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The Influence of Wealth on Role and Status of the Rural Elderly: A Sociological Study

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Abstract — *The issue of aging is now an emerging aspect of all over the world. Both the rural and urban societies of our country are not immune from this problem. This study mainly explored the influence of wealth on the enjoyment of role and status of the elderly in rural Bangladesh. It is based on empirical findings from the four villages of Gopalnagar union of Dhunat upazila of Bogra district. The study depicted that wealth has much influence regarding the enjoyment of role and status. Mixed approach has been given priority in this study. Survey, observation, case study and life history methods and focus group discussion technique have also been used in this study. Data have been collected from both primary and secondary sources. Simple random sampling procedure has also been followed in this study.*

Keywords — *Wealth, Role Status, Elderly.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The role and status of the elderly are associated with various socio-economic, cultural, factors. Various disciplines try to focus this issue from their own points of view. Gerontology, the study of ageing and the elderly, concerns itself not only with the physical process of growing old, but also with social and cultural factors connected to ageing [1]. Aged people are considered as natural outcome of demographic transition and their number is increasing gradually as an issue which is not separated from social integration, gender advancement, economic stability or poverty. Demographically, population ageing is a global phenomenon and Bangladesh is also not left untouched by this demographic reality [2]. Sociologists, social workers, economists, demographers and development planners almost agree that until the year 1961, both the birth and death rates were high. With this, the proportion of aged population was at a low level. But at present their number is increasing rapidly. The global population aged 65 and over was estimated to be 70 crore[3]. In the developing country the average percentage of elderly is 15% of the total population. In South Asian countries, the total population is about 200 crore. Among them 14 crore is elderly. It is estimated that in 2025 it will be 277 crore and 32 crore[4]. In Bangladesh, the percentage of elderly population is about 8.56[5]. In 2025, it will be about 9% and in 2050 it will be about 17%. Bangladesh, the eighth largest (147.3 million in 2008) and one of the most densely populated countries (966 persons per sq. km. in 2007) in the world has started to experience another emerging issue of population ageing in its highly vulnerable population and development context[6]. In 2007, the number of the elderly people aged 60 and over in this country was 9.41 million and it has increased from 1.94 million in 1951 which is quite abnormal. Bangladesh right now has the third largest number of old people after India and China and it is also frightening problems in the rural areas [7]. About 7.7% aged people are living in rural areas in Bangladesh. So, the number of elderly is significant in terms of our total population. The elderly in the past contributed a lot for the betterment of family, society and country. Now they are considered as the threat to national income, source of increasing dependency, creator of generation gap and social problems. Moreover, they are, according to Burgess, thrusting into a state of social inactivity that may be termed as role less role [8]. Hence, it is urgent need to explore the relationship between the influence of wealth on the role and status of the rural elderly in Bangladesh.

2. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The objectives of a research summarize what is to be achieved by the study. These should be closely related to the research problem. It must be interrelated, brief and realistic rather than vague and highly ambitious. The objectives of the study also explain the purpose of doing, where it will be done, who the subjects are, what will be done in the research etc. To speak concretely, research objective must be clearly stated and be specific in nature. The objective of this study is to assess the influence of wealth on the enjoyment of role and status of the rural elderly.

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The study may give some necessary directions for both academic and policy related benefits. As a contribution to knowledge, this study may also focus on micro level investigation to understand the real issues of role, status, and the influence of wealth on the enjoyment of role and status. The outcome of the study may advocate for taking a national policy for the elderly of Bangladesh. The findings of the study may also make the people conscious to make old age better.

4. METHODOLOGY

An exploratory approach as it aims to explore the influence of wealth on the enjoyment of role and status of the rural elderly in Bangladesh has been followed. Mixed approach, (that is quantitative and qualitative) especially has been given priority in this study. Several research methods have been used in this study. They are social survey, observation, case study, life history etc. In this study, four villages of Gopalnagar union from Dhunat upazila of Bogra district have been selected randomly. The names of the villages are: Konagaty, Sholiabari, Razarampur and Ariamohan. Although at present about 7.4 percent of our population is elderly, their percentage in these villages is near about 8.0, 7.6, 8.8 and 8.1 [11]. Simple random sampling method has been used for this research to the selection of unions and villages. On the other hand, the district and upazila have been selected purposively. The reason behind this purposive selection is, at present the percentage of the elderly in Bangladesh is about 7.4, the average percentage of elderly in Bogra district is about 7.9 and in Dhunat upazila it is near about 8.6. The same socio-economic, cultural and demographic situations, significant proportion of the elderly, characteristics of village life encouraged the researcher to select this upazila purposively.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Generally wealth refers to the abundance of valuable resources or material possessions. It includes natural, human, and physical assets, such as, land, education, infrastructure etc. That is, everything valuable a person or family owns is called wealth. However, in this paper an attempt has been made to discuss how the wealth including land, property, bank-balance, garden, pond, domestic animals etc influence the elderly especially on the enjoyment of their role and status.

