

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

A STUDY OF THE SATISFACTIONS AND DISSATISFACTIONS
WITH LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF A GROUP OF
MEMBERS OF SENIOR CITIZEN CLUBS IN
METROPOLITAN WINNIPEG

Being the Report of a Research Project
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement for the Degree of Master of
Social Work

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship of the aged parent to his adult children in terms of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with living arrangements (living apart and living together). This was related to independence from adult children and communication with them.

Of a sample group, 100 senior citizens from twelve senior citizen's clubs in Metropolitan Winnipeg were interviewed, and the data obtained in these interviews was analyzed.

The conclusions indicated that the ideal situation is to live together with independence, but, that those aged persons living apart expressed a higher degree of independence and hence of satisfaction with living arrangements than those living together. It was found further that independence and communication were more significant factors in determining satisfactions than living apart or living together. However, since a much greater number of those living apart were independent, it was concluded that the preferred pattern is living apart.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The problems of the aged have been subjects of research for some time. This study is concerned particularly with the feeling of the aged person regarding his relationship with his own family.

The relationship with his family can be studied from several points of view. Family relationships vary in different ethnic and religious groups. Socio-economic and occupational levels are also important factors in determining the type of relationship that exists. The number of children and grandchildren, and the type of living arrangements can also alter family relationships.

The focus of the study will be on the feelings of the aged regarding their living arrangements. The aspect of feeling that we are concerned with is the satisfaction or the dissatisfaction with the living arrangements. By the latter it is not meant the condition of the house, or its location, but refers specifically to living apart from or living together with adult children. Satisfactions with living arrangements can be studied from other points of view as well. Proximity to peers and nearness to recreational facilities are important considerations for the old person in choosing his living arrangements because his satisfactions depend largely on whether he has interesting things to do and whether he can enjoy life with his old friends. The source and size of his income also determines his

living arrangements, and influences the satisfaction he derives from these arrangements.

Satisfactions with living arrangements are also conditioned by whether or not the aged parent is independent from his adult children so that he is free to do as he wishes. Also, whether or not he is in communication with his adult children determines satisfactions because of his natural desire to maintain family ties.

Since the concern here is the relationship to the family, the scope of this study will be: the independence from, and the communication with the adult children. Independence does not mean merely "living apart". In this study, independence refers to financial, physical, and emotional independence. For example, can the aged person spend his own money as he chooses? Can he entertain friends independently, etc.?

A study made at Cornell University by Martin N. Martell, Ph.D., in 1956 concluded that: "In the preferred pattern old parents are supposed to live apart from their adult offspring, especially when both the parents and offspring are married."¹ As well, according to Linden in his study:

¹Martin, N. Martell, "Situations of Aging in American Society", I and II, Dissertation Abstract, XVII, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1956), p. 914.

A recent poll of older people indicated that they prefer not to live with their children. This feeling is based on a universal preference for independence in our society.¹

With this in mind the following hypothesis was formulated:

"The aged parent expresses satisfaction living apart from but in communication with his adult children more often than when living together."

Out of the hypothesis came several questions which the study will attempt to answer. These questions are: What are the living arrangements? Are the living arrangements satisfactory? Are the living arrangements the result of choice or necessity?

In this study the term aged parent will refer only to individuals born between January 1st, 1887 and January 1st, 1897; male or female; living in Metropolitan Winnipeg; mobile enough to attend a Senior Citizen's group in Winnipeg; and capable of understanding and answering the questions put to them.

The term expresses satisfaction will mean that the interviewee answers positively by word and tone.

Living apart means residing in a different household. (Household is a self-contained unit having separate toilet and cooking facilities).

Living together means residing with adult children in the same household.

¹Maurice, E. Linden, "The Older Person in the Family", The Journal of Social Casework, XXXVII, No. II, (1956), p. 77.

Adult children are those married or single offspring of the aged parents who are living in Metropolitan Winnipeg.

An initial and cursory survey of the existing literature prompted and spurred our thinking along the lines which have already been outlined. It helped by giving background material and providing a perspective for the study. The background material also revealed which studies had already been conducted and it also pointed out gaps which assisted in formulating the focus and scope of this particular study.

