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An Analysis of Socio-Economic and Health Issues of Aged Construction Workers as Perceived by them

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Abstract

This qualitative ethnographic study attempts to seek deep insides into the older construction Workers' perceptions of problems generate due to construction work. This study involves 23 aged construction laborers from south Punjab. The data were generated through detailed face to face interviews with the participants. This study employs thematic analysis to draw insights from the gained perceptions through interviews. The four themes that emerged from the thematic analysis are: degradation of health due to construction work; laborers' dissatisfaction with construction work; inconsistency of livelihood in construction work; and restricted socially active life due to construction work. This study recommends that future research should be focused on the comparative analysis of charter international labor rights and the organizational rules under which the construction labor works.

Keywords: Aging, Construction Workers, Perceived Problems, Analysis.

Introduction

Old age labor is a crucial issue nowadays and therefore it has created a need to focus on different aspects of it. Owing to the high poverty index, it is so common even in countries like Pakistan where it is observed that high norms are part of our family system. According to Maslow hierarchy of need, food is the priority of every human being (Maslow, 1954) but researchers observed that in this country an average age of sixty years is less for a man to fulfil his necessities.

Therefore, after one's long span of life, they are fighting for their survival. At the age of 50 or more, a man is still worried about his food requirement (Caporale et al., 2022). The perception of aging or

what is called old age discusses a part of the lifecycle of human beings, generally covering later years of adulthood and the final stage of life. However, people have diverse commencements of old age which differ with time and space (Lee et al., 2018). The whole concept of aging is a social structure covering multiple principles, age in years being one of these.

The elderly ratio of age is increasing by 55 years while the workers of 25 are reducing in number as per statistics of current population survey 2018. The Construction sector can witness it too hitting than the rest of the industries because the workers in the industrial sector are vulnerable to being old rapidly as reported by the Association of Home Builders (Vaquera, 2019).

In this research, old age labor is above 55 and the minimum age is 50. This is due to low income for survival in late middle age which shows the welfare of old age as a precedence area for public policy. After that researcher will analyze the contribution of old age labor in a different way and the researcher has selected the construction labor. This kind of labor is very common in our society.

Old age labor is very common nowadays due to family crises and unapproachable basic needs. Old age labor is basically considered a crucial part of our society as their services are valuable, but that labor has low wages and even lack basic rights (Kasper et al., 2019).

The specific factor is the responsibilities and services of family members, which enjoys a remarkable status in making attempts to resolve their economic and social needs. The needs of the elderly only depend upon the due attention and interests of family members to make their conditions better (Sivamurthy & Wadakannavar, 2001).

Some of the old men were seen to take the bricks on their heads to shift them in their right places in this old age. They used to do this type of work only to earn some money to keep it in hand so that they can fulfil their basic and urgent needs. They did not want to be a burden to their children. The term survival of the fittest is conceived to be an advantage that allows the individuals to flourish and live alive for existence for competing for four limited sources in society (Nowak & Sigmund, 2017). Older people still fight with many major challenges like being economically weak in less developed countries of the world where work wages, opportunities are very low (United Nations, 2015).

A human being witnesses so many tangible changes in life but the elderly people see the construction work to be too hard to do. Physical accomplishments for an old man, become much exerting on their hearts. The old people respond too slowly to their manual work (Thomas, 2010). Their bones become too weaker to be fractured (Sattelmair, Pertman, & Forman, 2009). Inflammatory diseases are also seen in too older persons. Bodyweight also changes which creates hypertension and diabetes (Spector et al., 1997; Strandberg & Tilvis, 2000; Houston, Nicklas, & Zizza, 2009). Moreover, certain changes in aging, can hamper them to do the work smoothly of daily life (Schwatka, Butler, & Rosecrance, 2012).

The works of constructions become challenging for the elderly; hence, they think of early retirement, even having no financial constraints. All types of physical work are related to their enfeeblement (Ervasti, et al., 2019). The work of construction becomes perilous industries along with a rate of catastrophic injuries. Older laborers' working ability decreases when they suffer injuries (Sokas, Dong, & Cain, 2019).