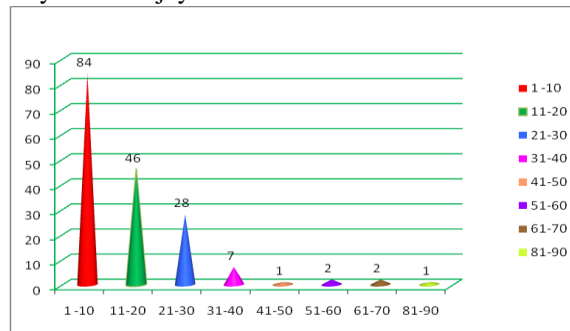


Fig.1. Homestead land of the elderly

The figure above indicates that about (84) respondents that is 41.4 percent elderly do not have more than 10 decimal of homestead land. About (46) respondents that are 22.7 percent have 11-20 and 28 (13.8 percent) respondents have 21-30 decimal land. On the other hand, the elderly who have more than 50 and above decimal of homestead land are not totally more than 3 percent. So, from the table it is obvious that the position of the rural elderly in our country in this point is not at a good condition rather than vulnerable one.

Table I: Amount of Cultivable land of elderly

Cultivable Land in decimal	Frequency	Percent
1-100	99	48.8
101-200	8	3.9
201-300	5	2.5
301-400	3	1.5
601-700	3	1.5
Total	118	58.1

From the table it can be understood that about 48.8 percent elderly have merely 1-100 decimal of cultivable land. On the other hand, the elderly who have more than 100 decimal of cultivable land are not totally more than 10 percent. Cultivable land is one of the most important properties of our rural society for playing role and enjoying status. From the table it is obviously understandable that the position of the rural elderly in our country regarding this issue is not satisfactory.

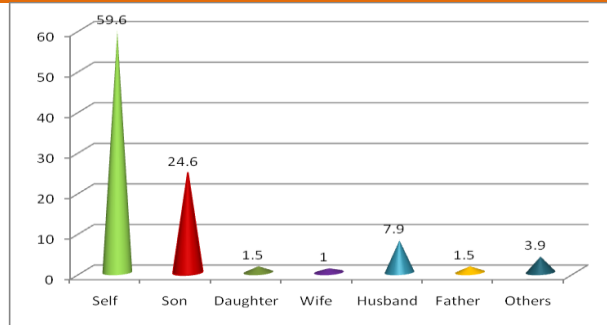


Fig. 2. Ownership of house of the elderly

The figure above highlights that merely 59.6 percent elderly are the owner of the house. The percentage of son in this case is about 24.6 percent, daughter is about 1.5 percent. There are some families in rural society consisting merely wife and husband who are sixty and above years old, 7.9 percent male elderly are the owner of the house and the percentage of female elderly is about 1.0 percent. So, the position of female elderly are also vulnerable than male one.

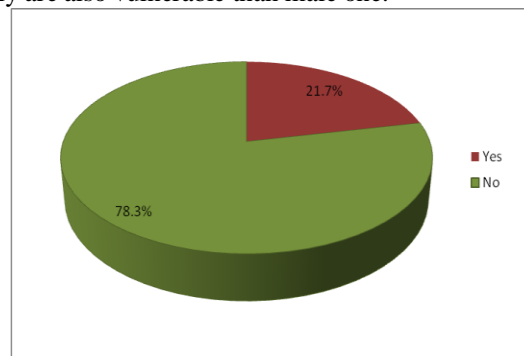


Fig. 3. Ownership of pond

It can be observed from the study of the table that about 78.3 percent elderly have no pond. It is also the source of income and indicator of enjoying status as well as playing role along with other indicators of wealth in rural society. As nearly eighty percent elderly have no pond, they are not able to earn more by this means of income. Ownership of pond is not only source of income and element of enjoying status but also the ingredient of protein based food for the elderly.

