

## Parent-adult child co-residence and relationship quality: Two views of a relationship

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**ABSTRACT:** The study explores the differences in perception of quality of relationship among members of generations co residing across the families of working and non-working daughters-in-law from middle socio-economic status. A total of 480 respondents (N=120 families) comprising of fathers-in-law (30), mothers-in-law (30), sons (30) and daughters-in-law (30) drawn randomly from Upper-middle socio-economic status families and fathers-in-law (30), mothers-in-law (30), sons (30) and daughters-in-law (30) drawn randomly from Lower-middle socio-economic status families equally divided further into families with working ( $n_1=30$ ) and non-working daughter-in-law ( $n_2=30$ ) constituted the sample. The analyses are based on self-reports of members of first and second generation living together. Results show that all the members of first as well as second generation of 'working' daughters-in-law families perceived their Quality of Relationship better in comparison to those from 'non-working' daughter-in-law families.

**Key words:** Adult children, co-residence, elderly parents, relationship quality, working women

Increase in life expectancy and decrease in fertility over the past century has produced significant changes in family configurations. Families have become vertical with fewer members in each generation but more generations alive at any given time. With dramatic increases in the life span, many people now have parent-adult child relationships with their parents that last 30, 40, or even more years. These patterns mean that older adults will form long-term relationships with the rest of the family, as because of medical advances life expectancy now has exceeded up to 75 years. This indicates that parents and children may develop relationships that would last over 50 years. These extended relationships significantly have an impact on family dynamics (Bengtson, 1996) yet, very little is known about this increasingly common intergenerational relationship (Giarrusso *et al.*, 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. In India, family is the most important institution that has survived through the ages. Researchers contend that the joint family still exists in all parts of the country (Biswas 1987). Studies of elder's family life in India produce two consistent findings: over 80% of elders live in joint families (Dharmalingam, 1990; Lal, 1990; Srivastava, 1995; Vlassoff, 1990).

Even the most modern and nuclear family in contemporary times has the deep-rooted jointness in various structural and functional aspects. The presumption that modernization has changed traditional support systems in a uniform manner would be highly misleading. In spite of the many changes and adaptations to a pseudo-western culture and a move toward the nuclear family among the middle and upper classes, the modified extended family is preferred and continues to prevail in modern India. The reason may be the interdependence of the generations on each other for fulfillment of a need or two. Due to housing problems in urban areas, adult children, especially sons, prefer or are compelled to stay with their elderly parents where the latter are property owners. 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.

A lot of structural and functional changes are being observed in present times when daughters-in-law, who are supposed to be traditional care-giver in families, are taking up jobs especially in middle socio-economic strata. At such times, the elderly parents take up the role as caretakers of grand children when the son/daughter-in-law is away from the home. All these factors have contributed, to changes in the structure and the functioning of the family system and the dynamics of

relationships in the families. 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 responsibilities 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).

The present study examines how Quality of Relationship is perceived by members of inter-generational families where elderly parents and adult married son and daughter-in-law co-reside, posing research question: Does Quality of relationship vary among the families with respect to work status of daughter-in-law? With an objective to examine how Quality of Relationship varies in the families where daughter-in-law is working or non-working, as viewed from the perspective of each member of both the generations i.e. fathers-in-law and mothers-in-law constituting first generation and sons and daughters-in-law constituting second generation, the present study was planned. Review of literature relevant to the present study indicates dearth of studies which have taken perspective of both the generations for examining inter-generational differences in families-especially neglecting the quasi-kin relationships. The present study of Quality of relationship in families with working and non-working women was set by taking the perspective of

all the members i.e. the parents/ parents-in-law and sons and daughters-in-law.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Sample