In Chapter II a more detailed survey of the literature will be made to point out the thinking of the more eminent authorities in this area of study and their relation to the present project.

In Chapter III the method will be described. The following is a brief outline of the approach.

To answer the questions posed in the hypothesis original data was required. To obtain this data a schedule will be devised containing questions pertaining to the hypothesis. Interviewing is a standard technique used by social workers and therefore to reach the subjective feeling tone the interview method was chosen. The interviews will be controlled by the uniform schedule,

Due to the exigencies of time the simple random sampling method will be used. The sources of data for the sample will be the members of various Senior Citizen's clubs in Metropolitan Winnipeg. This study is being conducted in Metropolitan Winnipeg by a research team of students from the School of Social Work, University of Manitoba.

In choosing a sample population, two choices were available. Of the two, which were either Senior Citizen's clubs or the recipients of social allowance of the Department of Public Welfare, the former was chosen. This made the sample more representative of the total population by eliminating a narrow economic or financial group.

It is more practical, economical and efficient to base studies on samples, and for most practical purposes the conclusions drawn from a sample can be just as valid as conclusions drawn from the entire population.

Various limitations inherent in the method were recognized at the outset. For example, it is difficult to establish a relationship in one interview. Therefore, there may be trouble in engaging the respondent in sufficient conversation in order to reach the feeling tone. Furthermore it is not possible to assess the reality orientation of the old person except in the gross.

There are various other limitations around the sample chosen (Senior Citizens), the schedule (not measuring the quality of communication), and the interview method. These will be discussed more fully in Chapter III.

In Chapter IV the main classifications in analyzing the data will be satisfaction or dissatisfaction with living arrangements relating to: living with adult children and living apart from adult children; communication with adult children and independence from adult children.

The analysis will be done on a percentage basis because it is not expected that the sample will include the same number of aged parents living apart as those living together. This will be expanded and discussed further in the chapter on Analysis.

In the fifth and final chapter, conclusions will be drawn in relation to the hypothesis, and the study as a whole will be evaluated.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The world today is faced with the problem of increasing population. As the general population increases so does the number of our aged citizens. The White House Conference on Aging states:

We have 16 million people over 65 today. This is five times more than we had in 1900 and the number will double in the next forty years. The number over 75 will triple. At that time, the over-65 group will exceed 10% of our population.¹

This study was done in the United States of America while another study carried out by the Welfare Council of Greater Winnipeg in 1956 quotes "that there will be an increase of 25% in the aged population of Canada from 1951 to 1971."²

Along with the population explosion and the out-of-proportionate rise in the percentage of our aging citizens there is an awareness in the field of social science that there is an urgency to assist the aged citizens to adjust in our industrial society. Studies on the aged have emphasized different facets of the problem. The following studies: Relationships Within Three-Generation Families,³

¹White House Conference, Proceedings of Conference on Aging, (Washington, D.C., January, 1961), p. 117.

²The Welfare Council of Greater Winnipeg, Age and Opportunity, A Report Prepared by the Committee on Services for the Aged (Winnipeg: The Welfare Council of Greater Winnipeg, 1956), p. 1.

³Relationships Within Three-Generation Families, cited by Geneva Mathiasen, A New Look at the Three-Generation Family (taken from an unpublished paper presented before the eighty-seventh Annual Forum National Conference on Social Welfare, June 10, 1960, Atlantic City, New Jersey).

Thurston County's Older People,¹ and The Family Life of Old People,² have contributed interesting background material which proved helpful to this present study on the aging carried out by master students from the University of Manitoba, School of Social Work. These studies substantiate the idea that there has been a change in the relationships existing between the aged parent and their adult children since the turn of the century. After 1900 there was a shift from rural to urban living; from the agriculture-centered life to an industrial one, and all of this was complicated the more by rapid scientific and technological advances.

Formerly the relationships were kinship-centered and in this setting the role of the parent was clearly defined. The parent wielded more influence and was held in higher esteem. As living became more and more urbanized family and kinship relations were de-emphasized and associations selected on a basis of occupational and avocational interests and similarity of ideas and values were emphasized.

