
Child vs Elderly: A Relationship Beyond *Role Reversal* at Family Level

Sushma Oommen*, Usha Menon**

Author Affiliation

*Associate Professor **Lecturer,
KDA Nursing College, Andheri West
Mumbai, Maharashtra 400053,
India.

Reprint Request

Usha Menon, Lecturer
KDA Nursing College
Andheri West, Mumbai,
Maharashtra 400053, India.
E-mail: usha.menon@gmail.com

Abstract

Children and elder members are important part of community. Seniors are helping hand and a guide for junior members, whereas, children are the source of excitement, motivation and caregiver for an elderly. Though the relationship between immediate family members like parents and siblings is important, but the attachment beyond this can make a positive contribution to child psycho-social, emotional development as well as overall growth and development. Many seniors take the responsibility as parents whereas many others describe the mere pleasure of spending time with a young generation without being burdened by the responsibility. Healthcare workers are responsible to promote healthy relationship between the child parents and elderly.

Keywords: Child Elderly; Old Age; Geriatric.

Introduction

Society without a child or an elderly is impossible. The share of *India's population* of age group 60 and older is projected to climb from 8 percent in 2010 to 19 percent in 2050, according to the United Nations Population Division (UN 2011). Whereas, India has one of the largest proportions of population in the younger age groups in the world. Around 35.3% of the population of the country has been in the age group 0-14 years as per the Census 2001. Approximately, 41% of the population account for less than 18 years of age [1].

The US census bureau defines "family as two or more people living together and who are related by birth, marriage or adoption" [2]. Though this definition limits the members to be counted in the family, no matter co-habiting in one home or living in distance they are members of same family. An independent and developing relationship between grand children and grand parents is "invaluable" for everybody in the family. Grandparents or other seniors in family are helping hand and a guide for junior members, whereas, children are the source of excitement, motivation and caregiver for an elderly [3].

Grandchildren Provide New Focus to Family Relationship

Presence of young child in the family gives a new focus for a family relationship. This can be rekindling in the form of intimacy that might have got lost along the way enriching lives across the three generation. Though the relationship between immediate family members like parents and siblings is important, but the attachment beyond this can make a positive contribution to child psycho-social, emotional development as well as overall growth and development.

Being Grandparents Presents an Exciting Opportunity for Growth and Change

Becoming the senior-most in the family provides an exciting opportunity for an elderly at this stage and also for the growth and change within the family. After passing the significant stages of life, this experience gives a blend of new life experiences to the aged. Today, many grandparents stay with family and children by taking the responsibility of the parents whereas many others describe the mere pleasure of spending time with a young generation without being burdened by the responsibility. Currently many elderly are active in profession or

social life of their own. Whatever the situation, becoming a senior gives a direct connection to the whole world and an opportunity to stay in touch with new ideas and the generation ahead.

Role of Elderly in Life of a Child - G-R-A-C-E

Seniors like Grandparents play an indispensable role in life of child .It includes Great friend, Role model, Annalist (historian), Caregiver and Educator.

Great Friend

Grandparent provides an opportunity for a child to expand relationship as a friend. As Grandparents, many times they are not only responsible for caring or disciplining a child, but also to act as a special friend and inculcate the value of friendship.

Role Model

Social scientist proved that much of learning during childhood is acquired through observation and imitation. Good role models create life long impression on children. Elders in the family grandparents, parents, or other seniors act as role model or hero whom they follow. They teach them how to react in difficult situation and they will inevitably face the play of life.

Annalist (Historian)

History, general background, genealogy, family customs and traditions are shared by elders of the family to their grandchildren as children are in a phase of learning through stories. These historical events mesmerize them and thus the seniors play a role of historians.

Caregiver

In most of the culture, families with elders played an important role as caretakers of child. Today many working parents rely on their grandparents to help with child care. As it is considered as safe, economical and also fosters the family relationship, many times, grandparents are called upon for supervision of outside activities camps, sports, so on and so forth. This valuable support is becoming an integral piece for today's family functioning.

Educator

Seniors in the family are often seen as adopting a role as an experienced teacher for the young

generation. The vast life experiences help them to gain knowledge and expertise that they pass on to their next to next generation.