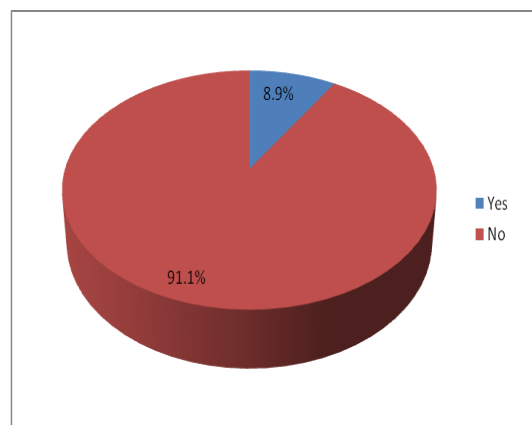


Fig. 4. Ownership of Garden

The figure indicates that more than ninety percent elderly have no garden. Near about nine percent elderly have garden. But garden is a source of income and income is the indicator of enjoying role and status.

TABLE II: OWNERSHIP OF DOMESTIC ANIMAL

Sex of the respondent	Domestic animal			
	Yes	%	No	%
Male	59	29.1	37	18.2
Female	56	27.6	51	25.1
Total	115	56.7	88	43.3

The table describes that 56.7 percent elderly have no domestic animals where as 43.3 percent have it. Again, 29.1 percent male elderly possess the domestic animals whereas the position of female elderly in this case is about 27.6 percent. The interesting fact is that female elderly almost look after the domestic animals but they all have no ownership of it. As, it is the source of income, important factor for enjoying status in the family of the rural society, their condition is not satisfactory here.

TABLE III: INFORMATION ON LIVESTOCK OF THE ELDERLY

Name of animal	Number	Percentage
Buffalo	00	0
Cow	15	13.04
Goat	20	17.39
Sheep	04	3.48
Duck	23	20
Hen	53	46.09

About 88 respondents out of 203 don't have domestic animals. So, their condition in this sector is not satisfactory. Those who have livestock among them 46.09 percent domesticate hen, 20.00 percent duck, about 3.48 percent sheep, 17.39 percent goat, and 13.04 percent is cow. Once upon a time the rural people used to domesticate Buffalo, now they are not interested about it.

TABLE IV: OWNERSHIP OF FURNITURE IN HOUSE

Sex of the respondent	Ownership of furniture			
	Yes	%	No	%
Male	86	60.14	27	45.00
Female	57	39.86	33	55.00
Total	143	100.00	60	100.00

The table above clearly points out that about 60.14 percent male elderly are the owners of furniture whereas the percentage of female elderly is about 39.86 percent. On the other hand 45.00 percent male elderly said that they have no furniture whereas the percentage of female elderly in this case is about 55.00 percent. The position of female elderly in this sector is not equal in study area.

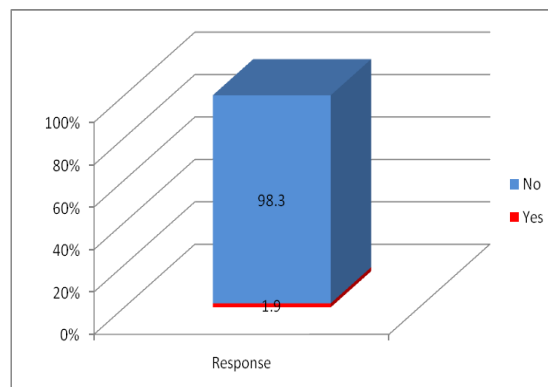


Fig. 5. Information on bank-balance

From the figure it is understandable that 98.03 percent elderly have no bank balance at all. The question is why? It is found that maximum elderly do not have sufficient money to keep in bank, maximum of them do not have sufficient knowledge on banking system, and some them are interested in keeping money in hand.

TABLE V: OWNERSHIP OF ORNAMENTS OF THE ELDERLY

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	120	59.11
No	83	40.89
Total	203	100.0

It is natural that the women are fond of ornaments. If the mother or mother- in- law has ornaments, the daughter or sons’ wives look upon them differently than the female elderly who do not have. Of course, it is a trend not common to all. From the table it is understandable that 59.11 percent elderly have ornaments. On the other hand, 40.89 percent have no ornaments. Ornaments especially for women in our rural society play important role for enjoyment of status and role for the elderly.