Other reasons for the changes in relationships between parents and children are increased life expectancy due to advances in medical technology, decline in family size, and a trend toward earlier marriage. In our industrial society, parents are able to live one-

¹Thurston County's Older People, cited by Geneva Mathiasen, A New Look at the Three-Generation Family (taken from an unpublished paper presented before the eighty-seventh Annual Forum National Conference on Social Welfare, June 10, 1960, Atlantic City, New Jersey).

²Peter Townsend, The Family Life of Old People, (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1957).

quarter of their married lives after their last child has left the parental home. The study, Our Needy Aged,¹ suggests that this family trend is associated with our industrial society and has a marked effect on family organization and functioning. Society expects the young couple to establish their own household leaving the middle-aged parents to continue on their own. The parents grow older and are admired as independent senior citizens until a spouse dies or becomes physically incapacitated.² The remaining parent feels isolated, useless and believes that he is a drag on his children. The aged parent is called upon to make more complex adjustments than ever before.

These adjustments are external and internal such as a necessitated change in his living arrangements and the aged parent's subjective reaction to this change. The aged parent therefore needs the psychological support of his family in order to make a decision in this regard which might be considered objective. Any plans pertaining to living arrangements for the aged should involve them from the outset. At this point, the surviving parent is often expected to live with his or her children who by this time are themselves middle-aged. Thus, the study, Our Needy Aged,³ recognizes that an

¹F. A. Bond, et al., Our Needy Aged: A California Study of a National Problem, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1934).

²Mayer, M.D. Fisch, "Organic Psychiatric Disorders of the Aged: How They Affect Family Relationships," Social Casework, XXXIX (February, 1958), pp. 503-507.

³Bond, et al., op. cit.

added responsibility is heaped upon the adult child who has for a number of years been free from this burden of caring for his parents and now must adjust to these changing circumstances.

In the agriculture-centered family there was built-in communication due to the fact that more than two generations generally lived in one household and family ties were very strong. The advent of industrialization, urban living, and the nuclear family saw a lessening of this communication. Despite the fact that much of this communication has been discontinued, the psychological theory on the normal growth of personality indicates that it would be unnatural should the aged parent cease to desire an ongoing close relationship with his or her adult children. As one 63 year old woman said, "You're more your own master when you're independent. But it's nice to be near."¹

The greatest satisfaction, therefore, would seem to be provided when the old person can maintain or return to his place in the community where he is able to continue accepting his responsibilities. In this way he can enjoy being an active member of the community and continue to live an independent life in his own home for as long as possible. It could be suspected that this is being done in part as indicated by the fact that in the United States, according to

¹The Family Life of Old People, cited by Geneva Mathiasen, A New Look at the Three-Generation Family (taken from an unpublished paper presented before the eighty-seventh Annual Forum National Conference on Social Welfare, June 10, 1960, Atlantic City, New Jersey.)

the study, Psychological Aspects of Aging,¹ 80% of persons 65 and over maintain independent households. In the study, Age and Opportunity, the claim is made that "independent living is favored".² This report equates "independent" with "favored" and it assumes that because two-thirds of the aged live independently it is the favored form of living. From the point of view of the present research group the word "favored" is a poor choice. There is sufficient information in the Age and Opportunity Report to indicate that more of the older people were actually living in an independent manner. However, this study does not indicate clearly why they live apart from their adult children. In the present project there will be an attempt to show why the aged parent lives apart and consequently it may come closer to showing how the aged feel about their living arrangements and whether they are actually in favor of independent living.

The sociological studies taken into consideration in the survey done by Geneva Mathiasen indicate that:

The impression from recorded evidence seems equally clear that where there is no choice, where ill health or financial considerations require a three-generation household, where there is little or no reciprocal advantage, - the results are likely to cause dissatisfaction all around.³

¹The American Psychological Association, The Nation and Its Older People, A Report Prepared by the Committee on the Research Division of Maturity of Old Age, (Washington, 1956).

