

# **Intergenerational Issues in Contemporary Indian Society**

**By**

**Prof. Parul Dave**

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# Introduction

In the later part of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, we find families profoundly transformed in almost every part of the world and India is no exception. Families make positive contributions to the society and its individuals, by preserving culture, values, ethics and wealth. At their worst, they resist change; they restrict individual freedom due to the intrinsic nature of family processes that lead to unequal distribution of power and resources between members, and nurture prejudices that can lead to conflict.

**A family counsellor is often presented with a variety of issues at the level of individual families and their members, which may actually be a reflection of changes taking place at the broader/macro level affecting social, economic and political structures. It is, therefore, imperative to understand the family as part of a larger social system, and its linkages to the economic, political and cultural institutions/structures of society.**

**Contemporary Indian society is considered a melting pot of tradition and modernity, which reflects in various aspects of family life. The changes brought about by technological advances, mass media and modern communications, and economic liberalization are well recognised.**

# Context

Industrialization, urbanization and migration have affected family life to a great extent. There have been significant changes in the structure, functions, ideals and values at family. The major changes in family are:

- Decline of family traditions
- Growth of individualistic families
- Women's economic participation in organized sector
- Personal choice in selection of marriage partner
- Decline in family control with reference to gender and generation
- Increasing dependence on outside agencies for care and support of family members.

**Socio demographic and change variables**

**Family Composition and structure**

**Family dynamics**

**Structural and psychological implications**

Caste  
Socio economic class  
Mode of earning livelihood  
*Proprietary class*  
*entrepreneurial class service class*  
Urban/Rural/Tribal background

Education Urbanisation  
Industrialisation  
Women's employment status  
Job mobility  
Modernisation of values (consumerism)

Life circumstances and difficult situations

Normative Family Patterns  
*Joint*  
*Nuclear*

*Alternate Family Patterns*  
*Single parent families*  
*Women headed childless families adoptive families*  
*dual earner families*

**Role Allocation**  
*By age*  
*By gender*  
**Power distribution between**  
*Father-son*  
*Husband-wife*  
*Mother-in-law-daughter-in-law*  
*Family Relationship*  
*Parents child including father-son*  
*Husband-wife*  
*Sibling relationships*  
*Extended family or kinship relationship*  
**Family Practices**  
*Child rearing*  
*Socialisation*  
*Observance of customs and traditions*

Family Values And Ideologies

Egalitarian vs. Traditional  
Companionship vs. Hierarchical  
Liberal vs. Conservative  
Role Diffusion vs. Role differentiation

**For the Family**  
*Stability and Unity*  
*Family health reflected in harmonious relationships and smooth functioning*  
**For the Individual**  
*Fostering of*  
*- familistic/individualistic values*  
*- conformity/autonomy*  
*- dependence/independence*  
*- group orientation/self orientation*  
*Personality*  
*Mental health*  
*Coping styles*

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## Structural and psychological implications

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# Situation of Older People

- Proportion of older population has increased tremendously.
- Life styles and living arrangements have altered.
- Health care is a great challenge for the individual, family and society at large.
- Financial dependence due to loss of occupation.
- Loneliness and depression.
- Adjustments between and within generations is an issue of concern.
- Loss of power leads to loss of dignity and respect.

# Intergenerational Relationships

- Loss of role models for the young due to break up of joint families.
- Older persons are increasingly marginalised which leads to value conflict in their own lives.
- Increasingly young perceive older persons negatively – as a burden.
- Need for independence on part of both generations create family conflicts.

- Modern life style makes older generation's knowledge and experience useless for young generations.
- Elder abuse is becoming more prevalent.
- Migration has deprived the older generation of the joys of grandparent hood.
- Value transmission is one of the major functions of family. Older generation inculcates the values in younger generation. However, the traditional values are changing fast and hence the younger generation finds them redundant.
- Parents of non resident Indians are financially taken care of but socially and psychologically feel neglected.

# Gender Issues in Family Relationships

- Employed women have gained considerable power in decision making. This has advantages for her own development but creates familial disharmony if others are unable to accept her changed role.
- Older women in joint households contribute more in household chores and childcare than older men.
- Girl children are encouraged to excel in studies as well as learn household chores, whereas boys are only expected to excel in studies. As a result the attitude to learn skills help in cooking, childcare etc. on part of men are limited.

- Women are the main caregivers for older persons as well as for children.
- Widowed older men are likely to contribute less in familial responsibilities and hence perceive themselves as dependent and helpless.
- More single women live alone during oldage.
- Mental health problems such as depression are observed in older men and women almost equally but for different reasons. Loss of status and loneliness respectively.

# Programs and Policies for Families

- Basic human rights to all family members such as access to resources, care, education, employment, rest and leisure, protection should be provided.
- Each member of the family has a right to fulfillment of basic needs, health care, financial security, housing facilities, recreation and mobility, continuing education, protection from neglect, violence and destitution.
- The voluntary organizations and government agencies share the responsibilities of family's welfare. They must involve members of family in planning, monitoring and evaluating the policies and programs concerning them. The participatory approach will make things more viable and useful.
- Old Age Pension Scheme – Varies from state to state. It is Rs.300/- (\$8) per person per month. This is not sufficient as the cost of living has gone much higher.

- Oldage pension is provided only to those who have worked in organized sector. Older people below the poverty line should get financial assistance.
- Children are legally liable to support parents financially but awareness and implementation is negligible.
- Telephone helplines for children, women and older persons facing threats and violence, have opened up.
- Residential institutions for older persons are mushrooming. The quality of services and facilities are much below the expected standards. Lack of professional staff is a striking feature, men and women perform traditional roles in the institution.

- Meals on wheels is becoming a common service for families, especially when older people live on their own.
- There is a need for day care centres for children and elderly so that the middle generation is free from anxiety when at work.
- The balance between employment and family life should be another principle underlying future family policy. Currently education of children and employment of parents take away a big chunk of their time and hence family gets neglected.
- Holistic Family Legislation – Legislation which focuses on each member of the family is needed. The middle generation who lives with older generation should get same benefits such as income tax exemption or immediate phone or cooking gas connections.

- Media, especially television should be used extensively for imparting necessary information regarding the programs and policies concerning family.
- A key challenge will be to organize family policy in a manner that has equality in all its forms as an end goal and an operating principle. The current policy does not address the gaps between men and women in relation to family roles, the disadvantaged low-income families and the opportunities for families for different religious backgrounds.
- Empowerment : It is necessary that the focus is on meeting strategic needs of family members that will result in positive change in their life styles. By ensuring and protecting rights of all family members, the family as an institution will be empowered.