

**Bangladeshi Elderly Immigrant in
Southern Ontario: Perspectives on
Family Roles and Inter-generational
Relations**

Purpose

- The purpose of this descriptive qualitative study was to examine and understand elderly immigrant's role within the family in a changing family structure and context particularly the nature and quality of intergenerational relations within the family. The research focused on how family roles and relationships have changed as a result of immigration and with what impact.

Cultural Context

- There are significant differences between Canadian and Bangladeshi cultures
- Collectivism versus Individualism
- High priority on dependence, loyalty, and solidarity with family and individual sacrificed his/her desire for the good of the family
- Since independence is encouraged in the Bangladeshi culture rather than achievement and self-reliance, Bangladeshi elderly immigrant are often ill-equipped to cope with the new challenges

Changes in Family Relations and Family Roles

- In Bangladesh, seniors role is to pass the family norms, values, traditions to the next generation.
- Role emptying
- Role Reversal

Traditional Expectation and Family Conflict

- 1) Traditional norms demand that sons are responsible for finance and care of parents religion says “heaven lies under the feet of one’s parents”
- 2) because of immigration children are struggling for settling down and may not able to fulfill the expectation
- 3) Erosion of traditional values and influence of North American values
- 4) Parents become overly dependent to their children.
- 5) Conflicting decision making process in the family.

Demographic Profile

- The number of older immigrants has been increasing markedly in recent years.
 - 2041 it is estimated to be 23% (aged 65 and over).
 - 2001, 12% were seniors among them
 - 28% of Canadian seniors were immigrants.

 - 68% were of European background
 - 19% were from Asia.
 - 31% of immigrants who arrived in 1997 were seniors.
 - In 2001, 4% of the immigrant seniors were of South Asian
 - Bangladeshi elderly are part of South Asian

Methodology

Qualitative Design

- A qualitative research methodology was used in this study.
- Qualitative research relies heavily on the narratives of participants,

- *Participants*

6 Bangladeshi elderly 3 men and 3 women participated in this research.

The participants were between the ages of 60 and 72 years.

None of the participants had more than a high-school education.

Five rated their English comprehension as poor, one as fair.

All had been primarily homemakers and had never engaged in paid employment.

Research Findings

Primary Themes

Physical Loss

- Loss of loved one and possession
- Loss of mobility, Loss of social network
- Loss of Job, Lack of social support
- Lack of Privacy, Loss of self esteem
- Loss of family management authority

Symbolic Loss

- Loss of status, Social role
- Loss of influence, Loss of authority
- Loss of identity, Religious custom
- Loss of Purchasing power

Problem faced Living in Canada

Harsh weather, Dependency (financially & socially)
Social isolation, Loneliness, Social neglect
Confinement, Depression, Nostalgia.

Problem living in multigenerational house

Changing values of younger generation,
Conflict with daughter in law low status within the
family, Manual work
Psychological distance, Misunderstanding,
upset Maladjustment, Lack of privacy

Secondary Themes

The dominant themes that emerged from the analysis of data were loss of status/ authority /dignity, economic dependence/loss of purchasing power, frustration/stress, overworked, social isolation and loneliness.

Discussion of Findings

Loss of Status /Authority/dignity

- Family loyalty was cultural value, aging was symbol of wisdom and respect.
- “Where is my dignity if I cannot do anything for myself? farming is everything I know”.
- Another participant uttered that:
 - “I no longer have the authority to tell them what to do....If they do something wrong I just give them advice. If they listen then it is good...I don't like to talk too much, because the more you talk the less respect they have toward you”.

Loss of Status/Authority Continued

one participant mentioned:

“Sometimes they would tell me some of their decisions of course, I have to agree. If not, they will do it their own way anyway”.

As another participant explained:

“I am not an authoritarian type of mother.”

Parents were quick to define themselves as subordinates in their children’s household.