²The Welfare Council of Greater Winnipeg, Age and Opportunity, A Report Prepared by the Committee on Services for the Aged, (Winnipeg: The Welfare Council of Greater Winnipeg, 1956), p. 1.

³Geneva Mathiasen, A New Look at the Three-Generation Family (taken from an unpublished paper presented before the eighty-seventh Annual Forum National Conference on Social Welfare, June 10, 1960, Atlantic City, New Jersey).

Late in our project the survey, A New Look at the Three-Generation Family,¹ by Geneva Mathiasen, came to our attention. In her survey one of the studies mentioned was the one carried out by the Pennsylvania State University² in 1958 for the purpose of determining how satisfactory the arrangement of living together in one household was for the three-generation family. Studied were 97 three-generation households in a small urban community; 45 in a rural community. Interviews were held separately with representatives of all three generations, providing the third generation member was over the age of ten. Four-fifths had been living under this arrangement for more than a year. The older generation indicated a preference for living in their own household while their adult children stated that they would prefer not having their parents living independently.

In the study, Relationships Within Three-Generation Families,³ an attempt was made to measure the quality of relationships in three-generation households by questioning all three generations about disagreements. It was found that there were disagreements all around. The grandchildren reported that they had the largest number of disagreements with the aged although not appreciably more than with their parents. The aged disagreed more with their adult children than

¹Ibid.

²Relationships Within Three-Generation Families, cited by Geneva Mathiasen, A New Look at the Three-Generation Family (taken from an unpublished paper presented before the eighty-seventh Annual Forum National Conference on Social Welfare, June 10, 1960, Atlantic City, New Jersey).

³Ibid.

with their grandchildren and their adult children in turn disagreed considerably more with their aged parents than with their own children.

Another finding from this study was the cause of disagreements between the three generations involved. The chief cause of disagreement between the adult children and the aged parents was smoking and/or drinking. The second cause was around the disciplining of the children. Disagreements between grandparents and grandchildren centered around staying out late, choice of radio programs, girls using make-up, choice of friends, smoking and drinking. This study covered an area which one of our set limits (the quality of communication) prevented us from measuring.

Another comprehensive study on the three-generation relationship concerned itself with the aged people of Thurston County, Washington.¹ It studied the relationship between the living arrangements and the social adjustment of the aged parent in an attempt to discover the reason why elderly people and their adult children were living together in the same household. They discovered that in 61% of the cases the living arrangement was for mutual convenience rather than necessity. They also found:

¹Thurston County's Older People, cited by Geneva Mathiasen, A New Look at the Three-Generation Family (taken from an unpublished paper presented before the eighty-seventh Annual Forum National Conference on Social Welfare, June 10, 1960, Atlantic City, New Jersey).

Those older people, sharing living arrangements with their children from choice rather than necessity were best satisfied of all the families studied, including those living independently. Those unable to live alone and living with children from necessity were least satisfied of all. Those living with sons and daughters for convenience reported considerable leisure but also had more interests, hobbies and social participation than any other group. Those unable to live alone had the most difficulty with free time. When asked about problems they were facing, those living with children of necessity had the most problems of all, - health, finances, and loneliness heading the list. The first two, health and finances, might logically have necessitated the living situation and could not be helped. But this group even more frequently than those living alone mentioned "lonesomeness" as a problem. The fact that loneliness may present more of a problem to those living with children by necessity than to those living alone presents a significant indication of relationship.¹

This study would appear to give credence to the idea that any amount of mutual convenience to be found in well-planned physical living arrangements for the aged parent in no way compensates for a lack of filial affection and good relationships between the aged parent and his adult child.

The next study on which we will comment is the survey carried out by Peter Townsend² in Bethnal Green, London, which had for its scope a much broader area of interest relevant to the aged than ours in that it looked at the whole aspect of family life. This survey was incorporated into the book, The Family Life of Old People. The first part of the book shows us that the dominant interest of most old people in the London borough of Bethnal Green was the extended

¹Ibid., p. 4.