TABLE VI: GETTING INVITATION IN THE LOCAL SOCIO –CULTURAL PROGRAMS BY THE ELDERLY

Age Group	Getting invitation in local socio- cultural programs			
	Yes	%	No	%
60 – 65	35	17.2	83	40.7
65 - 70	11	5.4	18	8.9
70 - 75	15	7.4	20	9.9
75 - 80	2	1.0	6	3.0
80 - 85	5	2.5	2	1.0
85 -90	1	0.5	5	2.5
Total	69	34.0	134	66.0

The table above gives an exact picture of status of the rural elderly in Bangladesh. Getting invitation in local socio-cultural program is the indicator of enjoying status. It is noticeable from the data that about 34.0 percent elderly get invitation in local socio-cultural programs. Among them 17.2 percent belong to 60-65, 5.4 percent 65-70 and 7.4 percent 70-75 age categories whereas 66.0 percent elderly cannot enjoy this. The fact is that they cannot contribute to the program. Another important fact is that the participation of the young elderly (60-75) is higher than the old elderly in this matter. So, age has also influence in getting invitation to local socio- cultural programs.

TABLE VII: IF THE ELDERLY HELP THE POOR IN THE VILLAGE

Principal income earner	Response				Total	%
	Yes	%	No	%		
Son	52	25.6	43	21.2	95	46.8
Son’s wife	1	0.5	-	-	1	0.5
Self	38	18.7	43	21.2	81	39.9
Daughter	-	-	2	1.0	2	1.0
Husband	4	2.0	13	6.4	17	8.4
Other	1	0.5	6	3.0	7	3.4
Total	96	47.3	107	52.7	203	100

Helping the poor man by the elderly depends largely on three causes: economic ability, mentality, and their dependency upon other people. The table placed above highlights that principal income earners play important role in helping the poor than the elderly because about 47.3 percent principal income earners including 25.6 percent son 18.7 percent elderly can help the poor man and 52.7 percent including 21.2 percent, sons and 21.2 percent elderly cannot do this. Though these types of activities are generally done by the principal income earners of the family, previously the elderly as a whole could do these.

TABLE VIII: IF THE ELDERLY ARE GIVEN IMPORTANCE IN FAMILY

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	96	47.3
No	107	52.7
Total	203	100.0

From the table, it is also apparent that 47.3 percent respondents admitted that the members of the family give importance to them whereas 52.7 percent of the elderly admitted that the family members don not give importance to them. That is to say, they are not important for playing vital role in the family. Question was also asked them, why? They replied that, due to economic hardship, physical dependency and changing situation of society, they are not given importance to them.

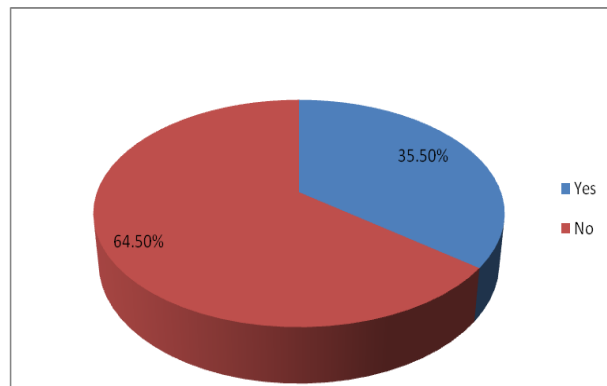


Fig.6 Participation of elderly in rural arbitration

Taking part in rural arbitration is also the symbol of enjoying role and status of the elderly. But it depends on the economic condition, educational qualities or level of education, previous position of occupation, access to urban society, powerful persons among the relatives, political attachment with the political parties, physical ability and ascribed qualities of elderly in rural settings. Those who have highest position in these sectors are able to take part in rural arbitration and the rural people also fear to them and abide by their decisions. In this study it has identified that 35.5 percent elderly can take part in this matter. The pathetic fact is that, 64.5 percent elderly cannot take part in rural arbitration as they do not have sufficient wealth.

6. CONCLUSION

Elderly population undoubtedly is the assets of any country for their bridging and cementing role based on wisdom, knowledge, expertise and experience in the context of cultural existence. In this study it has been identified that the role and status of the elderly and its matter of enjoyment largely depend on how much wealth and property they have. The study have successfully identified that wealth has great influence on the enjoyment of role and status. As the elderly do not have enough these, they are not playing role actively and enjoying status accordingly in the study areas. So, for better understanding and wider generalizing about the role and status of the rural elderly and its matter of enjoyment on basis of wealth, there are no other important options but to undertake further empirical studies on this issue covering entire Bangladesh.

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