

Intergenerational Differences in Perceived Conflict among Families of Working and Non-working Women

Kushagra Joshi^{1*}, Ritu Singh¹ and Sushma Jaswal²

^{1*}*Department of Human Development & Family Studies, College of Home Science, G.B.P.U. A. & T, Pantnagar 263145, Distt. U.S. Nagar, Uttarakhand, India*

**E-mail: kushagra.me@gmail.com*

²*Department of Human Development, College of Home Science, P.A.U., Ludhiana, Punjab, India*

KEYWORDS Consensus. Elderly-Parent. Adult-Child. Co-residence. Relationship Quality

ABSTRACT Intergenerational differences are the differences in the perception of the members of two generations co-residing together for years under one shelter. The study aimed to investigate the differences in the perceived conflict as reported by the members of the two generations co-residing viz. fathers-in-law, mothers-in-law comprising first generation and sons and daughters-in-law comprising second generation. A sample of 240 respondents (N=60 families) was selected comprising of fathers-in-law (30), mothers-in-law (30), sons (30) and daughters-in-law (30) drawn from the families where daughter-in-law was working, thus making a sample of 120 respondents from families with working daughter-in-law ($n_1=30$ families). In the same manner, 120 respondents were drawn from families where daughter-in-law was non-working ($n_2=30$ families). All the four members were interviewed and dyads were analyzed to investigate intergenerational differences. Results showed that all the members of 'non-working' daughter-in-law families reported more conflict in their families in comparison to those from 'working' daughter-in-law families.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant demographic changes of our time is the rapidly expanding number of older adults in the world population. The number of people aged 60 and more in the world is projected to be more than triple in the next half century, from 593 million to 1.97 billion, increasing the share of older people in the population 10 to 22 per cent (UNFPA 2002). By 2025, one in seven of the world's inhabitants will be at least 60 years of age. Nearly two-thirds of this population will be accounted for by Asia and the Pacific. Owing to the rapid international diffusion of medical advances and decline in fertility, the rate at which populations are aging in developing countries is much faster than observed in the industrial countries (United Nations 1996). Older persons in India are expected to number around 124 million by 2020 whereas the old-old persons (70 years and above) will account for 47 million. This increased life expectancy has given a scope for the young and old to live together for more years (Hagestad 2000). Due to increased longevity a majority of parents and their children will experience several decades of their lives together (Dykstra and Gierveld 2004). Because of a higher vulnerability of old people for chronic diseases, intergenerational relationships and care giving seem to

become central developmental issues in old age (Bradley and Cafferty 2001).

The family, in its diverse forms and structures, is a fundamental unit of society linking the generations, preparing its younger members for active and productive adulthood and providing support for its older members. Its ties have been the most intimate and long-lasting, where the aged have relied for greatest security. Even today, families continue to provide care, sometimes prolonged care, to older people. Chekki (1996) argued that despite forces of urbanization and industrialization which have had a significant impact on the traditional Indian family, the modified extended family is preferred and continues to prevail in modern India. In the absence of any extra familial welfare system, most elderly persons in India tend to co-reside with children.

When sons continue living with their parents, even after marriage, the family becomes multigenerational where different generations of individuals are constantly interacting with each other. These intergenerational bonds are perhaps the most stable and enduring ties people experience in our rapidly changing world. At the same time, social norms for how these relationships "should" be conducted have weakened, and many parents and adult children are struggling to understand their roles and responsibili-

ties toward one another. Coupled with this transition is the fact that the most of the families are residing in a multi-generational household permitting constant interaction among cross-generational members (Chadha and Malik 2004). At such times, when these members interact with each other while living together, there are always certain issues which are perceived as 'good' by some members while the same are viewed as 'bad' for the other members. The members hold some expectations from each other, but when these expectations are not met, conflicts are bound to follow. Conflict is an integral part of most human development theories (Shantz 1987), and researching the benefits of this behavior can yield a better understanding of human relationships.

