

# **Social Relationship among the Elderly People in Later Life**

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## **1. Introduction**

Friends are important in terms of social integration especially in later life of the elderly people. They may be easier to talk to than the young. They may also be more understanding and emotionally supportive than younger generations and in some cases they may be caregivers. Social connection is broadly defined as a subjective sense of having close and positive relationships with others. Maslow theorized a sense of affectionate and loving connection to others as an essential human need. The magnitude by which an individual attains social connection is multidimensional, involving both the quantity and quality of social relationships with others. The umbrella term “social connection” or “social connectedness” encompasses multifactorial constructs: structural, functional, and quality of social relationship. Thus, older adults are socially connected stem not only from the frequency of interactions with others but experience the sense of caring and positive emotional connection. This positive emotion is a contributing factor to subjective well-being and life satisfaction of the elderly people, whereas social support alone might not result in a positive emotional connection. Social relationships are fundamental to human survival and are significantly involved in the attainment and maintenance of good health and wellbeing. Social relationships have been variously defined and measured diversely across studies and disciplines. Regardless of the differences, however, two major components of social relationships have consistently been studied and documented: social networks and social support. Studies have demonstrated a clear link between these components and the health of older people.

Social relationships can involve positive experiences, such as support, intimacy, and companionship, which are linked to better mental and physical health. However, social relationships can also have a dark side and may involve conflict, alienation, and support burdens, which are related to poorer health and greater mortality risk (Holt-Lunstad, 2018; Rook & Charles, 2017). In light of this ‘double-edged’ nature of social relationships it becomes important to understand how these factors change with age. The present study is about the social relationships among the elderly people in later life.

## **2. Review of Literature**

Today’s older adults, who may have grown up in less secure economic and political circumstances, may place more value on maintaining their social networks than today’s younger adults who have been socialized in rapidly changing socio-cultural contexts (Bühler & Nikitin, 2020).

Living with relatives, in addition to being associated with older adults' health status, daily activities and functional autonomy, is directly related to a greater frequency of social interactions and a better support network. In turn, the social interactions of older adults, including contact with friends or relatives, constitute one of the main predictors of well-being (Arpino B et al., 2018 & Acosta L.D. 2019).

At all ages, maintaining existing social relationships might be important for well-being when individuals face challenges associated with significant life events. Familiar and close relationships that provide ongoing support and understanding can contribute significantly to well-being at such times. Such relationships are usually associated with high levels of well-being through authentic, accepting, and supporting experiences (Venaglia & Lemay, 2017).

On the other hand, new relationships can offer new perspectives and opportunities for positive experiences. After the birth of a child, for example, contact with other parents can provide shared experiences and a supportive network. Or in times of loss, socializing with people who have gone through similar experiences can provide a sense of understanding and companionship. Thus, both establishing and maintaining relationships should be positively associated with well-being during significant life events. Despite a lack of direct evidence in the current literature, we expect that this is the case during all life events, because relationships in general provide support and buffer stress during challenging times (Taylor, 2011).

## **Objectives**

1. To assess the socio-economic profile of the respondents
2. To find out the level of social relationships of the elderly people
3. To assess the significant difference between socio-economic variables and social relationships

## **Methodology**

The study is descriptive in nature. The Coimbatore city corporation has 100 wards (as per the census report 2011). From among these, ward no: 12 and ward no: 25 were selected using simple random sampling method. The voters list was obtained from the ward councillor to have a list of elderly people 60 and above. The two wards had a total population of 30107. Elderly people who were 60 years and above are 6710 of which 335 elderly people (5 percent of the population, in that 165 male and 170 female) were selected for the study. Cluster sampling method was adopted to list the respondent sample. The statistical measures used are Percentage, Correlation and Regression. All tests of significance have been carried out with the level of significance fixed at 0.05.

