-generational differences.

Traditionally in India, the aged enjoyed place of honour and respect in the family and community and were treated as repositories of experience, skill and wisdom. They were earlier a store house of anecdotes and stories for grand children before TV, Video games, and comics took away this role from them. With the breaking up of joint family system, the knowledge and experience of the old people lost significance in the proper functioning of society (Pathak, Bora and Borah, 2010) Commercialization, Industrialization and modernization have influenced, modified or even altered many social values and traditions particularly relating to older persons. The main argument is that the elderly enjoyed a much higher status in pre-industrial society marked by group oriented. Social interaction, agricultural mode of production, extended family system, kinship and patriarchal authority. In the prevailing situation, conflict and problems of adjustment have become a normal feature of the Indian families. Many of the elderly parents are compelled to leave their children and stay in old age homes. Parents are some times defined as grand children's "gate keepers" when the household is composed of three generations, even when the latter are already adults (Glarrusso, Silverstein and Bengtson, 1996) Close and proper relationships even between grandparents and parent create opportunities for reinforcing relationships and creating positive ties between grandparents and grand-children, while weak or negative relationships between grandparents and parents lead to less involvement of grandparents in their grand children's lives and even to negative relationship (Roberto, Allen

& Bliendszness, 2001; Unlenberg & Hammill, 1998). In any case, when grand children mature they determine the nature of their relationships with their grand parents independently as parental influence or the grand child- grand parent relationships with them grand parents independently as parental influence or the grand child- grand parent relationship gradually wanes (Harwood & Lin, 2000).

Nowadays it has been again observed that as women are taking up dual career the need for an elderly member in the home to take care of children is felt. The hired help to take care of household and children was taken as a resort in dual career families. The higher remuneration demanded by such services providers has made the people think of the importance of presence of some elderly person in the home who unselfishly and with love takes care of the household functions and of children. Such changing thoughts have made the grand parents also valuable asset of the family. It becomes important to make them realize their worth and give them due respect which is very much in the Indian philosophy. With this background a multidimensional study on three generation families was conducted on 60 households from Vadodara (Gujarat).

Objectives

1. To study the background characteristics of youth, parents and grand parents in families
2. To study the selected aspects of interpersonal communication between grand parents and youths viz. the extent of communication, the content of communication and the time for communication
3. To find out the areas of conflict and methods of resolving conflict between grand parents and youth.

Methodology

The research design of the study was descriptive in nature conducted on 50 three generation families living in Baroda City, selected through purposive sampling technique. Interview schedule was used as an instrument for gathering data as the educational level of respondents was expected to vary. Interview provides an opportunity to probe further and clarify the questions, hence interview was selected as the tool. The scales developed to find out 'extent of communication' and 'conflict between youth, parents and grandparents' were subjected to establishment of content validity and reliability through test-retest method. The data were analyzed employing descriptive statistics.

Major Findings

Background Information

Majority of the youth considered as sample were female and a little more than one third of them were male respondents. Mean age of youth was found to be 19.8 years, mean age of father was 49.1 years of mother was 46.4 years, of grand father was 73.8 years and that of grand mothers was 71.4 years. It was found that all the fathers were employed whereas majority of the mothers were not employed. A wide majority (95.6%) of the grand mothers and grand fathers (70.6%) were not employed. Mean income of the family was found to be Rs. 21980. The mean number of family members were 6.3.

Extent, Content and Time for Communication

A scale was developed to find out the extent of communication. The scale contained two sub sections A and B. Part A contained some areas for communication viz. educational, money, personal, religious matters, household activities, recreation socializing matters and health. It was a three point scale reflecting the extent to which the communication took place between youth and parents and youth and grandparents. The respondents were requested to indicate whether they communicated to great extent, to some extent or to a low extent with each other and the scores of 3 through 1 were ascribed respectively. Their responses were scored for each areas and were summated. The possible score of the scale were divided into two categories which indicated low and great extent of communication. In Part B the various areas of the communication were listed and the respondents were requested to specify the time (approximately) they spend in communication with each other during a day.

Extent of communication

A probe into different areas of communication revealed that majority of children and grandparents had communication to a great extent on religious, socializing and health matters. Majority of the youth had good communication with grand parents than parents. The mean weighted scores regarding content of communication revealed that the child communicated with grand parents mostly on health aspect, educated, religious and socializing matter.

Time Spent on Communication

It was observed that majority (68%) of the children and grandparents communicated for less than half an hour on education. For money matters it was observed that majority of child and grandparents spent less than half hour for communication. It was further seen that majority of the children and grandparents spent less than half an hour on personal conversation. Forty six percent of the child-grandparent spent less than half an hour on religious matters. For household activities it was observed that forty five per cent of children and grandparents spent less than half an hour. More than half of the children and grandparents spend less than half an hour on recreational and socializing matters. Lastly the same percentage (40%) of child-grandparent spent less than half an hour for conversation on health. The present research is a pioneer in dealing with the time aspect in communication between the three generations as no study could be found on this aspect by researcher. It has been found through the research that the time spent on communication is very less. Due to the advancement of science and technology, the other activities like computer, Internet, surfing, polo games, television, Gyms, hobby centers, chatting, dating etc., have increased rather than the interaction within home with family members. So they may be left with less time to spend with the family members. The choice and interests of youths and adults do vary which leads to less of communication.

