

# Feeling of Seclusion or Withdrawal

## *Pulse of Senior Citizens*

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**G**rowing with a greying and youthful India is a delightful challenge! The blossoming of gated communities of crowded senior citizen's homes, exodus of youth to foreign countries, mushrooming of skyscrapers with apartments designed for small families indicate that our members of three generations are undergoing tremendous cultural stress. Ultimately, senior citizens are in a vulnerable state.

### Data Details

Simulation through case-studies, video films, pictures; expressions through drawings and debate; participation through games and one-to-one discussions support as data sources.

A total of 105 (44 men and 61 women), from 15 different old-age homes situated in South and West of Coimbatore City, represent this study. The participants were aged between 65 and 91 years; with a gender spread of 44 men and 61 women. An overwhelming proportion consisted of migrants (95) and singles (101). Eight of 10 have had functional literacy. Six of 10 have had some job during their prime age. The sample was spread linguistically. There were five couples, 3 siblings, 10 unmarried and 26 childless or single couple.

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The samples were able to walk, talk, hear, see, read, write, play and manage their routine affairs. The most common health-related ailments reported were diabetes, blood pressure, dementia, hearing difficulty, joint pain, sleeplessness, post-operative complications, indigestion, hallucination etc.

### Seclusion or withdrawal

Modifying the living arrangement is the most disliked which causes a difficult decision and insecure feeling in senior citizens, no matter if self-made or facilitated by others. While fifty of them expressed that, they were “secluded by others” and so forced to make alternative shelter; the rest of them (45) withdrew voluntarily from the situation and got relocated. One out of ten landed up accidentally in homes due to various unexplainable reasons.

#### *Secluded*

- Socio-economic value
- Gender disparity
- Care and support
- Empty nest

### Why secluded at old age?

The detachment of kin circle from the senior citizens in the form of social interaction, extending support and socially engaging them in cultural practices, with an intention and in precautions, is conceived as seclusion.

Participant's feelings are clustered as socio-economic value, gender disparity, desertion by social ties and empty nest.

*Being economically or socially valueless* is the key cause attributed for detachment or attachment (70%). Once benefitted, the kin beginning to label and dump older citizens as of “no-value” is the beginning of expulsion. A senior citizen quips, “We are used and thrown out before the expiry date”. The deteriorating physical condition further qualifies expulsion.



*“Exploiting our wealth, extracting our health and expelling from our nest” is the most disgusting feeling as expressed by senior citizens.*

Gender disparity persists throughout one’s lifetime. Every alternate person has had sons. Children are forever trusted to be the bridge for building and sustaining social circles. They feel one who has sons but living in a home is shameful. Daughters are with limited decision-making power to accommodate a parent with themselves. Those who have had no sons still perceive that their life would have been different if they had one (25%)! Though daughters live at reachable distance, sons-in-law do not relish an extended living arrangement with in-laws (25%).

The daughters, who do not have economic power to decide and dictate terms with spouses, either let the aged parent to decide for themselves or facilitate the decision to settle at old-age homes. Though a son deserts a parent, the daughter-in-law and her kinsfolk get the label as the perpetrators! A strong admission by most of the senior citizens is “sex preferences and the consequential treatment at young age is the root cause for their difficult ageing”.

“ A state of mind wherein an individual consciously decides to stay away from the organic supportive ties, detached emotionally and prefers to stay away is termed as withdrawal. ”

Care and support due to weakening kinship ties remain a key determinant to opt for a home-based care. That the warmth and affection among the kinsfolk are weakening and perishing is one’s general impression. Majority though prefer to live amidst kith and kin, for a feeling of security, only a few are empowered to take decisions. As one grows older, one becomes powerless and voiceless to convince one’s children, son-in-law or daughter-in-law, especially on living. A senior single woman has a better chance to relocate with one or other kinsfolk than a senior man does as woman decides on care and support. “We are physically risky, culturally less valuable and socially a burden for others’ fast changing lifestyle” is the most rated impression.