## Analysis and Interpretation

### Demographic profile of the Respondents

Variables	Category	Male	Female
Age	60 to 65 Years	30.3 %	37.6 %
	66 Years to 70 Years	23.0 %	25 %
	71 to 75 Years	20.6 %	19.4 %
	76 years and Above	26.1 %	18 %
Education	Illiterate	16.4%	31.2%
	Primary Level	29.1%	29.4%
	High School	21.2%	32.4%
	Post Graduate	33.3%	7.0%
Marital Status	Married	92.7%	48.8%
	Widow	7.3%	51.2%
Family Type	Nuclear Family	67.9%	41.2%
	Joint Family	32.1%	52.3%
	Solitary	-	6.5%
Family Size	Up to 3 Members	65.4%	58 %
	4 to 5 Members	27.3%	29 %
	6 Members and above	7.3%	13 %
Number of Children	No Children	1.8%	5.3%
	One to Two children	65.5%	47.6%
	3 to 4 Children	25.4%	34.7%
	5 Children and above	7.3%	12.4%
Total Family Income	Up to 15000	35.1%	42.4%
	15001 to 30000	28.5%	24.1%
	30001 to 45000	10.9%	8.2%
	45001 to 55000	5.5%	8.8%
	55001 and above	20.0%	16.5%

- Nearly two-fifths of the female respondents (37.6 percent) and three-tenths of the male respondents (30.3 percent) are in the age group of 60 to 65 years.
- A little more than three-tenths of the male respondents (33.3 percent) and a very few female respondents (7.0 percent) have studied up to post graduate level. A little more than three-tenths of female respondents (32.4 percent) and a little more than one-fifth of the male respondents (21.2 percent) have studied up to high school level.
- Nine-tenths of male respondents (92.7 percent) and nearly half of the female respondents (48.8 percent) are married.
- A little less than seven-tenths of the male respondents (67.9 percent) and a little more than two-fifths of the female respondents (41.2 percent) are in nuclear family.

- A little less than two-thirds of the male respondent (65.4) and a little less than three-fifths of the female respondents (58 percent) are living in families having 3 members.
- More than half of the male respondents (65.5 percent) and a little less than half of the female respondents (47.6 percent) have one to two children.
- A little more than one-third of the male respondents (35.1 percent) and more than two-fifths of the female respondents (42.4 percent) have their monthly family income in the range of up to Rs.15000. One-fifth of the male respondents (20 percent) and a little less than one-fifth of the female respondents (16.5 percent) have their monthly family income more than Rs.55, 000.

## Level of Social Relationships

Social Relationships	Male	Female	Total
Low (Up to 28)	28 17.0%	29 17.1%	57 17.0%
Moderate ( 29 to 47)	105 63.6%	111 65.3%	216 64.5%
High ( 48 and above)	32 19.4%	30 17.6%	62 18.5%
Total	165 100.0%	170 100.0%	335 100.0%

As far as social relationships are concerned, more than three-fifths of the male and female respondents (63.6 percent and 65.3 percent respectively) maintain their social relationships at moderate level. Nearly one-fifth of the male and female respondents (19.4 percent and 17.6 percent respectively) maintain their social relationships at high level. A few male and female respondents (17.0 percent and 17.1 percent respectively) maintain their social relationships at low level.

## Correlations of Socio-economic Variables with Social Relationships of Male and Female Respondents

Independent Variables		Male	Female
Age	Corr	-.178	.158
	Sig	<b>.022</b>	<b>.040</b>
Education	Corr	.396	.125
	Sig	<b>.000</b>	.104
Marital Status	Corr	-.027	.030
	Sig	.726	.696
Family Type	Corr	.058	-.044
	Sig	.456	.565
Family Size	Corr	.086	-.077
	Sig	.272	.317

It is	Number of Children	Corr	-.102	.109
		Sig	.194	.157
	Total family income	Corr	.202	.158
		Sig	<b>.009</b>	<b>.039</b>

observed from the foregoing table that among the male respondents age has significant negative relationship with social relationship, as age increases social relationship decreases, among the female respondents social relationships has significant positive relationship, as age increases social relationships also increases. Education has significant positive relationship with social relationships among male respondents, as education level increases social relationships also increases whereas among female respondents it has no significant relationship. Marital status, family type, family size and number of children have no significant relationship with social relationship for both male and female respondents. Total family income has significant relationship with social relationship for both male and female respondents, as total family income increases social relationship also increases.

## Conclusion

Social relationships play a vital role in the later stage of the elderly people. The study reveals that the level of social relationships among the male and female respondents is at moderate level. Among the male respondents age has significant negative relationship with social relationship, as age increases social relationship decreases; among the female respondent's social relationships has significant positive relationship, as age increases social relationships also increases. Education has significant positive relationship with social relationships among male respondents, as education level increases social relationships also increases. Total family income has significant positive relationship with social relationships for both male and female respondents, as total family income increases social relationships also increases.

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