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Social Isolation within Family: An Analysis of Old Age Citizens

**Shahzad Farid^{1*}, Muhammad Luqman¹, Muhammad Zeshan Saleem²,
Ahmad Saad¹, Waqas Ali Khan³, Samia Arshad¹
and Imtiaz Ahmad Warraich¹**

¹Department of Sociology, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Pakistan.

²Department of Gender Studies, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Pakistan

³Department of Sociology, University of Gujrat, Pakistan.

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Authors SF and ML designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol, wrote the first and the final draft of the manuscript. Authors MZS and AS managed the analyses of the study. Authors WAK and SA managed the literature searches and data collection. Author IAW did the proof reading and the English editing. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Original Research Article

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ABSTRACT

Aims: The present study aimed to identify the factors of social isolation among aged males and females within their families.

Study Design: The mixed approach technique was applied in the present research.

Place and Duration of Study: The present research was conducted in Multan city of Pakistan from January 2012 to January 2013.

Methodology: We selected a panel of 120 respondents (60 males and 60 females) out of 385 respondents by using multi-stage sampling technique. Initially, we interviewed 385 respondents by using interview guide and then excluded the inappropriate respondents for the study.

Results: The results indicated that lack of money leads toward social isolation among aged males ($y=6.97+1.007 \text{ LM } x$, $P=0.000$) and lack of involvement in family issues leads toward social isolation among aged females ($y=33.803+0.193 \text{ LIFI } x$, $P=0.000$).

Conclusion: The present research concluded that aged males and females are isolated

*Corresponding author: Email: shahzad.farid82@yahoo.com;

from their families but the factors effecting their relations are varied i.e., lack of money for aged males and lack of involvement in family issues for aged females. It is suggested that money circulation within family under the custody of aged males will decrease their level of isolation, whereas, the involvement of aged females in family issues will reduce their social isolation.

Keywords: Social isolation; old age; gender; family.

1. INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of social isolation is widely identified among aged people [1] and it has several correlates e.g., lack of communication [2,3], personal relationship [4-9], economic resources [3,10, 5,6,11,12] and health [13,14,6,15]. In addition, it is associated with suicide, distress, premature death and mental illness [16-23]. Although social isolation has been associated with different variables but lack of communication was rarely noticed which is a key factor of social isolation.

South Asian countries, particularly Pakistan and India, have common features and problems [24,25] such as bureaucracy and social isolation [26,27]. In these countries, second generation has lack of communication with aged people because of cognitive and age differences [28-30]. They depend upon their children, family members and relatives. Due to the dependency, they rarely welcome to participate in the family issues. They feel being ignored [31] to participate in family issues [32].

Women are more isolated than men [33] especially widowed and unhealthy [34,35]. [36] Explored the extent of objective social isolation among married and unmarried women of different ethnic background. They found that married women are more socially isolated than those who are unmarried because married women, particularly in urban areas, have lack of interaction with their male family members. The diversity of emotional state and behavior also affects their relationship [37,38]. Such lack of interaction forces them to live as unhappy person [39] and promotes interpersonal difficulties that produce schizophrenic state among them [40-42].

1.1 Conceptualization of Social Isolation

Social isolation should not be confused with loneliness and social exclusion. Loneliness, initially, illustrated by [43,44] and afterwards it was given empirical support by [45] who claimed that loneliness is the deficit of one's social relations. Social exclusion elaborated as the exclusion of certain groups from benefits of development due to the particular social identity like gender, ethnicity, caste, religion and profession. It is clearly demonstrated in the Eurostat statistical book [46] that social exclusion is much broader concept that represents the cluster of concepts like poverty, unemployment, access to education, health care facilities and living conditions.

[47] Clarified that loneliness and social isolation are subjective and objective states respectively. Social isolation is an "objective state of having minimal contacts with other people" [48,49], whereas, "loneliness refers to the subjective state of negative feelings associated with perceived social isolation. It is also expressed as having lower level of contacts than desired contacts or the absence of a specific desired companion".

Interestingly, [50] stated that all socially isolated people are not lonely because loneliness is the subjective term.