Another demographic change that our society is facing is the increasing work force participation of women especially from the middle class families. The percentage of educated women job seekers among the total educated job seekers witnessed an increase from 72.6% in 1993 to 74.6% in 2002 (Directorate General of Employment and Training, Ministry of Labour, Govt. of India 2002). So, these days women are entering into employment sector not only because of economic compulsion as in earlier times but also because of their desire for self-expression and having an independent identity which is a resultant of their being educated. Education and employment has brought about self-reliance, confidence and a sense of identity in the women. As a result of being educated and employed, they are now better turned out, outgoing, open to new ideas, well-informed and aware of their rights and surroundings. They can identify and cope with their problems better as they have lot of exposure and access to the world. They are much of their own individual now, on the road to emancipation (Singh et al. 2006). They have acquired certain level of mental maturity and psychological strength for making options for the choice, assuming responsibility for their decision and moving ahead in life independently and efficiently. They have moved from a life of drudgery to a new arrangement of things. Given the new set of roles and family structures, these women have adapted to this challenging task with aplomb.

The research papers reviewed on the topic reflected that the researches done on this particular aspect are from western origin, depicting lack of data from developing countries where

parents still live with their adult children. Though the studies provide useful theoretical and empirical information regarding intergenerational solidarity, its generalizability seems to be limited because of unavailability of published empirical evidence on this issue from the developing countries.

Most family researchers focus on primary family relationships rather than secondary or quasi-kin or quasi-maternal relationships such as mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships. In such studies, perception of only one generation either of parents or their children has been taken whilst the researches themselves stress the need of conducting studies by taking both of the co-residing generation's perceptions on various familial issues.

Keeping in view the demographic changes that must have brought significant changes in the functioning of families and the research gaps observed, the study was planned with twofold objectives: first, to examine the congruence between members of each generation living together regarding their perception of conflict in their families. And second that does the perception of conflict, of members of both the generations in the families, varies with work status of women (refers to daughter-in-law) in the family? Information was based on reports from the members of two generations in the dyad. The perspective of both the generations was taken and dyadic analysis was carried out for probing intergenerational differences in perceived conflict as co-residing parents and adult children may perceive same issue differently in their families.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and its Selection

The sample was confined to upper-middle socio-economic status families of Ludhiana city. The sample for the study included those families who satisfied the following inclusion criteria:

- i. The selected family should be essentially intergenerational where parents and adult married son is co-residing at least for the last two year.
- ii. The age of the elderly parents should be 60-75 years.
- iii. The length of marriage of the adult son should be at least three years.

iv. All members of the family should be apparently healthy-physically and mentally.

The sample for the study comprised of 60 families. The sample constituted of fathers-in-law (30), mothers-in-law (30), sons (30) and daughters-in-law (30) drawn from the families where daughter-in-law was working, thus making a sample of 120 respondents from families with working daughter-in-law ($n_1=30$). In the same manner, 120 respondents were drawn from families where daughter-in-law was non-work-

ing ($n_2= 30$); thus making the total respondents for the study as 240. Figure 1 shows a clear description of the division of sampled families for the present study.

Research Instruments Used

The socio-economic status of the respondents was determined by administering standardized Socio Economic Status Scale by Bhardwaj (2001). Conflict was assessed by using one of