Empty nest is an alarming demographic challenge for family institutions. Most of them have lost their relations. Born as single, unmarried, widowed or deserted, childless, without in-laws, migrant, and deserted are a few cited factors for void kinship. This absence of blood ties, anonymous neighbourhood, weakening community sentiments to secure the aged have all generated a physical and mental vacuum in the society. A senior citizen states, “We had no children, people around me were cautious to ensure that there is no iota of dependency from me. While my spouse died physically, I feel my kinsfolk “died spiritually” out of the fear that I may be their dependent”.

What facilitates one to withdraw? A state of mind wherein an individual consciously decides to stay away from the organic supportive ties, detached emotionally and prefers to stay away is termed as withdrawal.

#### Withdrawn

- Right to Survive
- Emotional Anaemia
- Social Ostracism
- Gaps in Coping Skills

Largely viewed as an affordable option, a few look at it as an opportunity. The right to survive, emotional anaemia, social ostracism and lack of coping skills are facilitating factors to withdraw, which are discussed further.

“Right to survive with dignity” is a strong expression aired by those senior citizens who are mentally and physically fit and have opted willingly to stay away from kith and kin (30%). This process as perceived by the aged is “most peaceful and soothing”. As well, such

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arrangement assures self-prestige and self-respect. A few of them project high esteem by saying, “no one should look at us as a dependent or tend to feel as a burden or give a look of pity”. There are level-headed responses like “not to be a burden to others as they too have their right and privilege to live happily” while there were impressive ones like “we love to live and be alive”, “...right to protect our self and our body..” and “feeding the stomach and being happy is one’s own karma”.

*Emotional anaemia* is a coinage expressing deficiency of warmth and happiness in care and concern. Most of them have experienced suffocation and depression during the crucial stages of decision-making, and this has pre-empted them to stay out of the social circle. Incidences of emotional trapping / blackmailing by the caretakers, are also factors causing this shift of residence. Expressions of feelings such as *worthless, lost, sorrowful, lonely, inferior, social exclusion, desertion, helplessness, fear, unable to speak and laugh, excluded, silenced* in front of others and so forth were qualitative indicators of emotional anaemia. There are deep scars in their hearts, as they are unattended and their requests unheard of for years by kinfolk.

*Social ostracism* while living under a common roof is a strong factor forcing the aged to look for alternative living style. Not allowing one to mix up, fondle, play or engage grand children are the most reported disheartening feelings. Intentional exclusion in various forms like in decision-making processes, role fulfilment, task sharing, and taking part in social functions push the aged out of social circle.

A few quote, “You know entering into the kitchen to make a recipe of our own taste is forbidden and

*finally ends up in verbal fight and displeasure*”. In summation, seclusion takes in every aspect from sleeping, dining, decision-making, chatting, outing, and living all alone to look out for companionship.

*Lack of coping skills* is a realization by the senior citizens. Skill-gap among the members across generations to take care and to cope with changing family structure and functions; time and need of food; mobility, to live with family-in-laws; cultural disparity, malfunction of their own routine, lack of role in making decisions and taking up responsibilities are all commonly reported issues.

Most of them admit, “We failed to orient and equip our children and prepare them to develop skills to handle, while we matured as senior citizens, and help us in changing roles”. The biggest challenge here is the medical support in terms of cost, time and energy as a caretaker remains unprepared.

## Conclusion

Seclusion or withdrawal in old age is a disgusting feeling. Relocating and re-establishing ties is a challenging when you are old. The most secure and evergreen strong ties are parents and grandmothers who they opine, can never be substituted. Eight out of 10 expressed that old age homes substitute kinsfolk in instilling a sense of security while the rest still feel that children especially sons, parents, job, siblings, are secure teams while ageing.

Greying India is facing a challenge to balance desire and destiny while the young India is fixed at a crossroads to design a living arrangement including senior citizens. Medical advancements boost the life expectancy of the aged but psychosocial support of the aged stands as a huge challenge for caregivers, no matter the living arrangement. More research is required to explore the vulnerability of aged in terms of emotional support and youth sentiments to embrace and coexist with senior citizens joyfully.

(This paper is devoted to all those senior citizens and home-caregivers who participated in our workshops at Karl Kübel Institute for Development Education (KKID)). ■

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