Research Questions

1. Why do they work in this stage?
2. How their health is being affected due to work?

Materials and methods

In this study, respondents' maximum age is 65 and the minimum age is 50. This is due to low income for survival in late middle age which shows the welfare of old age as a precedence area for public policy. After that researcher analyzed the contribution of old age labor in different ways and the researcher had selected the construction labor. The elderly ratio of age is increasing by 55 years while the workers of 25 are reducing in number as per statistics of current population survey (Balistreri, 2018). The Construction sector can witness it too hitting than the rest of the industries because the workers in the Industrial sector are vulnerable to being old rapidly as reported by the Association of Home Builders (Vaquera, 2019).

The labor work done by old age people is indispensable and elemental to human life, which is called to be a problem-ridden phase of life. Their physical enfeeblement calls for their needs and helps from the others at an emergent stage. But in this callous and heartless society, nobody finds enough time for them, even their own children beg sorry to make the intermittent sit-ups with their old parents or relatives. The researcher had conducted the firsthand data from the rural union council situated in the South Punjab region, Pakistan. The data for this study were collected based on extended observation and interviews with aged villagers who were selected through purposive sampling. The data generated through extended observation was reconfirmed and amended through interviews. This descriptive qualitative study involved 25 participants who were 50 to 65 years of age. The interviews with respondents were based on demographic open-ended questions in respondents' native language (Saraiki) in order to ensure reliability, clarity and consistency of the recorded responses. Each interview lasted more than one and less than two hours. Being a native speaker of respondents' mother tongue (Saraiki); the researcher himself transcribed the recorded responses and translated them into the English language which ensured participants' protection as well as data protection. Embarking on the cause-effect relationship technique, the researcher employed thematic analysis of the data in order to draw the issues of old age construction labor phenomenon from participants' views, opinions and experiences.

Demography of Respondents

Sr. no.	Pseudonyms	Age	Area	Construction work Experience	Spouse Status	Family Members
1	Ali Ahmad	55	Multan	20 years	Alive	09
2	Ahmad Yar	58	Multan	37 years	Alive	06
3	Shafeeq Ali	61	Multan	40 years	Alive	12
4	Malik Hussain	52	Multan	29 years	Dead	05
5	Yaseen Rao	64	Khanewal	09 years	Alive	07
6	Ali Shah	55	Lodhran	23 years	Divorced	11

7	Nasir Dogar	60	Muzafargarh	16 years	Alive	02
8	Khadim Khokar	50	Muzafargarh	30 years	Alive	06
9	Noor Baksh	58	Lodhran	08 years	Dead	05
10	Mazhar Khan	63	Khanewal	45 years	Dead	01
11	Shokat Ali	61	Khanewal	35 years	Alive (Physically handicapped)	02
12	Malik Kashif	54	Multan	09 years	Alive	12
13	Haq Nawaz	55	Lodhran	35 years	Alive	01
14	Rashid Shah	63	Multan	23 years	Dead	02
15	Kosar Ali	51	Khanewal	29 years	Alive	05
16	Malik Naeem	59	Muzafargarh	27 years	Alive	07
17	Aliyan Ahmad	65	Lodhran	47 years	Divorced	01
18	Shakeel Ahmad	54	Muzafargarh	14 years	Alive (Physically handicapped)	03
19	Zafar Khan	51	Khanewal	31 years	Alive	04
20	Sher Khan	63	Khanewal	32 years	Dead	05
21	Mubarak Ali	55	Lodhran	31 years	Alive	04
22	Akbar Shah	63	Khanewal	28 years	Dead	09

23	Najam	65	Muzafargarh	15 years	Dead	01
24	Amjad Mughal	54	Multan	34 years	Alive	08
25	Faiz Baksh	64	Khanewal	38 years	Divorced	08

Results and Discussion

The old-age construction issues are directly or indirectly linked with the old age people's life. This research describes the older people's problems work-wise like their health conditions, their living patterns, their children's education and their social status. Researcher links between these variables in further explanation. The researcher has observed the relation between socioeconomic status and the health status of the elderly. Money is an important factor for all those who have a strong economy and are enjoying the good life, and those who have low socioeconomic status, are facing hardships throughout their poor lives. These themes emerged from the deducted thematic analysis based on in-depth observation and face to face interviews.