Another participant emphasized:

“Well, my role is the mother and, well, I cannot say that I’m the boss (laughs) you know they are the boss because it is their household. I’m just living with them.

Loss of Status/Authority Continued...

My role only is as a mother....I cook and clean....I do everything. That's it."

When asked about her grandchildren's education, another woman declared:

"I cannot interfere so much because that is the decision of my daughter and my son-in-law. I am just a supporting role. I don't want to be an interfering mother".

Economic Dependence/Loss of Purchasing Power

**In absence of any independent source of income
Most participants feel they become a burden to their
Children. As one participant mentioned:**

**“Think about a person who was very active in
Bangladesh suddenly. Becomes jobless. How do you
compromise it? At the same time. I don’t have income
I am totally dependent on my son for money. If he
willingly gives some money then I can spend but still
feel uneasy to spend my son’s money.**

**Sometimes I want to buy gift for my grandchildren
but when I think spending their fathers money don’t
feel comfortable and Satisfied with it. Giving a gift
bought from your own resources has a Different kind of
satisfaction, isn’t it? To be dependent on another Person
in any age is very painful. I cannot express it by language”.**

Economic Dependence/Loss of Purchasing Power Continued...

As a condition of sponsorship and because of The 10 year residency period, participants are not eligible for Government financial assistance or the old age Pension. Most of them are looking forward to the day they Would qualify. As one participant mentioned:

“I am dependent on my son for money and transportation. I am happy that my old-age pension might be due in another few months”.

Frustration/Stress

- **Women participant have some problem**
 - **with their daughter in law**
 - **One participant expressed tremendous dissatisfaction with her immigrant life,**
 - **“After immigration the younger generation change themselves quickly to survive, they assimilate themselves with the Canadian lifestyle”.**
 - **Another source of stress is the hectic lifestyle of their children.**

Frustration/Stress Continued....

According to one participant:

“My son is so busy most of the times that (he) does not get time to sit with me and talk; he is busy with his job and future....materialistic life made all people crazy like a dog”.

Participant often lament about feeling neglected.

Overworked

- Looking after old husband and taking care of grandchildren as well as household chore was a burden for the participants.
- This load of domestic work is increasingly oppressive for older women due to their age and physical fitness.
- I am very busy I don't have time. I don't feel good all the time.
- “But I chose it now this is my destiny. I cannot avoid this work”.
- “I am afraid of the daylight because I have to care of three grandchildren during the daytime”.

Social Isolation and Loneliness

- Because of English language problem elderly immigrant face problem in communicating with Canadian.
- Inability to speak English also affect their privileged position within the family and the ethnic community.
- Participants expressed frustration and sadness with the seemingly unfriendly attitudes of their “Canadian” neighbors.
- “We have been living here for years, can you believe that I don’t even know their names!”

Social Isolation and Loneliness Continued...

Another participant mentioned:

“Here I feel lonely. You cannot socialize with anybody language is a barrier, without expressing yourself how can you be a friend to another person? This is a ‘hi’ ‘hello’ country. Neighbor doesn’t visit you or never talks to you, you cannot see anybody even if you open your window and look on the road.

Everybody is busy with his/her job and they stay most of the time outside the house. If you want to visit somebody you need an appointment. In Our country (Bangladesh) you don’t need appointment”.

Policy Implications

- **It is the findings of the research that better family relations are likely to decrease elderly immigrants stress and improve their emotional well-being.**
- **Family members who are directly involved in the absorption process of older parents are even more likely to ease their transition.**
- **Intimate and confiding relationships within the family is very important. It is essential to provide the older adult to participate in the household decisions.**

Policy Implications Continued...

Community social worker working with immigrant populations can help older immigrants through support groups.

Language is a basic problem for the immigrants elderly. So special English class need to be designed.

Because of the sponsorship requirement participant have to stay in Canada for ten years to qualify for Canadian pensions.

Questions and Answers

- Thanks