Extent of conflicts

"Generation gap is much talked about by the social scientists. It is in fact a conflict between the two generations. The study aimed to find out the areas on

which conflict mostly takes place between the grandparents and children. In this section some of the areas of conflicts were listed viz.; Educational, Money matters, Personal matters, Religious matters, Household activities, Recreation, Eating habits, Discipline, and freedom for making decisions. The respondents were requested to indicate the frequency with which they experienced conflicts with their parents and grandparents for a particular area. This was a three point summated rating scale. The responses of always, sometimes and never were scored and the scores of the respondents were summated separately for each area of conflicts. The possible score was divided into two categories low and great which indicated their extent of conflict. An overall view of the scores obtained on total scale revealed that majority of the child and parent experienced great extent of conflicts whereas majority of the child-grandparents scored low which depicted their low extent of conflict.. Probing into areas of conflict it was observed that majority of the child-grandparents score low on education money, personal, religious matters, households activities, recreational matters eating habits and freedom for making decision areas which revealed that they experienced low extent of conflicts.

Methods of Resolving Conflict

"One of our most common errors in communication in all fields and at levels is to take for granted that when we talk to others they understood what we say. We assume that others use words just as we do. Instead we often talk past or by-pass them. We use language in ways that fail to convey accurately what we mean what we say is not what other hears or what we want them to hear, words, ideas, gestures, signs, symbols, none of these instruments of communication mean the same to others that they mean to us. Yet we blithely assume that they do, and risk our welfare upon the assumption that our personalities, plans, and purposes will be surely, safely, and effectively communicated".

(Harlow, 1957)

When a number of people live together under a common roof conflicts occur because every person has his/her own personality and thinking. They may disagree on certain points. When good understanding is found among the members there are no conflicts. When difference of opinion and misunderstanding are prevailing among the family members then conflicts among the family members occur. Conflicts however, cannot be stopped totally. Conflicts may affect an individual's peace of mind, create tension and also affect the health. To avoid conflicts, person should have control on one's anger and should not loose temper. Conflicts can also be avoided by discussing and sharing problems in a group.

Methods of Resolving Conflicts

When there is disagreement between people on any issue there are six possible

outcomes representing different levels of adjustment. (Fallet, 1960)

Dominance

Struggle and victory of one side. In the dominance method one person forces the other to obey it. It may be physical or mental force and the person accepts it. For e.g. parents force the child to study hard to achieve good grades in the class.

Voluntary Submission

Voluntary submission of one side. A person can accept the force according to his/her wish and according to his/her likes and dislikes for e.g. If the child is not interested in doing household chores the parents leave up to the child whether he/she wants to do household chores or not.

Compromise

Compromise is possible by the contribution of the two person or more. There is some voluntary yielding on all side without which the essential harmony of feeling or resolution of fundamental differences is not possible for e.g. If the child is not able to secure good grades in exam the parents lower their expectations for the achievement by children, at the same time the child raise his goal for level of achievement.

Integration

Integration is the level of the settling conflict in which all person reach to a new solution together, all are satisfied. For e.g. if the child is not satisfied by the pocket money given by the parents, both the child and parents sit together and mutually think of an option by which both are satisfied for future allowance.

Conversion

In this, all the members of the group agree for the solution and they have to choose among these after weighing all the situations and decide if the decisions were to be made a new one.

Acceptance of Differences

The last method of adjusting or solving conflicts is acceptance of differences. In this the policy of "live and let live" works. It is the feeling about the differences, which determines the success of this type of solution. It is most important to understand that there is no conflict on the earth, which cannot be solved when there are noble intentions on both the sides.

Most of the child and grand parents had low extent of conflicts as they followed integration method of resolving conflicts. This was observed in the dual career families as the grandparents and children got more time to interact with each other than the parents.

Conclusion

In recent decades, research has expanded to investigate ties between grand parents and their grand children. The present study proved that the grand parents and children are sharing a special bond especially in dual career families. The young grand children receive benefit from having close and supportive relation grand parents can serve as advisor of adult grand children as well as and they can provide help in various areas of life transitions (Silvesteen & Marrenco, 2001).

In general if the grand children's contact with their grand parents is maintained both can live a contented life. Grand children can indeed act as a resource in helping to care for grand parents and the grand parents enjoy more with grand children. The present study throws light on the place of communication for the purpose of healthy relation. This has widened the data base. The experts from various field concerned with interpersonal relations can provide counseling to the families to allow the grand children to respect their grand parents and spend time with them so that interpersonal communication can be strengthened between family members.

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