1.2 Theoretical Perspective

Pre-suppositions in relation with social isolation have been described through multidisciplinary approaches like health and aging [6,51-53]. The factors of social isolation have coercive influences on aged people which compel them to live in isolation. Sociologists, having major concerns with coercive forces over individuals, reflected it by macro level theoretical perspectives [54] but the present study did not concern with the pre-suppositions of functional or conflict perspectives of Sociology. In the present research, the factors of social isolation are extracted from risk factors, loneliness and causes of social isolation [55-57,52,58,59-61] which compel old age people to be isolated socially.

The structure of Pakistan is changing rapidly e.g., family structure [62]. There are several causes of such a change [63] which are affecting aged persons [64]. In Pakistan, joint family system is about to end and nuclear family system is becoming popular which is clearly pointing towards the isolation of children from parents [65,66]. Such kind of assumptions and propositions intrigued the researchers to detect the factors that force the aged persons towards social isolation. Thus, the core objective of the study is to identify those factors which effect old age citizen to be isolated within family.

2. METHODOLOGY

The present research used the mixed approach technique (see Fig. 1) dividing it into two phases due to the certain restrictions which are as follow:

- 1) Respondents were not agreed to provide the required time and data.
- 2) A structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews could not be conducted simultaneously.

2.1 Phase One

2.1.1 Procedure, criterion and sample selection

Initially, researchers interviewed the 385 male and female respondents from Multan city; all respondents were above the age of 50 years. Researchers asked them either they feel isolation or not? Researchers did not include those males and females who were living in old age houses and do not have families because they were already isolated, whereas, the present study concerned with those old age people who conceived themselves isolated and those factors which forced them to be isolated. Those respondents who perceived themselves socially isolated were included in the sample (N=120) and all other male and female respondents who did not possess the selection characteristics excluded from the sample. While those respondents (i.e. widow, unmarried and divorced) who were living with families included in the sample as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents

Category	Male (n=60)		Female (n=60)		
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
Age	50-55	30	50.0	23	38.3
	56-60	18	30.0	21	35.0
	61-65	5	8.3	8	13.3
	Above 65	7	11.3	8	13.3
Education	Uneducated	13	21.7	15	25.0
	Under matriculation	22	36.7	19	31.7
	Under Graduation	17	28.3	17	28.3
	Above Graduation	8	13.3	9	15.0
Marital status	Married	21	35.0	14	23.3
	Unmarried	6	10.0	4	6.7
	Divorced	11	18.3	14	23.3
	Widowed	22	36.6	28	46.6
Living with	Son	38	63.3	31	51.7
	Daughter	10	16.7	17	28.3
	Other	12	20.0	12	20.0

