

DISCUSSION

This chapter raises the theoretical framework (see Figure 1) to discuss the findings under the overarching research question and ends with the conclusions. The present study provides an insight into the lives of elders whose children have migrated abroad. Given the descriptive nature of the study and the absence of comparative empirical data, a few conclusions are attempted after following the protocols of a case study approach, for lending validity as propounded by Yin (2000). It may be mentioned here, that the present study takes off from the study conducted by Burholt, Wenger, Biswas, Dave, Mallya, Sodhi and Shah (2003), in this area.

Has there been any impact on elders whose children have migrated abroad ?

This research question received many points of affirmation. At the outset, it is safe to say from the results that the respondents are better off as their children sent them remittances, gifts or products to enjoy a better quality of life. Their lifestyle and surroundings are different from the majority of the Indian villages, as a quaint mix of modern amenities, with the traditional way of social existence characterizes them. Brink (2000), who compared elders from six cultures in out-migration and in-migration situations, found that older parents are likely to enjoy a better standard of living if the child who had migrated, sends financial helps. The respondents enjoyed the benefits of the electronic and modern gadgets at have such as television, freeze, radio, telephone, watches, cameras, VCR to name a few. Sofa sets, chairs, display of expensive draperies and photographs of children with their families abroad home replaced old ethnic ambience and pictures of gods in the drawing room. The landscape of their village has also changed. Smart and posh bungalows or renovated houses, new marble temples, huge

water tanks and commercial lanes scream of the inputs from the opulence of the Patels and Shahs who comprise 40 % of the village population. In contrast, the elders live a life steeped in culturally prescribed roles of women doing household chores and child care work and the men making important household decisions. Fortuijn, Musterd & Ostendorf (1995) in their study of Asian and Indian immigrants who sent remittances to their villages, found the elders had hefty bank accounts and savings and invested in better housing.

The study demonstrated how a chain of migration gives birth to an International Network that, first operates on the push and pull factors. During their earlier migration stint abroad in USA, UK and Africa, they had left behind property or their kin and friends. These now proved to be the pull factors that opened avenues for children's migration. The elders, then pushed their sons to these destinations to seek a better quality of life and usually got their daughters married there. The Network theory also illustrates how the whole family is involved in decision making for further migration. A case in point is about a child, orphaned in India, who was reared by his aunt for the first three years of his life, and later adopted by his eldest uncle, both living in USA. These moves ensured that the grandmother did not have to be burdened with the child's responsibility at her age, in India.

Another instance of the Network theory was seen in operation when elders from abroad used the existing network of friends to send money for charitable causes through visiting children of their friends, or themselves brought messages from these children to their parents, when they came once in a while for nostalgic visits to the village.

Once the children had migrated, the relationship between parent and child was maintained. There was constant touch with their children wherein, telephone contact was the most preferred on a reciprocal basis, especially as every respondent had a telephone at home and most of the times the charges were reversed to their children. Exchanges of lavish gifts between respondents and their children was another means of keeping in touch, followed by more frequent visits by parents than the children.

A positive picture seemed to emerge when the respondents were asked if they saw a change in their status. It appeared that the village community appreciated their rich experience of life abroad, as well as their wisdom, which their years gave them. They looked up to the latter for providing advice, support and guidance for visa and related formalities required, to survive in a foreign land for sending young aspirants from the village. How did they perceive life for elder abroad? Though the elders did not confess to having personally faced any problems of adjustment, they perceived a rather dismal life for elders living abroad, especially the widows. They felt that life abroad was at the mercy of the daughter-in-law and a 'modern' life style followed by children and their grand children causing pain and sorrow to the one brought up in a traditionally conservative lifestyle of India.

Another example of their old values was illustrated, when it came to deciding with whom the elders should stay when the old couple was really helpless, the widows opted for the son, even though he stayed abroad. The other respondents felt that the son had a duty towards the welfare of the parents even if they lived away from him. However, all things considered, it is apparent that, exposures abroad had promoted a newer mental framework, in the respondents despite their predilection towards old

cultural values that allowed them to straddle the western world in the west and the Indian world in India. The men especially had a more pragmatic view of the situation of elders abroad because of an assured old age financial security and better quality of life.

The social support network of the elders was one area wherein the departure of children abroad, did not affect them, since they all had a combination of family dependent and locally integrated network. These networks are the two out of the five suggested networks by Wenger (1994), which operate in the rural community. Thus, other family members as well as neighbours and friends, filled in the gaps left by the migrated children.