Degradation of Health due to Construction Work

The health condition of laborers in old age is not good due to hard work. According to them, they cannot work in hot summer and extremely cold winter because their bones are not strong enough and due to weakness, their bodies are not stable to work for the longest hours continuously. Sometimes, if they do the work in scorching summer then the pain starts in their whole body and in the backbone. Sometimes, their bones give the horrible sounds like something broken and due to atmospheric or climatic fever, cough and flu attacks them.

Males in Pakistan can be imagined living for 51 or 52 years with no disability and disease-free life expectation is only 10.4 percent. But in this work, men living without any disease is not possible at the age of 50 or more because, in this work, older people face more chances of an accident and chest problems due to dust and hard work (World Health Organization, 2011). If we want to deliver improved healthcare services for older persons then we must gain help from some organizations like United Nations Population Fund (Chaudhry et al., 2014).

In government hospitals, the treatment is not satisfactory, and a few things are not available to free of cost e.g. laboratory tests and some medicines. They have no reference in hospitals to be attended properly by the doctors because they lack sources and financial problems for treatment in the private hospitals. Like Mr. Saleem had said that "his health condition depends on GOD's mercies as there are no health facilities for him due to his poor economic condition". Government should make policies of health which also might be implemented especially in the great interest of the old age laborers and treatment of older people must be done in a proper way. Many of the respondents said that due to lack of knowledge, they don't know about the rules of the hospitals and could not reach the concerned departments of the diseases, therefore, they came back home unattended and their health condition went from bad to worst day by day. We have an insufficient well-trained geriatrician, social workers, nurses and skilful staff at public health institutions immensely. The need for certified geriatricians is for more than 7500 and the rest of the under-training geriatricians, are not enough as needed. There can be several reasons, but geriatricians are facing certain financial constraints (Rowe et al., 2016).

According to a respondent Mr. Shakeel that there are different types of work that create instability in our health conditions exactly when we work in the hottest summer or must work continuously for

hours. Mostly hard works disturb our health like shifting or carrying bricks and mud onto the roof from the ground floor and then laying the mud on the roof. This type of work especially disturbs our health because due to age level, our physical condition becomes weaker.

They face different kinds of diseases because they do the hard labor work and this kind of work is the cause of different health diseases mostly people suffer from the blood pressure, backbone pain and some suffer from the heart diseases and finally fell ill as a heart patient. These are all diseases that they face due to such hard work and have not cared for the proper treatment of these diseases. Therefore, treatment of these diseases ends with their life. Certain diseases are found among the common people at a high level, such as respiratory, musculature and skeletal disorders, skin diseases and hearing loss. One-third of the world has made the programs to investigate these serious threats (World Health Organization, 2017).

Laborers' Dissatisfaction with Construction Work

They are not satisfied with their work because in this field, the income is very low, and people do not give them respect for being the poor ones. People just give respect to those who have the command in this work. If they take rest during work then the owner shouts at them, therefore they cannot take rest for a while. These types of things mentally disturb them because, in this age, they just take rest, if not, they cannot be able to work continuously. Work hours in this field, are not defined. Sometimes, the respondents work for 10 to 12 hours continuously and sometimes for 8 to 10 hours. Due to weakness and older age, they become so much tired.

One of my respondents, Allah Ditta said that "if we do not work as laborer then how our family can survive! Our whole life circle depends on this field" There are different types of reasons which insist them for work i-e the expenditures of houses not fulfilled, mostly respondents' sons are married and they have certain personal needs, so they are not able to help them, therefore they work for survival on their own. They earn Rs.700/- to 800/- a day. This income is not enough for anyone because they cannot buy their necessities through this income, therefore if they work for entire family members, then they live a simple life without any burden.

Government should make policies for the betterment of old age labor because through the pension system and retirement at the age of retirement, through this money they get after retirement, they also tend to set up their business and in such old age, they do not want to be the dependents on anyone whether it's their own children. Therefore, they work for the whole society and government should make policies for them, so that they can have no needs to work at this old age. Government should give scholarships to elderly people because, at this age, people are not able to hard work. In the report, Labor Policy, rights of old age labor clearly mention like old age labor have rights to work in the form of the Unions and should be protected by an institutional framework. They work for mutual benefits and make social insurance schemes. These types of policies and laws also make old age easier to live but old age believes that these policies only are written in papers not implemented officially or presently (Government of Pakistan, 2010).