The study was conducted in Ludhiana, a city of Punjab state in 2011. The sample for the study comprised of 480 subjects from 120 families, equally drawn from the families belonging to upper middle (60 families or 240 respondents) and lower middle (60 families or 240 respondents) socio-economic strata. The sample drawn from each socio economic status was further divided into families with working daughter-in-law (30 families or 120 respondents) and families with non-working daughter-in-law (30 families or 120 respondents). The target respondents in each selected family were members of first generation i.e. father-in-law and mother-in-law and the members of second generation i.e. adult son and daughter-in-law. Thus, a total of 16 subgroups each comprising of 30 persons was formed (Fig.1). A purposive selection of the respondents was made through personal contacts, peers, friends and acquaintances as per requirement of the study. It provided a snow balling effect to the selection of respondents initially. From the list of the 350 families fulfilling the inclusion criteria decided for the study, 120 families were selected randomly and were assigned to each of sixteen subgroups comprising of 30 respondents in each category.

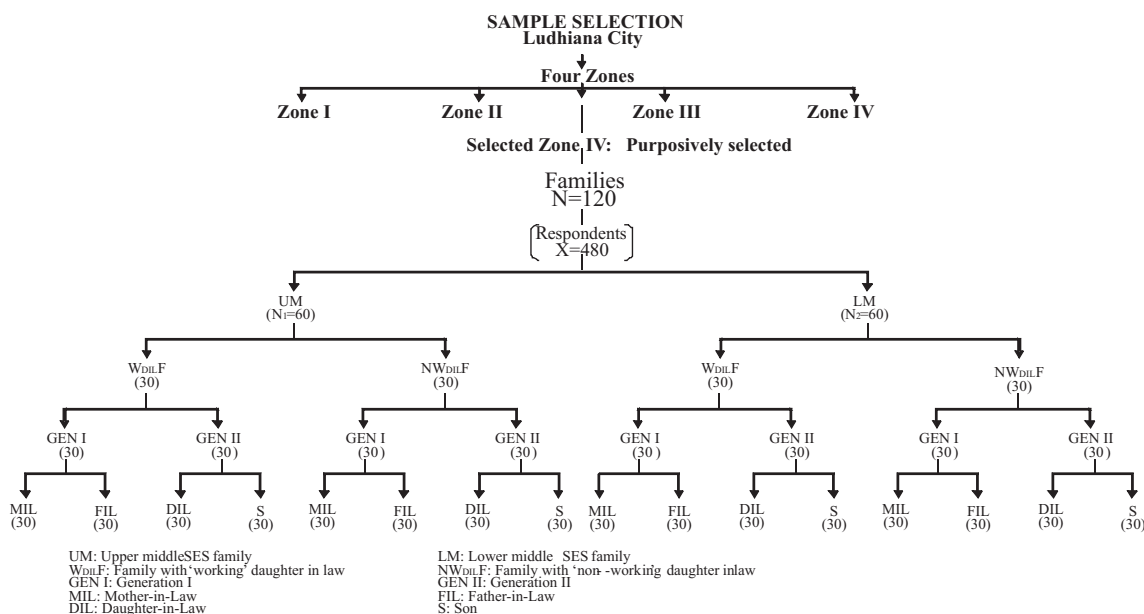


Fig.1: Sampling Design

### **Tools used for data collection**

Socio-economic status scale by Bhardwaj (2001) was used to assess the socio-economic status of the respondents. The scale assesses the status of the individual in following areas: Social, Family, Education, Profession, Caste, Total assets and monthly income. Selected subjects were contacted personally for data collection. Data were collected using self-structured Quality of Relationship Scale, which was prepared after exhaustive consultation of theoretical and empirical evidences on adult child and elderly parent relationship. The questionnaire designed by the investigator was standardized by calculating reliability (0.80) of the scale by split-half technique and face validity by getting it approved by the experts of Department of Human Development, Sociology and Extension Education. Tool comprised of 26 statements regarding Quality of Relationship i.e. the amount of satisfaction the members derive from co-residence. It includes statements like 'I feel comfortable to share my problems with my family'; 'I feel my family is critical of me'; 'I feel neglected and worthless in my family'; 'I feel cheerful and delighted in presence of my family'; etc. It was a five-point Likert scale having options as Strongly agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly disagree. Positive statements were given scores as (5 for Strongly agree), (4 for Agree), (3 for Neutral), (2 for Disagree) and (1 for Strongly disagree) and vice versa for negative statements. The instruments were pre-tested on 32 subjects apart from the actual sample so as to determine their reliability. The scales were modified as per requirement to minimize the ambiguities, redundancies and to maximize the understandability of the questions.