It is very interesting to note that the widows had a smaller network and the widowers, had the smallest one. As far as widows are concerned in India, their secondary and inferior status due to their widowhood reduces their visibility and social contacts outside her family circle. Whereas, Lalitha and Jamuna (2003) in their study of a cross section of elders have demonstrated that widowers had weak links with their family members and appeared rather aloof.

A study on elders remains incomplete without reflections of their reminiscences, which is an integral part of being old. The respondents indulged in life review regarding their past life, present feelings and future expectations as well as their concept of old age. The women found it very constraining to recall their past, saying it was too uninteresting with no major hiccups. On the whole they unfolded their roles of a traditional housewife, long-suffering daughter-in-law and self-sacrificing parent. Whereas, the men, especially the widowers reminisced at length, recalling their ups and downs which revolved around their jobs or business, their family and personal tragedies.

The respondents displayed mixed reactions to feelings regarding the present situations in life. The situations included feelings about their present life, children's migration and fulfilling children's responsibilities in life. The feelings ranged between happiness, neutrality and unhappiness. On the question about feelings for the present situation, the married women and men appeared to be happy, the widows were either neutral or unhappy; and, only 50 % widowers were happy.

As regards their feelings about loneliness, it was not felt by the respondents, except for few married women and the widowers who missed the company of their wives.

The widows had the least number of satisfactions than all the others; and, the widowers had as many concerns as satisfactions. The satisfactions and concerns of women and men centered on the children and the family. The men were satisfied about their past achievements in addition, the widows and widowers had fears about finances. As far as future expectations of helpful persons were concerned, all of them named family members; except the widowers, who left it to fate and god. Prakash (2003), who interviewed 40 women and 35 men, urban parents of NRI children, found that 2/3rd of the sample felt lonely, especially the women. However, none of her sample said that they were unhappy or dissatisfied with life. This could be because the urban neighbourhoods do not have a strong social support network as in a rural setting.

The concept of old age by the respondents, was seen in line with the last two stages of the Ashrama Dharma theory which is characterized by wisdom and experience to be transferred to the next generation, spiritual preoccupations, and awaiting death. Mehta and Mallia (2000) in a sample of elders from a low income neighbourhood, found

that the concept of old age was associated with life milestones such as marriages of children and birth of grand children, along with physical changes due to health deterioration.

On the whole, the elders had come to terms with the situations in their lives, and, despite earlier struggles did not face any despair. Therefore if Erikson is to be quoted they had achieved a sense of tranquility and it may be said, ego integrity as well; which is obvious in their philosophical wisdom about life and its truths, in their narratives.

Finally, a surprising twist in the life of the respondents was seen, for which the investigator was not prepared, nor did any theory have answers about it. These may be described as shifting roles of the elders. There were instances when women who had picked up skills such as entertaining friends, car driving and teaching English to their children in the true spirit of a 'modern' woman, during their stay abroad, had relinquished all, to become passive and dependent women, yet slipping into demanding roles of housekeeping and child care taking at 60 years of age, when they come back to their roots. Their husbands and sons took over the driving and the grand children needed special tutors.

As regards the men, many married, men considered themselves still 'youthful' and plunged into a hectic life of earning as well as co-coordinating village development activities, that could put many a younger man to shame. Another man fancied himself to be quite a catch for women, and, was ready for marriage in his 60's, except that his children frowned upon it!

Conclusions

The present study centered on women and men between 55-80 years, from Kheda-Anand village of Gujarat, India. Their support system, status, perceptions and feelings were studied for impact felt after their children's migration abroad.

One may safely arrive at the following concluding statements, which are drawn from the discussion of the results.

The conclusions are:

- International migration leaves an impact on the family and community life of the elders. They reap benefits from foreign remittances, gifts and products sent by the children residing abroad.
- Their exposure and experience of living with their children abroad and the constant communication with them, later from India, creates an international network that benefits other family members and other potential aspirants from the village. The status of elder is somewhat enhanced thereof.
- The elders are inclined to turn to the family for present and future help and support in times of need and crisis. The widowers though, have a somewhat pessimistic outlook regarding this issue.
- The widows and especially the widowers need special support and help services as their support systems are weak and smaller than those of the married women and men.

Though evidence suggests an impact on a range of components, only detailed studies on a cross section of elders with more controlled variables will help to ascertain

the extent and nature of the impact on the older parents. This is especially essential in the absence of empirical data from parents of non-migrated children.