²Peter Townsend, The Family Life of Old People, (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1957).

family. This aspect of the book was completely sociologically oriented. The latter part of this book dealt with the social problems of old age, scrutinized in the light of the survey's resultant information as well as their implications for policy. The aim was to derive practical recommendations for policy from sociological evidence.

This survey was carried out within a working-class area in east London. The study found that:

fifty-nine percent lived in one-generation households, 31% in two-generation households (these are usually unmarried or widowed children) and only 10% in three-generation households. Most of the old people interviewed wished to be independent and were attached to their own homes. The great majority believed that to live together was to invite open conflict with the child's spouse, and this they wished to avoid. They thought they served both their own interests and those of their children by living near them rather than with them.¹

Old people were not against living alone. Their one big qualification to living alone was that they should live near the children. "A strikingly large proportion - 85% of those with children - had a child living with them or within a mile."² In looking at the findings of the Bethnal Green survey we must keep in mind that the families' geographical proximities cannot be expected to be duplicated in the United States and Canada.

¹Ibid., p. 31.

²The Family Life of Old People, cited by Geneva Mathiasen, A New Look at the Three-Generation Family (taken from an unpublished paper presented before the eighty-seventh Annual Forum National Conference on Social Welfare, June 10, 1960, Atlantic City, New Jersey).

However, it is interesting to note that in a study on old people carried out in Chattanooga, Tennessee, family relationships were also very strong.

Seventy-two percent reported living children and about 25% lived with children. Only one-fifth of these, however, or 5%, did so from choice rather than necessity.¹

Geneva Mathiasen suggests that Chattanooga might not be typical of American cities. The interviewers carrying out the present study on the aged were also skeptical about the remaining 20% of the aged parents residing in Chattanooga who indicated that they were living with their adult children because of necessity. On the basis of our interviews it is our impression that the aged parent places an extremely high value on "independent decision-making" and when questioned about his living arrangements is loathe to admit that he could be living in the same household as his adult child for any other reason but that he wishes it this way.

Further evidence from the Peter Townsend survey suggests:

that the extended family is slowly adjusting to new circumstances, not disintegrating. To the old person as much as to the young it seems to be the supreme comfort and support. Its central purpose is as strong as ever. It continues to provide a natural, if conservative, means of self-fulfilment and expression, as the individual moves from the first to the third generation, learning, performing and teaching the functions of child, parent and grandparent.²

¹Geneva Mathiasen, A New Look at the Three-Generation Family (taken from an unpublished paper presented before the eighty-seventh Annual Forum National Conference on Social Welfare, June 10, 1960, Atlantic City, New Jersey).

²Peter Townsend, The Family Life of Old People (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1957), p. 210.

One of the most important findings to emerge from this study was in connection with the major role of the aged parent in the three-generation family. By this it is meant that they found that the aged grandparent although in receipt of support in many circumstances from his family, however, in turn helped the family in many cases through provision of midday meals, baby-sitting and other services.

This survey, although limited, provided us with information pertaining to the aged parents' living arrangements, his communication with his adult children as well as indications that the aged parent felt strongly that he preferred living apart from, but in communication with his adult children.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

The general method chosen by this research team was the interview, because it was felt that in a face-to-face situation one could most easily arrive at subjective feelings. In addition, the interview method is a technique known to social workers.

To obtain the data a sample of one hundred was chosen. This number was feasible in terms of the time available and the size of the research team. Results from samples are considered fairly accurate as a survey of an entire universe.

Membership lists were obtained from three United Church senior citizen groups. Upon surveying these lists it was found that a majority of the members were over seventy-five years of age and, therefore, did not fall within the definition of "aged parent". Thus it became necessary to look for another population. In the second week of January, 1962, the Age and Opportunity Bureau was contacted, who in turn provided the research team with the names of fourteen senior citizen clubs in Metropolitan Winnipeg. The final sample for the study was based on one hundred out of a possible one hundred and forty-nine names available from twelve out of the fourteen groups. The sample was taken during the 'on-season' of the clubs, in January, 1962.

At each club two-thirds of the people who fell within the definition of "aged parent" were interviewed. This was based on the