Inconsistency of Livelihood in Construction Work

Older construction people's daily income depends on their work. If they work under the contractor, then maybe their income can be low but if they work on their own behalf then their income can be good. Laborers' daily wage is Rs. 700/- to 800/- and whose master in this work daily wages are Rs.1100/- to 1200/- if they work for the whole day. Mr Shafi said, "It's a temporary earning in different situations". If an owner is satisfied with their performances, then they give them an extra income along with daily wages but it happens for once depending on the income of the industry and

if they got contract then through contract, they get better income because in contract, constructing a building with a fixed price with labor, the Contractor only gives to those who are expert in this field.

The economy is the basic need of everyone and their life effects when they are on leave or are not working properly then life circle is disturbed badly. Then they borrow some money from their relatives or friends, and they run their life cycle. On borrowing system, they run their life cycle. If they earn better on any week or all family members earn well, then they save some money and have recourse to those who once helped them in their bad times. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Older people who are working at this age or making a career, change later in life and face many problems to maintain the wages, and benefits levels are compared to their previous employments records because fewer options are available (CDC, 2012).

Mostly they prefer daily wages because they earn more than in contract system, and in contract system, the Contractor wants the commission but in daily wages, there is no commission, besides, in daily wages, there is some relaxation in their working but in contract system, there is no any relaxation because the Contractor completes its work within time. So, they work without any rest but in the evening, they receive no appreciation.

This work is good only in the sense that if they do not work under any pressure, their work depends on their income. If they are on leave, the income automatically is not earned and accordingly, this work is not good from the perspective of earnings because income is very low, and work is much harder. They work the whole day in the hot weather but in the evening, they earn just Rs.700/- to 800/-, that's why they are not satisfied with their amounts of income.

Many respondents told that they are experts in their works as the others are experts in their own fields, but their condition is not better than others. Governments have no time to think about them because governments do not want to waste time on such types of rubbish things. Government just makes the laws that are beneficial for the government itself not for the people. The government has attached them through different types of Construction Companies and the Companies give them daily wages or monthly salaries but does not give any benefit for their future. Companies must give them a pension at the age of 60+, so that their economic condition can be better, otherwise no chance. In the recent report of Labor Policy, the government has planned to get the system of low wages implemented in the context of basic Old Age Labor Protection. In future, a Commission for Self-governing National Wages would also be established, and the government would set up a body to know the detailed recommendations for certain operational arrangements along with secretarial support requirements to see its relationship with the provincial wage-fixing authority (Government of Pakistan, 2010).

Government should make different types of policies like scholarship system, gratuity system and many other sources but in government, they view their work have no speciality in the society but they serve for whole life in this field, and in the end, their health is not good for this work but if they do not go on work, then their life cycle will not be run properly, therefore the government must promote and enhance their economic condition. With each day passing in life, all types of physical or mental abilities are disappointingly going to be reduced with their monetary resources. If we really wish to make their lives easier, healthier and safe, all the stakeholders and the prevailing government should make sound plans which might help provide the economic chunks to the deserving elderly of societies (Chaudhry et al., 2014).

Restricted Socially Active Life due to Construction work

The social life of old age construction labor is not good at this age as they live peacefully and participate in every social activity of the society as an elder one but due to financial crisis, their social life is going downwards and does not gain any status in the society. People think that labor is not

good work and people do not give them due respect or any kind of honour because they are not considered powerful or of high status due to their works. The previous study of Chaudhry et al, (2014) explores that the relationship between the older person and social exclusion is strong because both terms are used commonly. If we do not involve the older persons in any social activities, then the effects of social exclusion on the health status of older persons, are various. Mostly, the articles show that aging is most painful.