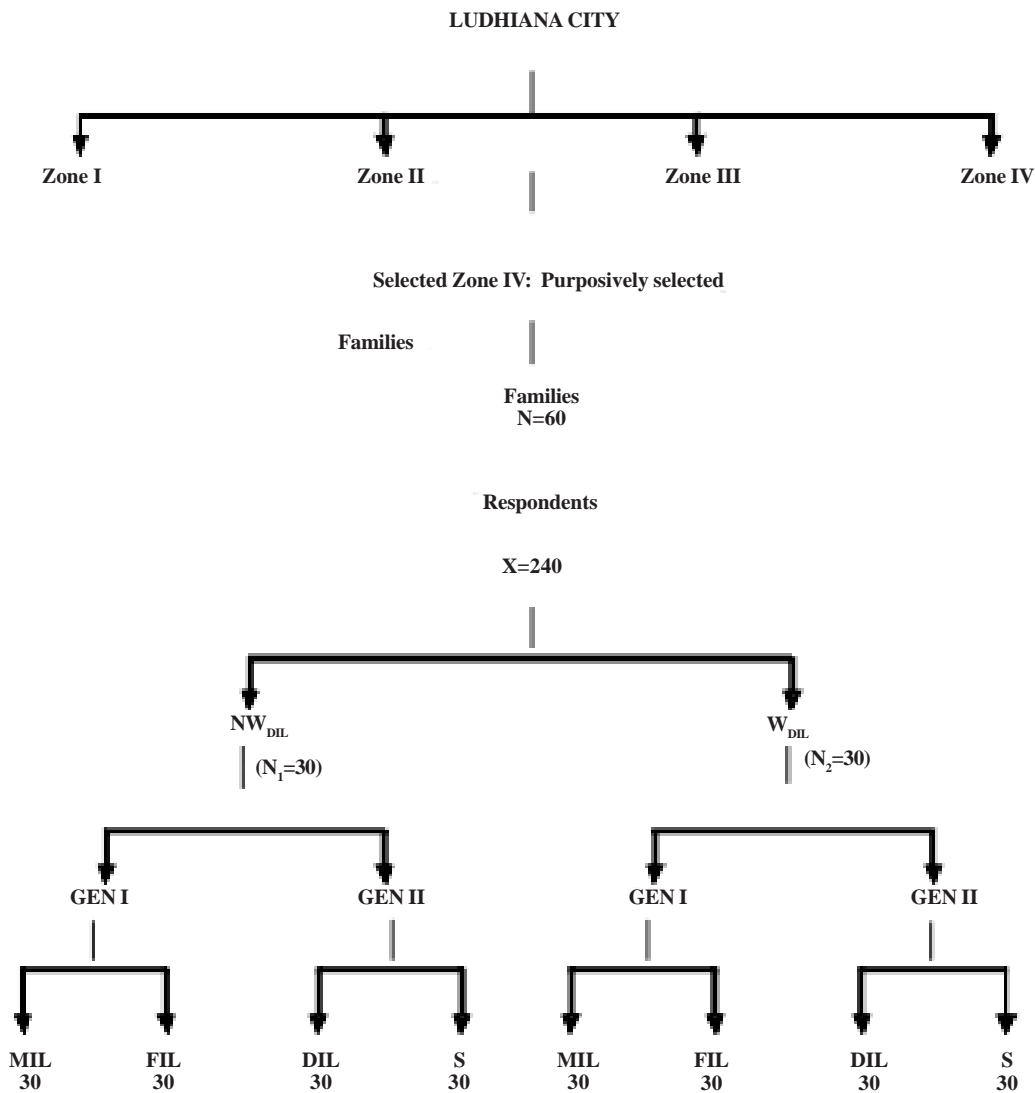


Fig. 1. Sampling design
 Note: MIL: Mother-in-law; FIL: Father-in-law; DIL: Daughter-in-law; S: Son

the subsets of Family Environment scale by Bhatia and Chadha (1993) which was modified by deleting some items and by adding various issues of familial conflict generally observed in the families (reliability coefficient : 0.81) as per the objectives of the study.

Collection of Data

The subjects were personally contacted, the purpose of the visit was explained and the requisite information as per the study proforma was gathered. Each respondent was assured that the information provided would be kept confidential. Each member of the family was interviewed separately after taking prior appointments in order to maintain reliability of information gathered. The data were analyzed statistically in line with the objectives of the study.

Statistical Analysis

The collected data were classified and tabulated in accordance with the objectives to arrive at the meaningful and relevant inferences by using arithmetic mean and student's t-test.