### **Data Analysis**

The responses obtained were coded, and mean

scores were calculated. In order to investigate the difference in the quality of relationship with respect to work status of daughter-in-law was measured by student t-test.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The data collected was analyzed first by examining the statistical difference in perceived Quality of relationship by the members of both the generations co-residing. Table 1 displays the difference in Mean scores along with the probability values (p-values) drawn from student t-test to examine the statistical significance of difference in Quality of relationship perceived by the members of first and second generation in families with 'working' and 'non-working' daughters-in-law from two socio-economic status i.e. Upper-middle and Lower-middle socio-economic status.

In Upper-middle socio-economic status, the data presented in Table 1 revealed that significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) were observed in perceived Quality of relationship of mothers-in-law with respect to work status of daughter-in-law. Difference in Mean score (8.14) revealed that mothers-in-law of families with 'working' daughter-in-law perceived their Quality of relationship better than those from families with 'non-working' daughter-in-law. In Lower-middle socio-economic status, differences were non-significant among the Mean scores for perceived Quality of relationship of mothers-in-law of 'working' and 'non-working' daughter-in-law. Fathers-in-law did not differ significantly with respect to work status of daughter-in-law in Upper-middle as well as Lower-middle socio-economic status. Contrarily the members of second generation i.e. sons and daughter-in-law did not exhibit significant differences in Quality of relationship with respect to work status of daughter-in-law.

**Table 1: Difference in mean scores for Quality of Relationship in upper-middle socio-economic status families with working & non-working daughter-in-law**

Members of Generation-One & Two	Differences in perceived quality of relationship in Upper-middle socio-economic status families with 'working' & 'non-working' daughter-in-law			
	Mean scores		Sig. of Difference (p-value)	Difference in Mean scores ( 'working'-'non-working' )
	Families with Working DIL	Families with Non- working DIL		
Fathers-in-law	104.07	105.50	NS	-1.43
Mothers-in-law	103.57	95.43	<*	8.17
Sons	103.23	103.13	NS	0.10
Daughters-in-law	96.97	97.43	NS	-0.46

<\* Significant at 95% confidence level    NS: Non-significant difference    DIL: Daughter-in-law

**Table 2: Difference in mean scores for Quality of Relationship in lower-middle socio-economic status families with working & non-working daughter-in-law**

Members of Generation-One & Two	Differences in perceived quality of relationship in Lower-middle socio-economic status families with 'working' & 'non-working' daughter-in-law			
	Mean scores		Sig. of Difference (p-value)	Difference in Mean scores ('working'-'non-working')
	Families with Working DIL	Families with Non- working DIL		
Fathers-in-law	98.07	96.70	NS	1.37
Mothers-in-law	95.43	89.93	NS	5.50
Sons	97.80	92.80	NS	5.00
Daughters-in-law	89.03	89.43	NS	-0.40

<\* Significant at 95% confidence level    NS: Non-significant difference    DIL: Daughter-in-law

Probability values drawn from student t-test presented in Table 2 reveal that in Lower-middle socio-economic status, all the members of first generation i.e. fathers-in-law and mothers-in-law and second generation i.e. sons and daughters-in-law of families with 'working' daughter-in-law did not differ in their Mean scores for perception of Quality of relationship when compared with their respective counterparts of 'non-working' daughter-in-law families.