Mostly the respondents told that the social status of old age labor was not better because they were laborers and their status was only attached with their work and their status in society was only related to work. If they were good in their works then everyone wanted to do the works through them and used to give them the works but due to age level, they could not do the works as youngsters did the works. Therefore, their social status was not good as that of youngsters. Achenbaum has recently understood in its research that during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the social status of the elderly was noticed to be remarkable in terms of advanced technology and social transformations, especially in Western Europe and North America. It has been observed that the ratio of elderly in National Population had grown slowly and briskly at fertility behavior which has changed, and the measures by public health sectors have rendered exceptional service to get their longevity. Such socio-economic and mathematical changes have caused the contexts to study the aging and old age respectively, as the scientists and historians had researched systematically in social gerontology soon after World War II (Achenbaum, 1978).

This kind of work disturbs their social relations and the reason behind it, is that if a marriage ceremony is going to be held in their family, their financial conditions do not allow them to go, somehow, if they have to go due to any reason, they must have to scarify the earnings of those days, but they have not saved enough money that they can easily feed their children, so borrowing the money remains their last resort. Their work relates to everything which belongs to them, but they must go through these types of ceremonies because they want to secure their relations. If they are not able to go, then it creates a lot of problems. Due to this, they are away from their home and they meet their family members and relatives after a long time. This is the major effect of their social relation disturbance and they came back to their homes after 15 days or month only for one day. How much do they secure their social relations in one day? As Qureshi, argues that social relations disturb family structures, living arrangements, behavior and attitudes, the relation between generations, health and other areas of life. It means that if your social relationship is good or strong enough then everything is fine because everything is related to our social relations and social relations are based on social status. If your status is good then automatically, the social relations are strong (Qureshi, 2005).

Conclusion

The basic purpose of this study was to identify the issues of old age construction labor. The study concluded that in old age, the labor faces different types of problems to which they try to cover by their work because their children cannot either help financially or they do not want to support by any reason, thereafter they turn in this condition and are compelled to work at their old age levels for fulfilling their basic needs. Due to such work, they have less contact with society or have no time to attend any event because they work for the whole day. In the evening, they are much tired and wish for some rest because the next morning, they must go to work again. Regarding the health status of old age labor, it is not good as well because this work is very hard and requires energy but due to age level, they have less energy and they face different types of health diseases like pain in the body and especially in the backbone. Some older people's backbone is in curve shape and they walk slowly. Some of the people in old age face blood pressure, therefore they cannot do the works continuously and they must take rest during work.

The environment of old age labor is not good, and the employer does not understand his true feelings about their work. Everyone treats them badly, but old age laborer is wiser and more honest than young laborer but, in the end, they cannot get any reward for work. These are the main stress of old age labor and due to this their health deteriorates day by day. Their income is also not good in this field. They told that they just meet their basic needs and were able to face health disasters/disorders but due to earning constraints, we earn in at this age level. They do the work under the authority of anyone who always wants his objectives without the understanding of anyone's emotion. No one understands what they want or why they do the work at this age. Their children's education is also affected due to a lack of parents' attention. The economy is the main cause because money is the basic need of any work and they cannot fulfil their children's education. So, their children also do not complete their education. Their social status is not good due to weak social relations because they cannot attend most of the ceremonies of relatives and societies. Due to all this, the financial issues also become the bottlenecks.

In short, most of the following problems faced by old age people in their lives like health problems, chest problems, they think that these problems would end with their life because these problems will be resolved with the help of society and government, but they are least interested. The elderly's dreams and wishes can be materialized by society and relevant communities. An old person always faces problematic situations such as the losses of spouses and close friends along with the financial constraints and non-availability of recreational opportunities and above all, loneliness. These factors cry for their rights to have love and due attention of close family members. The younger generation which misbehaves with the older persons must treat them politely and decently to make them feel contented from all aspects and angles of their lives. The family members might support them with love and affection, especially from the financial perspective. Their medications are also unavoidable truths. The State authorities must prioritize their needs at this stage by having an exclusive program for their betterment. Sound professionals might be deputed to monitor their everyday needs. The communities and the other institutions can help resolve their immediate issues.

Recommendations

- Conduct awareness sessions regarding older rights and solutions and cultural traditions need to be revived so the younger generation learns to respect their elders.
- Government should establish older health care hospitals with free services.
- This study recommends that future research should be focused on the comparative analysis of charter international labor rights and the organizational rules under which the construction labor works.

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