Illness of Aged Parents and Children Relationships with Them

Case Study of Aged Parents of Sabzevar City-Iran

Shafieh Ghodrati [1], Hossein Ghodrati [2], Dariush Boostani[3]

This paper investigates the relationships of children with their old parents with an emphasis on illness of parents. Data were collected from a sample of 400 old men and women aged 60+ through multi-stages cluster sampling in Sabzevar city. Parents were asked to answer four questions: are you generally satisfied with your children? Do they have affable and warm relations with you? Do they meet you? Do they help you generally? Dependent variable was formed through computing the four questions. Findings show that there is a negative correlation between independent variables of age, income as well as number of children with dependent variable. Furthermore parents, who are ill, attain significant higher scores in first three questions than healthy parents. However there is no significant difference in the score of last question between two groups. Test of mean difference according to gender of parents indicates that old mothers are more satisfied with their children than old fathers however old fathers receive more help from their children compared with old mothers. It is notable that there is no significant relationship between age and illness. We can conclude that although normally old parents receive more helps in the condition of being sick however old mothers experience better life in relationships with their children than old fathers.

Keywords: aging, parents, illness, children relations

Introduction

Aged people are the main carriers of human culture (Shuman et al, 1993: 23). Demographers define aging as a shift in human organism in which life capabilities decline so that the face, behavior and social roles change (Vicki, 2000). Aging is not limited to the modern era however it has been prevailed during the late century (Hamilton, 2000). Urbanization processes, expansion of health and medical possibilities, increasing life expectancy and decrease of mortality levels have led to aging phenomenon in 20th century. The

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[1] Assistant Professor of Demography, Research Center of Geography and Social Studies- Hakim Sabzevari University.

[2] .Assistant Professor of Sociology, Research Center of Geography and Social Studies- Hakim Sabzevari University.

[3] - Assistant Professor of Sociology, Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman

proportion of aged population of the world (65+) has been increased from 5.2 percent in 1950 to 6.9 percent in 2000 (Allen, 2002:56; National Research Council, 2001:200).

During the recent four decades some practitioners have focused on intergenerational relationships within family in West Europe and United States. Most of these studies are in the framework of sociology of family and gerontology. This attention has done because of shifts in population age structure, pressures on public welfare and increasing medical care of aged people (Hammarstrom, 2005).

Iran is experiencing the last phase of demographic transition. The population of aged people has increased considerably during recent decades. Also the share of aged groups of the whole population has increased during the two recent decades (Iran's Statistic Center, 2013). Recently few researches have concentrated on the aged people in Iran regarding the issues such as quality of life, subjective well-being and intergenerational relationships. The present study examines the relationships of aged people with their children in Sabzevar city-Iran.

Research Methodology

Research Context. Sabzevar is the second most populated city of Khorasan Razavi province in north east of Iran.

Subjects. A sample of 400 individuals at the age of 60+ was selected through multi-stage cluster sampling in Sabzevar. The sample can better be specified in terms of the following figures:

1- Sex: 53.8% are male and 46.2 are female.

2- Employment: 86% are unemployed and 14% are employed.

3- Marital Status: 73.6% are married and 26.4% are widowed.

4- Average age: 69.3

5- Average years of education: 4.6

Instrument. The instrument is a questionnaire which includes four questions in the form of Likert scale about the relationships of respondents' children with them as parents. The Alpha Cronbach of the scale was more than 0.7. The four questions are: 1) Are you generally satisfied with your children? 2) Do they have affable and warm relations with you? 3) Do they meet you? 4) Do they help you generally? Dependent variable was formed through computing the four questions.

Findings

Table 1 shows the mean score of each item of quality of relations between parents and their children. The highest mean belongs to the last one- 3.22- which indicates that parents believe that they receive enough aids from their children. The lowest score is related with parent's general satisfaction with their children-1.98. Comparing these two mean implies that parent's satisfaction with their children does not depend just on the amount of help they receive from their children. It is notable that all these findings are statistically significant.

Table1- Description of four items of dependent variable

Items of Scale	Are you generally satisfied with your children?	Do they have affable and warm relations with you?	Do they meet you?	Do they help you generally?
Valid	400	400	400	400
Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean	1.98	2.11	2.45	3.22
Std. Deviation	.80	.84	.90	1.37
Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

Table 2 indicates the results of Pearson correlation tests between independent variables and dependent variable- children relations with parents. All variables have significant relationship with dependent variable except education. That is as the age of parents increases the quality of relationships with their children declines. Also as parents income increases the quality of relationships with children decreases. The last row of table 2 shows that those parents who have fewer children are more satisfied with their children.

Table 2- Correlation Tests between Interval Independent Variables and Dependent Variable

Independent variables	Pearson coefficient	Significance level
Age	-0.15	0.002
Education	-0.05	0.30
Income	-0.18	0.002
Number of children	-0.14	0.005

Table 3 depicts the results of mean difference test of quality of relations between two groups of parents-those who are ill and those who are not ill. According to figures old parents who are sick are more satisfied with their children- 2.1- than parents who are not. Furthermore compared with health parents, sick respondents believe that their children have more affable relations with them. Also sick respondents achieve higher mean score in third item (Do they meet you?) than health parents. According to the three questions we can conclude that sick parents experience better relations with their children. According to significance level the mean differences of all questions are significant except the fourth.

Table3- T-test of dependent variable between health and sick parents

Scale Items	Sick	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Significance level	T
Are you generally satisfied with your children?	yes	238	2.1	.82	.000	4.3
	no	149	1.7	.73		
Do they have affable and warm relations with you?	yes	238	2.2	.87	.000	3.7
	no	149	1.9	.75		
Do they meet you?	yes	238	2.5	.90	.001	3.5
	no	149	2.2	.85		
Do they help you generally?	yes	238	3.3	1.32	.263	1.1
	no	149	3.1	1.44		

Table 4 shows that test of mean difference is significant for the first and fourth questions. That is old men are less satisfied with their children than old women. However they receive more help from their children compared to old women.

Table4- T-test of dependent variable according to respondents' gender

Scale Items	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Significance level	T
Are you generally satisfied with your children?	men	215	1.91	.78	.042	2.0
	women	185	2.07	.81		
Do they have affable and warm relations with you?	men	215	2.05	.82	.132	1.5
	women	185	2.17	.85		
Do they meet you?	men	215	2.38	.88	.089	1.7
	women	185	2.53	.92		
Do they help you generally?	men	215	3.38	1.40	.011	2.6
	women	185	3.03	1.30		

It is notable that tests of mean difference of dependent variable were not significant according to independent- variables including birth place (rural or urban area), illiteracy state (literate or illiterate), job state (employed or unemployed) as well as migration state (native or migrant).

Conclusion

The growth in the number and proportion of old age groups is unprecedented in the history of the world population (Sanderson and Scherbov, 2008). The share of aged groups of the whole population has increased in Iran as a developing country which is at the last phase of its demographic transition during the two recent decades. Under the circumstances of demographic as well as socio-economic transition the quality of children-parents relationships changes so that aged people may experience something different with their previous generations.

Illness is an unavoidable part of aging and has important consequences for the quality of life. The present study examined the relations of children with their old parents with an emphasis on illness of parents. Results show that there is a negative correlation between independent variables of age, income as well as number of children with dependent variable. Also sick parents experience better relations with their children compared with health parents. Test of mean difference according to gender of parents indicates that old mothers are more satisfied with their children than old fathers however old fathers receive more help from their children compared with old mothers. We can conclude that although normally old parents receive more helps in the condition of being sick however old mothers experience better life in relationships with their children than old fathers.

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