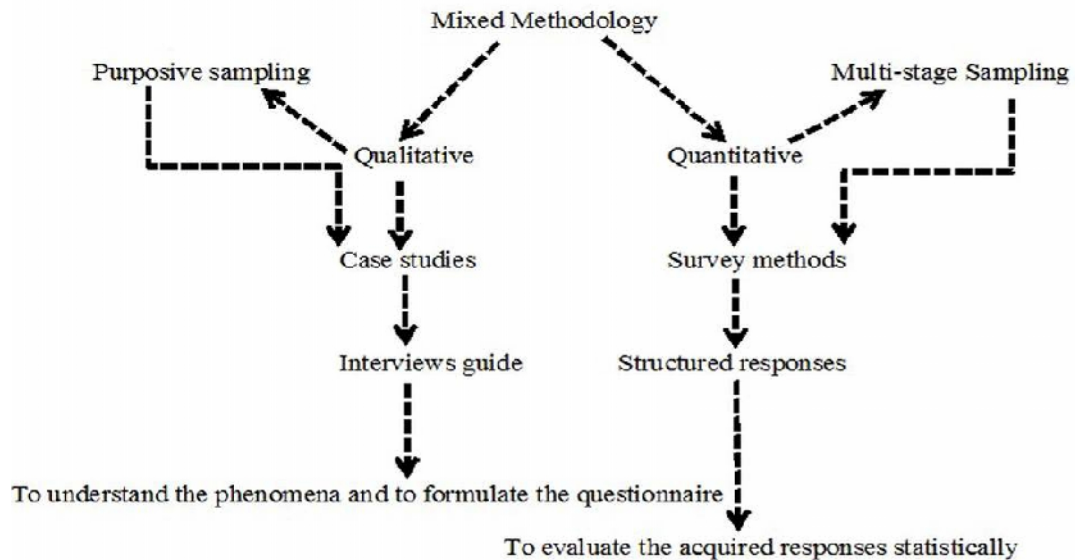


Fig. 1. Mixed Methodology path

2.2 Phase Two

Tool for data collection and data collection procedure: After selection of the sample we formulated a structured questionnaire –consisted of 12 questions as presented in Table 2 which measured the factors of social isolation based on the previous researches and data acquired via first interview guide. The questionnaire was devised to identify the major factors that forced aged people to be isolated socially. The questionnaire is consisted of five points

Likert Scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. We analyzed the acquired data and organized the major factors of social isolation. Afterwards, we formulated a second interview guide to explore why those factors are forcing them to be isolated socially? Were-visited the panel of respondents for in-depth interviews and used the data, obtained through interview guide, to interpret the major factors of isolation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social isolation is an extensive concept having numerous indicators. Several researches have also been conducted associating multiple variables with social isolation [67,68,69]. It is impossible to measure a concept thoroughly covering all dimensions as [70] used a term "meaning space" (universe of indicators to measure a concept) to demonstrate this concept, whereas, [71] has made it evident through visual and theoretical depiction in her book "How to build social science theory". Both of these have tried to explain that a concept in itself is a complex network of variables; therefore, we specified factors of social isolation. The factors selected to measure social isolation were not prioritized contingently for the study rather they were identified after the initial interview of respondents and review of relevant literature. All factors, except F.11 and F.12 see Table 2, are contiguous with the prefix "lack of" (e.g. lack of money) because social isolation, mostly occurs due to the absence or deficiency of selected factors whether physical (i.e. money) or non-physical (i.e. connectedness). Table 2 signifies the description of selected the factors of social isolation.

Table 2 depicts that lack of money (45 % are S.A) and lack of friends' visits (45 % are S.A) are major contributing factors to make them socially isolated but most influential factor is lack of participation in family gathering (46.7% are S. A). Table 2 also revealed that lack of friends' visits is imperative factor of social isolation comparing with lack of relatives' visits (only 33.3% are S. A). Lack of participation in decision making within family is equally (43.3% are S.A) forced both, male and female respondents, to be isolated socially, whereas, minor importance was given by the respondents to the lack of involvement in matters of children like children consultation (33.3% are S.A), gossiping (30 % are S.A) and activities (38.3% are S.A).

Male respondents prefer lack of money, friends' visits and decision making power as major factors of social isolation but the responses of females were contrary. Female respondents did not consider money as a proponent factor of social isolation (41.7% are SD). They preferred lack of involvement in family issues (46% are SA) and decision making process within family (46% are SA). The overall description of Table 2 reveals that female respondents have almost contrary axioms as compare to male respondents regarding coercive factors of social isolation. Therefore, the formulated hypotheses consisted of those factors which have vital contribution in social isolation of respondents.

Table 3 depicts that lack of money (independent variable) leads to the social isolation (dependent variable) among aged males and lack of involvement in family issues (independent variable) leads to the social isolation (dependent variable) among aged females.

Table 2. Percentage distribution of respondents with respect to factors of social isolation (N=120; Males n=60 and Females n=60)

