



**IMPLICATIONS OF  
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION OF  
CHILDREN ON OLDER PERSONS :  
A CASE STUDY IN RURAL GUJARAT**

**(A SUMMARY)**

**By**

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A thesis submitted to  
The M.S. University of Baroda  
in partial fulfillment of  
The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
(Human Development and Family Studies)

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VADODARA.

AUGUST 2003



## **Introduction**

Asia, home to a 60 % of the world's population has been a major source of immigrants to countries such as United Kingdom, United States of America and Africa. India is one of the forerunners in this phenomenon of migration since the last century.

On the one hand, more and more younger people are migrating abroad to improve their quality of life. On the other hand, demography shows that the population of above 60 years is growing steadily and will reach to 113 million by the year 2016 (Devi, n.d., PDF 9). Therefore, it is not hard to imagine that very soon, India will face the problem of meeting the social and psychological needs of a large number of elders, most of whose families will have disintegrated, as the younger generation would have gone to urban areas, due to attractive global market factors giving promises of upward mobility in jobs and a better quality of life. The older generation, consisting of the old couple as well as other members from earlier joint families, especially in rural areas, will be left on their own, lonely and dependent on others outside their families for help and support.

An overview of the existing literature shows that the elders lose power and authority because of their advanced age and retirement, and need the help and support of social networks in daily routine and crisis situation. Thus, if their children migrate, the elders will feel the resultant impact on their lives in many ways.

Previous studies and internet search for overseas migration from countries including India, showed up literature on rural and urban migration mostly as census, labour or even archival cases in the foreign immigration office without the psychological and "social implications", being addressed (Papastergiadis, 2000, p. 31).

### ***Review of Literature: Some Highlights.***

In India, the proportion of elders has increased substantially between 1961 (24 million) to 1991 (52.4 millions). The figures are expected to double by 2016 and reach about 113 million according to population projections in India (Devi, 2000). The gender differences of the elders in India are brought out by Gulati & Rajan (1999), "The gender difference is apparent only when we look at the marital status of the elderly. The incidence of widowhood increases rather sharply for women with advancing age. While only 19.4 % of the men found themselves widowers, about 64 % of women were widows. This was even more sharp for those over 70 years; 77 % women as against 22 % men. Thus, the overlap between incidence of widowhood and ageing is rather striking among women with serious economic and social implications. Aged women without much access to income, were totally dependent on family members for support, forms the future scenario. Such gender differences are a result of a (a) substantial age difference between marriage partners, because of differences in the ages at which men and women marry; (b) the differential life expectancy between males and females; and, (c) the differing proportion of old men and women who remarry.

In such a scenario, States which are on the threshold of modernization, find themselves having a large concentration of urban population, leaving the rural areas with nucleated or smaller families consisting of just the older parents.

Gujarat has been undergoing fairly rapid urbanization. The percentage of the total population living in urban areas increased from 28 percent in 1971 to 31 percent in 1981 to 34 percent in 1991, which is higher than 26 percent for all India in 1991 .... The proportion of older persons aged 60-64 was 2.7, 65-69 years was

2.0 % and 70-74 years was 1.4 % which declined to 0.6 % for the age group of 75-79 but rose to 0.8 % for 80+ .... Rajan, Mishra and Sharma (1999), reported that by the year 2021, the proportion of the old-old persons in Gujarat there will be 3.83 % rise as against 1.85 % in 1961 (Dave, Mallya & Bhojak 2003, p.19).

### ***International Migration***

An overview of International migration brings out the dirth of a well developed, holistic theory. However, the Network theory of family and the Push and Pull factors of migration seem most appropriate for the present study.

According to the Network theory ( which integrates many theories) suggests that there are positive and negative aspects of migration provoking situations, perhaps searching for opportunity to improve one's lot in life by being pulled to a destination. Alternatively, undesirable or negative social and economic situations can push persons towards migration. Migration takes place when the positive pull factors at the place of destination, are outnumbered by the push factors at the place of origin.

A support Network for the elders is defined as all people involved with an older person in a significant way, be it in the family or the neighbourhood. Research has shown that behaviour, including the search for support or help is affected by the kind of social network that people have and that, access to resources and capacity to cope with problems, is affected by structure and the membership of the network. Research has also proved that different patterns of informal support exist in the rural community. This is because different types of neighbourhoods have been found to produce different types of networks and help seeking behaviours (Wenger,1994).