Responsibilities of Grand Parents

As an elderly or senior in the family they do have certain responsibilities. They should:

1. Gain insight about their own strength, limitation and express these feelings to the family members.
2. Rebuilt and strengthen the relationship with the members who have adopted a new role and to those who are new members of the family.
3. Attend to everyone.
4. Be neutral and non-judgmental.
5. Create a bridge for the child to move between the lives at home with parents and outside world.

Responsibilities of Family

Child is an important part in the life of elders. Parents and other significant members in the family should bridge the generation gap between the child and grandparents. As parents, they should take the responsibility to flourish child-elderly relationship. They should: [3,4,5]

1. Act like a role model while dealing with elders as children tend to follow the same.
2. Instill positive values.
3. Start expressing feelings to the elders like "I love you" in presence of younger ones.
4. Encourage and appreciate the child's act of kindness and love for elderly.
5. If the grandparents are staying away, arrange frequent visit and sensitize the child to the needs of seniors.
6. Share your experiences to boost grandparent - grand children relationship.
7. Teach children to wish and congratulate their grandparents on occasions.
8. Never control or correct parents in front of their children.
9. Involve children in care of elderly.
10. Arrange visit of seniors to the child's school on special occasions like grandparents day.

Health Professionals as Facilitators of Elder-Family- Child Bond

According to Brubaker and Brubaker, (1992) Tennstedt (1999), care of elderly is a major concern

of nursing, gerontology and policy makers as need of aging societies continues to increase in dramatic proportion [5]. The statistics in United States shows that 80% of the elders are cared by family members primarily by spouse or adult daughters. In India, because of family oriented society most of the elders are cared and valued by family members [6]. The Nurses and other healthcare professionals play a pivotal role in maintaining elderly family and child bond. The health care professional's role includes:

1. Helping the care giver to cope with increasing demand.
2. To help the family members to balance the responsibilities towards elderly for self and to other family members.
3. To guide therapeutic interactions with child and adults involved in parental care.
4. Redirect emphasis to long-term benefits of care giving as well as to draw attention to the roles and needs of other family members.
5. Access and manage the state of stress and crisis.
6. Respect the cultural diversities and family preferences and adopt family friendly policy.
7. Access the family structure and find out the potential resources (child or adult) for the care of elder.
8. Recognize and respect the caregivers' expression of negative or positive emotions like guilt, anxiety, worry, frustration, comfort and counsel them.
9. Nurses act as an educator for the family members require information for care of elderly. She/he facilitates the caregiver's need for learning. Nurse should create awareness among school children regarding needs and care of elderly.
10. Be alert for the caregiver's reactions burnout and depression (Skaff and Pearlin, 1992) and build in support for the long term. Theses supports can be facilitated more by encouraging them to join support groups [7].
11. Encourage quality family time that enhances the

positive relationship and also contribute insensitising children about the care of elderly.

12. Maintain coordination between school, parents, child and elderly.

Grandparents are really important for children. Children of all age feel that somebody has time for them. Through their relationship with the seniors, a child can feel another level of support and care [7]. A child can gain not only just a reliable and interested caregiver or babysitter but someone who is a friend and a guide, whereas, grandparents accomplish a great sense of responsibility and satisfaction. Thus a young one in the life of an old or an old in the child is beyond mere role reversal it's an intimate deep relationship.

References

1. Scommegna Paola, India's Aging Population - Population Reference Bureau www.prb.org/Publications/Reports/2012/india-older-population.aspx.
2. U.S. Census Bureau, "Households by Size: 1960 to Present" and "Households by Type: 1940 to Present, released June 12, 2003.
3. Strawbridge, W.J., & Wallhagen, M.I. Impact of family conflict on adult child caregivers. *The Gerontologist*, 1991;31(6):770-777.
4. Skaff, M.M., & Pearlin, L.I. Care giving: Role engulfment and the loss of self. *The Gerontologist*, 1992;32(5):656-664.
5. Tennstedt, S. Family caregiving in an aging society. 1999. Retrieved October 27, 2001 from <http://www.aoa.dhhs.gov/caregivers/FamCare.html>.
6. Ziemba, R.A. Factors Influencing the Preparedness of Adult Daughters for Taking Care of Elderly Parents. Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertations Publishing. 2002.
7. Ziemba, Rosemary A. *Family Health & Caring for Elderly Parents*, MLibrary Digital Collections. Retrieved at March 19, 2012, from the website Temoa: Open Educational Resources (OER) Portal at <http://www.temoa.info/node/109494>.