Sr. #	Factors	Males					Females				
		SA*	A	UD	DA	SD	SA	A	UD	DA	SD
1.	Lack of Money	45	10.0	11.7	26.7	6.7	5	11.7	18.3	23.3	41.7
2.	Lack of relatives' visits	33.3	8.3	3.3	35	20	10	10	1.7	28.3	35
3.	Lack of relatives' dealing	41.7	16.7	8.3	16.7	16.7	36.7	15.0	6.7	18.3	23.3
4.	Lack of Friends' visits	45.0	18.3	5.0	25.0	6.7	41.7	11.7	6.7	21.7	18.3
5.	Lack of Participation in Family gatherings	46.7	13.3	3.3	23.3	13.3	41.7	10.0	5.0	21.7	21.7
6.	Lack of information about children activities	38.3	28.3	10.0	16.7	6.7	33.3	20.0	8.3	20.0	18.3
7.	Lack of involvement in family issues	38.3	18.3	5.0	31.7	6.7	46	13.3	6.7	30.0	16.7
8.	Lack of participation in decision making	43.3	13.3	13.3	20.0	10.0	46	8.3	8.3	23.3	21.7
9.	Lack of children consultation	33.3	15.0	10.0	28.3	13.3	31.7	13.3	6.7	26.7	21.7
10.	Lack of gossiping with children	30.0	28.3	5.0	15.0	21.7	35	26.7	26.7	15.0	6.7
11.	Being unmarried or divorced	43.3	13.3	13.3	20.0	10.0	46	8.3	8.3	23.3	21.7
12.	Self-Perceived social isolation	49	18.3	10.0	8.3	33.3	51	15.0	13.3	10.0	38.3

*SA=strongly agree A=agree UN=undecided DA=disagree SD=strongly disagree

Table 3. Regression Analysis: Social isolation of males and females versus lack of money and lack of involvement in family issues respectively

Predictors	Coef	SE Coef	t-value	p-value
*Constant	6.9701	0.5963	11.69	0.000
**LM	1.00751	0.02965	33.98	0.000
***Constant	33.803	1.736	19.47	0.000
****LIFI	0.19135	0.03358	5.75	0.000

*Regression equation is social isolation $y = 6.97 + 1.007 LM$ x ***Regression equation is social isolation $y = 33.803 + 0.193 LIFI$ x **Lack of Money
 ****Lack of involvement in family issues

Actually, in Pakistan males hold the family economically [72] and they have to suffer for their family during their earning span. Caregivers spend, almost all of their lives, to scrutinize the process that how to feed their families and how to get better living standard for them and their families? They have to bear the expenses of education of children, family's health, food and almost every expense of family [73,74] even they have to pay for the hospitality of relatives and friends. When they become aged, it brings more psychological and social problems in their lives as retirement from job, lack of participation in family issues, loneliness and leisure [75, 76]. Indeed, they perceive themselves as money-man for family and get the maxim of "Money Relations" instead blood relations.

So, when they confront the lack of money (e.g., retirement) it elicits social isolation [77,78,79] that can decrease by giving them economic hold of the family. On the other hand, Pakistani females are less participative in work force [80] as compare to the other Asian countries [81] and mostly become the part of domestic work like child rearing, cooking and dish washing; the nature of work is different in rural areas of Pakistan [82]. They visit to their relatives only at special events and ceremonies. Therefore, lack of money is not a factor of social isolation for them. In case of typical Pakistani families, wives spend most of their time with the family stuff that's why they get very little time to visit relatives [83]. They get all their necessities within home without any job, while, it is a matter of pride for females to indulge in domestic affairs. That's why lack of involvement in family issues is a crucial factor of social isolation among aged women as compare to aged males. It also distorts their health [84] because isolation is associated with psychological impairments [41,85-88]. Results of the present study indicated that old age females are more concerned towards the lack of involvement in family issues as compare to males; therefore, the persistent involvement of aged females in family issues will reduce their isolation.

Self-satisfaction from earned money is also the factor that has been omitted in several studies of social isolation. Although some organizational reports paid attention on association between money and social isolation but they expressed it in suggestions and strategies to undermine social isolation among old age citizens.

4. CONCLUSION

The present research concluded that aged males and females are isolated from their families but the factors affecting their relations are varied [47] i.e. lack of money for males and lack of involvement in family issues for females. Some studies [89,90] inferred that females are more socially isolated than males, whereas, [91,92] reported males' isolation more than females. Males are responsible to cultivate their families [93] but when they encounter the monetary problems they perceive themselves as socially isolated. Females are more related with domestic relations [94,95] as compare to males, therefore, their life circulated around family relations [96,97] rather than earning which is a contrary result as compare to other researches [98,99]. It is also inferred that old age males and females perceived themselves socially isolated although they have families. Precisely, the study supported the formulated hypotheses that lack of money among aged males lead towards their social isolation and lack of involvement in family issues among aged females lead towards their social isolation.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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