RESULTS

Conflict, for the study, has been defined operationally as the amount of openly expressed aggression and conflict among family members while co-residing with each other and the lack of disagreement expressed in the family in an issue or two. Table 1 puts forth the differences among the members of first generation that is, fathers-in-law and mothers-in-law and second generation that is, sons and daughters-in-law in their perception of conflict.

The data presented in Table 1 shows that intergenerational differences were observed as significant ($p < 0.05$) in fathers-in-law and sons dyad in families with working daughter-in-law. It is noteworthy that sons reported for perceiving more conflict in their families in comparison to their fathers. Rest of the dyads did not vary in their perception. In families with non-working daughter-in-law, the differences were observed as non-significant. In the families with non-working daughter-in-law, all the dyads showed concordance in their perception of conflict.

Table 2 shows the difference in conflict perceived by members of first and second generation with respect to work status of daughter-in-law in the families. The probability values were derived on the basis of student's t-test employed on the mean scores for conflict perceived by members of both generations of families with working and non-working daughter-in-law. Difference in mean score was derived by subtracting the mean score for perceived conflict by members of non-working daughter-in-law families from the mean score for conflict of members of working daughter-in-law families.

Data shows that all the members varied significantly ($p < 0.05$) in their perception of conflict when work status of daughter-in-law was taken into account. The results showed that all the members of families with 'non-working' daughter-in-law reported more conflict in their families in comparison to those from 'working' daughter-in-law families. The families where daughter-in-law was non-working, more conflict was perceived by all the members that is, fathers-in-law, mothers-in-law, sons and daughters-in-law when compared to their respective counterparts of 'working' daughter-in-law families.

Table 1: Inter-generational difference in mean scores for conflict across families with working and non-working daughter-in-law

Comparisons between members of generation-one and two(dyads)	Intergenerational differences in perceived conflict			
	Families with working daughter-in-law		Families with non-working daughter-in-law	
	Sig. of difference(p-value)	Difference in mean scores	Sig. of difference(p-value)	Difference in mean scores
Fathers-in-law-Sons	<* (0.0301)	-4.20	NS (0.2876)	-2.37
Fathers-in-law-Daughters-in-law	NS (0.9424)	-0.17	NS (0.4514)	-1.13
Mothers-in-law-Sons	NS (0.1021)	-3.80	NS (0.8311)	-0.50
Mothers-in-law-Daughters-in-law	NS (0.9298)	0.23	NS (0.6640)	0.73

<*significant differences at 95% confidence level NS: Non-significant difference

Table 2: Differences in mean scores for conflict in families with working and non-working daughter-in-law

<i>Members of generation-one and two</i>	<i>Difference in mean scores for conflict in the families with working and non-working women</i>		<i>Sig. of difference (p-value)</i>	<i>Difference in mean scores ('working'- 'non-working')</i>
	<i>Mean scores for conflict</i>			
	<i>Family with Working DIL</i>	<i>Family with Non-working DIL</i>		
Fathers-in-law	58.93	65.30	< [*] (0.0005)	-6.37
Mothers-in-law	59.33	67.17	< [*] (0.0012)	-7.83
Sons	63.13	67.67	< [*] (0.0566)	-4.53
Daughters-in-law	59.10	66.43	< [*] (0.0011)	-7.33

<^{*} significant difference at 95% confidence level

DISCUSSION

The results of the present study reveal incongruence in the perceived conflict reported by both the generations in families of working and non-working women where parents co-reside with adult married son and her wife. All the members in the families with 'non-working' daughter-in-law reported more conflict than their counterparts in families with 'working' daughter-in-law. From such daughters-in-law who are non-working, parents-in-law as well as their husbands also expect more in comparison to those who are working. Non-working daughter-in-law is expected to play perfectly all the conventional roles of housekeeping as well as kin keeping.

Whereas working daughter-in-law earns and thus contributes to financial status of the family. Women today are a necessary and permanent part of the labor force, and their income has become critical to even a minimal maintenance of living standards for working-class households. While wages have stagnated over the last thirty years, women's work has helped to fill the gap.