It could be inferred that work status of daughter-in-law did not pose significant differences in Quality of Relationship of members of first and second generation in Lower-middle socio-economic status.

One noteworthy thing that was observed in the study was that all the members of first and second generation did not vary significantly in their perception of Quality of Relationship with respect to work status of daughter-in-law except mothers-in-law, who did vary in this respect.

In Upper-middle socio-economic status, mothers-in-law of 'working' daughter-in-law perceived their Quality of Relationship better in comparison to mothers-in-law of 'non-working' daughter-in-law. This particular finding shows a new trend emerging in families-which is very significant for relationship quality-that with the change in time, mind set of people is also changing. The daughters-in-law who are taking up jobs are being more valued in their families by their in-laws than the daughters-in-law who are non-working. Though tremendous amount of studies support that when daughter-in-law works outside home, parents-in-law do not get attention and care and don't have time to be with daughter-in-law; and being in job there may be possibilities that they may not be able to give adequate time and efforts at home and taking care of elderly parents-in-law as well as husbands. This may be true as

interactions in family significantly affect relationship quality. By the usual account, communication is the means by which quality relationships are achieved (i.e., communication has a causal influence on relationship quality) or, even, communication is the relationship (or its observable manifestation), so relationship quality is necessarily defined by the nature of communication (Montgomery 1988). Opportunities for having quality time with family may also be less in such families which may make daughter-in-law as well as other members dissatisfied with the interactions that they have in their families. But keeping in view the rising cost of living, it seems that in modern times, parents-in-law understand the importance of women employment as it ultimately adds to the family income. At such times, they try to help their daughter-in-law in household, take care of children etc. and expect less of care giving from them. The daughter-in-law when gets such help at home in household chores and child-care, she feels more contented and reports better relationship quality with her husband as well as parents-in-law.

According to modern times as the cost of living is rising day by day and so are the needs of families for recreation, for support and for better care of children, so those daughters-in-law who share the financial responsibility by taking up jobs are more valued than those who do not work. Mothers-in-law in such families where daughter-in-law adds to the family income perceive better relationship quality than those where daughters-in-law are non-working. There may be many reasons for mother-in-law-daughter-in-law conflicts but they occur primarily because of the relative positioning of both in the family power structure and the mother-in-law-daughter-in-law-son triad. Besides that, working daughter-in-law remains outside the home for some hours and this may make the mother-in-law feel to have more authority in home affairs than the daughter-in-law who is



at home for a fixed period of time. Whilst in families where daughter-in-law are non-working, a continuous tussle between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is observed for gaining authority and power in the household affairs (Dube, 1974), which ultimately may affect the relationship quality.

It is observed that in order to reduce the pressures endemic to work-family interface, couples in dual-earner families have negotiated an optimal allocation of roles. In majority of the households where wives were engaged in outdoor employment, husbands extended a helping hand in the performance of household chores (Joshi, 1999). Similar finding was reported by Hood (1983) too. He 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 and men were the only breadwinners of the family. However, Hannan *et al.* (1978) reported that a woman's occupational attainments may also have a negative effect on union dissolution by increasing family income. Extra income can decrease financial stress and increase marital specific capital (a resource worth more inside a marriage than outside it). The result of this extra income is to make a union more attractive relative to available alternatives, decreasing the likelihood of union dissolution.

## CONCLUSION

The study was planned with an objective to view the relationship quality perceived by the elderly parents and their adult married children living together. It was planned to take the perspective of all the members of both the generations co-residing with a view to investigate differences in the perception of the members of working daughter-in-law families and non-working daughter-in-law families. The results showed that quality of relationship did not vary with respect to work status of daughter-in-law in upper-middle as well as lower-middle socio-economic status families except for mothers-in-law of upper-middle socio-economic status families. Mothers-in-law of 'working' daughter-in-law perceived better quality of relationship in comparison to those of 'non-working' daughter-in-law.

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