

Extended Abstract

Population aging is gradually becoming a concern for both the developed and the developing nations. Demographic forces such as increasing life expectancy and rapidly falling fertility rates are contributing to a growing bulge in the age group of 60 and above. This global aging has the potential to transform economies and trade, migration, disease burdens and social relations, all very significantly. In this India is no exception. In fact, projections suggest that India's older adult population (60 and above) will rise from 8% in 2010 (~ 60 million) to 19% in 2050 (approximately 300 million) (UNESA, 2009; Census of India, 2011). This demographic bulge of older adults is growing at a time when India is also experiencing significant shifts in family structures, security provisions and social policies. Demographic work on population aging in India has often focused on issues relating to family structure, health outcomes and living arrangements. Despite this focus on the Indian family, an in-depth study of the complex dialectic of intergenerational relationships is often missing from the gerontological literature. Against the background of this gap, this dissertation adopts a socio-gerontological lens and studies the complex interactions of family and intergenerational relationships in Ahmedabad, India. As a corollary to studying intergenerational dynamics and family ties, this dissertation examines questions of social capital, non-familial ties and older adult wellbeing in elder care institutions (more commonly known as old age homes). This is particularly useful as India is undergoing dramatic transformations in family structure marked by a gradual, but steady, movement away from multigenerational settings to the individual, the market and the state - these being the emerging sites of aging and elder care. Finally, this dissertation engages in a cross-cultural and comparative interrogation of filial expectations, network ties, (transnational) identity and cultural meanings of religion and death in two transitional cities of Ahmedabad (India) and Saskatoon (Canada).

This dissertation project lies at the intellectual interface of gerontology and family sociology. Ever since gerontology's evolution as a scientific field of study, it has been repeatedly criticized for being a-theoretical with a dominant focus on amassing large datasets and for remaining practice-oriented, or as Bengtson and colleagues (1997) aptly describe, "data rich but theory poor". Subsequently, despite a large and an impressive array of topics covered by scholars, Indian gerontology remains highly empirical with an (unintended) neglect of theory use and advancement. This neglect has motivated the present research and thus, a conscious effort has been directed in infusing theory with empirical observations from the field.

The thesis is organized as follows. The first essay (Chapter II), examines change and continuity of intergenerational relationships in joint families of Ahmedabad city. In particular, the study borrows from the social constructionist framework of gerontology in order to interpret individual processes of aging. Within this framework, the dissertation adopts one of the earlier theories in sociology of aging, the Disengagement Theory (Cumming and Henry, 1961) which suggests a gradual withdrawal of the older person from social roles and an overall personal decline. Though the Disengagement Theory has often been criticized for its poor empirical fit and its deterministic approach in explaining human behavior, this dissertation revisits this theory for its semblance with the process of growing old in India. By doing so, this study shows that though old age in India is marked by a gradual disengagement as a way of preparing for death - this process of withdrawal reconfigures intra-familial relationships in complex ways. Moving on, this dissertation also examines intergenerational relationships against the backdrop of shifting social and economic realities as well as that of changing attitude towards the aged. Another dominant theoretical framework - the Conflict-Solidarity-Ambivalence Model (Bengtson and Schrader, 1982; Bengtson and Roberts, 1991; Bengtson and Achenbaum, 1993; Bengtson et al, 1997; Bengtson, 2001) has

been utilized to examine how older adults in urban settings navigate their later lives in joint households. Findings from the first essay demonstrates the changing nature of intergenerational relationships in Indian joint families.

In Chapter III, this dissertation adopts a Social Exchange perspective (Dowd, 1975) so as to understand how older adults in institutional settings (more commonly known as old age homes) adapt to these non-traditional sources of care and support. The analysis of the interviews with the residents of elder care institutions suggest a tension between compulsive self-care and an idealized way of growing old that emphasizes on bodily and social detachment. The findings also show that these elder care institutions, under the garb of discipline and safety regulation, often restrict outings and overall mobility. This restriction is often disproportionately directed towards older women. The study further highlights the role of social norms and how that translates to social control, creating different social realities for older men and women. Overall, this part of the dissertation highlights the remarkable continuity of patriarchal ideology along the life course while investigating questions of roles, mobility and support.

In Chapter IV, questions that lie at the intersection of normative roles, intergenerational relationships and the social process of growing old are all examined in the transnational context. This essay draws from the Successful Aging model (Rowe and Kahn, 1997) to understand the process of growing old in Saskatoon. The Successful Aging model suggests that lack of physical disability and high cognitive functioning are the main components to age successfully (Rowe and Kahn, 1997). Building on this model, this chapter shows how perceptions of aging, caregiving expectations and intergenerational relationships are shaped in Saskatoon (Canada).

In Chapter V, this exercise on utilizing competing models to understand the process and experience of growing old is further advanced when a comparative framework is also adopted to reflect on

the commonalities and parallels between the two contextually dissimilar settings (Ahmedabad and Saskatoon). Specifically, two contrary micro perspectives of gerontology -Disengagement Theory and Successful Aging model are utilized to understand the (differing) cultural notions of death, role continuity, filial expectations and identity formation through the everyday experience of growing old. Significantly, the role of context and the associated normative culture is shown to be deeply influencing this experience. In this final chapter (Chapter V) the dissertation also focuses on the intersection of age and gender- that is it examines how gender roles and expectations around household autonomy and mobility differ not only between men and women but also within women living in two different cultural contexts. In the process this chapter offers reflection on the paradoxical relationship between religion and everyday construction of old age in both the cities.

The methodology adopted for all the three substantive studies involves utilizing a pre-tested and pre-determined semi-structured questionnaire and in-depth narrative style interviews to capture the perceptions of older adults as well as the co-resident adult offspring, wherever possible. Sampling method has been non-statistical; primarily snowball sampling given the nature of the questions and the overall study design.

Overall, by closely examining the complex interplay of intergenerational relationships, family dynamics and social norms with age, the dissertation hopes to expand the gerontological knowledge to understand the future of aging as a lived experience as opposed to an empirical exercise of population numbers. As a related contribution, the dissertation opens up areas of intellectual investigations that lie at the intersection of family sociology and gerontology