### ***Theoretical Framework of the Study***

A theoretical framework was developed from the literature reviewed especially, the different theories on aging and international migration. There are push factors in the community and family life in villages that lead to the international migration of older children. This migration impacts on the situation of older parents who remain in the village, alone or in families. Though they keep in touch with their migrated children through available communication channels, they also need a local network for help, care and support. Further, their own perceptions of elders' situation abroad, take shape due to exposure to foreign settings in different ways. At this stage of life the elders are also given to reminiscing and reviewing about their life events and defining old age. Usually, feelings, satisfactions and constraints are felt. Last, the study threw up the concept of the shifting roles of elders which has come as a surprise. Many of these concepts named above are inter-connected .

### ***Rationale***

Aging is an inevitable developmental phenomenon, bringing a number of changes in the physical, psychological and social conditions. The study of aging is vital at a time when we all live longer and services are needed to improve the care and support of the ever-increasing population of elders. Due to globalization, the younger generation is seeking or tapping the vast opportunities in countries abroad, leaving the elders to fend for themselves. There is a dearth of literature on the impact felt by such migration on the social and psychological aspects. This is because researches so far have focussed on the census or archival considerations with respect to immigration and labour requirements.

The knowledge gained from the present study will be disseminated to the national and the local governments, NGOs and other service providers and schools, to take appropriate action at policy and implementation levels. Communities and families will be better able to understand the unique support needs of older parents with out migrated children in rural settings and encourage the mainstreaming of such individuals for a more active and productive life in a supportive environment.

#### ***Relevance of using a case study approach***

The literature on case studies is not very intensive but contains specific guidelines for the researchers to follow in carrying out the case study. Case study is a naturally occurring phenomenon and prefers small numbers wherein focus is on one or few instances of a particular phenomenon to provide an in depth account of events, relationships, experiences or processes occurring in that particular area. It is also a research strategy. It can test a theory by confirming crucial elements that are especially significant that researchers should be able to predict certain outcomes if theory holds true e.g. push and pull theory of migration. Case studies are self-contained with distinct boundaries i.e. physical or geographical, social, political and artificial. Artificial boundary includes activities, processes, relationships in a physically defined area and the outside happenings, which have a direct bearing on the subjects. There is some difficulty in dealing with temporary outside factors. The present case study is descriptive in nature that answers all the “what” questions and uses case study guidelines throughout, to validate the findings (Yin, 1998).

### ***Objectives of the Study***

#### ***Broad objective***

Study the impact of international migration of children on older parents, in rural Gujarat.

#### ***Specific objectives***

- To develop an integrated profile of their setting.
- Find out their:
  - (a) Reciprocal communication with migrated children
  - (b) Reciprocal support system in the community
  - (c) Perceptions about life situations of elders and international migration
- Review their own life situation on selected factors

### ***Research Question***

What is the impact on the community and life situations of older parents after children migrate internationally?

### ***Sample and data source***

**Population.** Five villages in Anand- Kheda district of Gujarat, namely, Alindra, Dharmaj, Karamsad, Mehlav and Sojitra, were selected on a criteria of heavy international migration and availability of communication system with the outside world.

**Sample.** 20 ( women and men), aged between 55 and 80 years, having overseas son or daughter, were selected by snowballing technique.

**Key informants.** 50 key informants from all the five villages were interviewed individually or in small groups to help identify the sample and help build the village profile.

### ***Tools***

Three tools were utilized as follows:

- ***Guideline to prepare a village profile***

Includes information on the population, landmarks, markets, organizations in the village, places where the village elders gather, daily routine and life styles of elders, and so on.

- ***Semi- structured interview guide***

It includes data on information on personal information and health, migration of children and communications with them and social support systems.

- ***Interview guide and oral history***

It includes life course accounts of major events e.g. births, deaths, trauma etc., major life satisfactions feelings about life course events, present, and future expected sources of help, change in status due to migration, perceptions of life for elders in different life situations and about old age.

### ***Results and Discussion***

This chapter raises the theoretical framework 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. Fortuin, 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 2/3<sup>rd</sup> 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 Mallya (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.

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