By virtue of their working status, daughters-in-law may also get some help at home by their in-laws and husbands too. Study by Joshi (1999) revealed that majority of the households where wives were engaged in outdoor employment, husbands extended a helping hand in the performance of household chores. Similar finding was reported by Hood (1983) who stated that wives' employment was associated with more equal sharing of child care, more shared interests and spouse's greater interest in each other as individuals and confidantes, whereas, this was not the case when compared with traditional families wherein women were non-employed.

The evidences clearly support that being a contributor to family's income; the domestic role expectations become loose for working women.

If we look at the interaction pattern and its frequency, the families in which daughter-in-law does not work, family members remain together for more time, more are the interactions and verbal exchanges which may increase the chances of friction in the families and more are the expectations too which if not met, conflicts are bound to follow. While in families where daughter-in-law is working, she remains outside the home for at least 6 to 8 hours. At work place, she gets opportunity to meet with people outside the family ties. This exposure to outside world for a fixed period of time may shift the focus of the women from the daily family feuds, disagreements and other issues, and hence may report less conflict.

CONCLUSION

The study attempted to investigate the concordance in the perception of parents/parents-in-law and their married sons and daughters-in-law regarding conflict experienced in their families while they co-reside. Along with this, the difference in their perception with respect to work status of daughter-in-law was also investigated. As far as intergenerational differences in conflict were concerned, it was found that fathers-in-law and sons differed in their perception in the families with working daughter-in-law while in families where daughter-in-law were non-working, no such incongruence was observed. With reference to work status of daughter-in-law, all the members of first and second generation of families, where daughter-in-law was not working, showed more conflict than their respective counterparts of families where daughter-in-law was working.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Senior Research fellowship granted by University Grants Commission for completion of the research is sincerely acknowledged.

NOTES

- For the present study, Fathers-in-law are the fathers of the sons and fathers-in-law of the son's wife (daughter-in-law).
- Mothers-in-law are mothers of son and mothers-in-law of son's wife (daughter-in-law).

REFERENCES

- Bhardwaj RL 2001. *Manual for Socio-economic Status Scale*. Agra: National Psychological Corporation.
- Bhatia H, Chadha NK 1993. *Manual for Family Environment Scale*. Lucknow: Ankur Psychological Agency, pp. 1-7.
- Bradley JM, Cafferty TP 2001. Attachment among older adults: Current issues and directions for future research. *Attachment and Human Development*, 3: 200-221.
- Chadha NK, Malik N 2004. Intergenerational relationships: A futuristic framework. *Indian Journal of Gerontology*, 18: 318-347.
- Chekki D 1996. Family values and family change. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 27: 409-413.
- Directorate General of Employment and Training 2002. Emerging Markets Economy: More and More Women Seeking Jobs in India. From < www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4174/is_200406/ai_n12932533-20k > (Retrieved August, 2011).
- Dykstra P, Gierveld JJ 2004. Gender and marital-history differences in emotional and social loneliness among Dutch older adults. *Canadian Journal of Aging*, 23: 141-155.
- Hagestad OG 2000. Intergenerational Relationships. A Paper Presented for the Gender and Generations Programme, Economic Commission for Europe/Population Activities Unit, United Nations. From < www.unece.org/ead/pau/gg/hagestad.pdf > (Retrieved October, 2009).
- Hood JC 1983. *Becoming a Two-Job Family*. New York: Praeger.
- Joshi ST 1999. *Women and Development-The Changing Scenario*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications.
- Shantz CU 1987. Conflicts between children. *Child Development*, 58: 283-305.
- Singh R, Thind SK, Jaswal S 2006. Assessment of marital adjustment among couples with respect to women's educational level and employment status. *Anthropologist*, 8: 259-266.
- UNFPA 2002. State of the world population: People, poverty and possibilities. *AJWS*, 10: 78-86.
- United Nations 1996. *Report of an Expert Panel on Lifelong Preparation for Old Age in Asia and the Pacific: Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific*. New York: UN.