



Changing Family Dynamics: A Study of Intergenerational Relationships between Grandparents and Grandchildren in Manipur

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ABSTRACT

Intergenerational relationships between grandparents and grandchildren play an important role in promoting family solidarity, emotional support, and cultural continuity. However, social changes such as urbanization, migration, nuclear family patterns, and technological advancement have influenced traditional family bonds. This study, titled “Changing Family Dynamics: A Sociological Study of Intergenerational Relationships between Grandparents and Grandchildren in Imphal West District, Manipur,” examines the nature of grandparent-grandchild relationships and their influence on the quality of life of elderly persons. The study adopted a qualitative research design and was conducted among 20 elderly grandparents and their corresponding 20 grandchildren (40 participants) in Imphal West District, Manipur. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that grandparents who shared close, regular, and affectionate relationships with their grandchildren experienced greater happiness, emotional satisfaction, and improved quality of life. Grandchildren provided companionship, emotional support, and a sense of belonging to elderly family members. However, many grandparents perceived that intergenerational bonds have weakened compared to the past due to changing family structures,

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migration, busy lifestyles, and digital technology. They recalled the earlier period when extended families provided greater care, respect, and involvement for older persons. The study concludes that strong intergenerational relationships contribute meaningfully to healthy ageing and emotional well-being, and emphasizes the need to strengthen family interactions, cultural practices, and intergenerational engagement in contemporary society.

Introduction

The family is one of the most fundamental social institutions that provides emotional support, social security, cultural continuity, and a sense of belonging to individuals. It is within the family that individuals learn values, traditions, norms, and patterns of social behaviour. Among the various relationships within the family, the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren holds a special as it connects two different generations and facilitates the exchange of experiences, knowledge, affection, and support. This relationship represents an important form of **intergenerational solidarity**, where older and younger generations maintain emotional bonds, provide mutual assistance, and contribute to each other's well-being. Grandparents have traditionally occupied a respected position in Indian families. They have been regarded as custodians of family history, cultural traditions, moral values, and life experiences. In many traditional societies, particularly within joint family systems, grandparents played an active role in child-rearing, decision-making, and transmission of cultural knowledge. The presence of grandparents provided children with emotional security, guidance, and a connection to their family heritage. At the same time, grandchildren offered companionship, affection, and a sense of purpose to older adults, contributing positively to their psychological well-being during later life.

However, family structures and relationships have undergone substantial transformations due to modernization, urbanization, industrialization, migration, changing occupational patterns, and technological advancement. The traditional joint family system has gradually declined, particularly in urban areas, with the increasing emergence of nuclear families. Younger generations migrate for education and employment opportunities and this leads in physical distance between grandparents and grandchildren. These social changes have influenced the frequency and quality of interaction between generations and have altered traditional patterns of care, communication, and emotional exchange.



Ageing is a natural social process accompanied by various physical, psychological, and social changes. As individuals grow older, emotional support, companionship, and meaningful social relationships become increasingly important for maintaining quality of life. The relationship with grandchildren can serve as an important source of emotional satisfaction, reducing loneliness and enhancing the sense of purpose among elderly persons. Research on ageing has shown that strong social networks and supportive family relationships contribute significantly to successful ageing and overall well-being.

In contemporary society, the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is influenced by several factors. While many grandparents continue to play important roles in childcare and cultural transmission, the nature of their involvement has changed. Increased educational pressure, busy lifestyles of parents and children, migration, and the growing influence of digital technology have reduced opportunities for direct interaction. Many elderly persons feel that younger generations have become more occupied with personal goals and digital devices, resulting in decreased family conversations and emotional closeness.

In the context of Manipur, family relationships have traditionally been characterized by strong kinship ties, respect for elders, and collective responsibility. Elderly persons have historically held an important position within families and communities, contributing their wisdom, experience, and cultural knowledge. Grandparents have played important roles in nurturing grandchildren, teaching traditional practices, and maintaining family identity. However, rapid social changes in the state, particularly in urban areas such as Imphal West District, have influenced family dynamics. Expansion of education, employment-related migration, changing lifestyles, and increasing use of technology have brought changes in the way different generations interact with one another.

The concept of **intergenerational relationships** focuses on the connections, exchanges, and interactions between different age groups within a family. These relationships involve emotional closeness, communication, mutual support, caregiving, and the sharing of experiences. Strong intergenerational relationships benefit both generations: elderly persons experience greater happiness, reduced loneliness, and improved quality of life, while grandchildren gain knowledge, guidance, and a deeper understanding of family traditions and values.

In recent decades, rapid social and economic transformations have significantly influenced family structures and patterns of interaction between generations. Urbanization, migration, the increasing prevalence of nuclear families, and the widespread use of digital technology have reshaped the nature of relationships between grandparents and grandchildren. While these changes have created new opportunities for communication, they have also altered the frequency, quality, and emotional depth of intergenerational



interactions. Understanding how these evolving relationships influence the happiness, emotional well-being, and overall quality of life of elderly grandparents is essential. Equally important is exploring older adults' own perceptions of these changes and how they compare present-day family relationships with those of earlier generations. Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to examine the changing dynamics of grandparent-grandchild relationships and their implications for the well-being of the elderly in contemporary society.

Literature Review

Ding (2024), in the study **“The Impact of Grandparents and Intergenerational Living on Children's Social and Emotional Development,”** examined the role of grandparents and intergenerational living arrangements in shaping children's social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural development. The study highlights that increasing life expectancy, changing family structures, and socio-economic factors have enhanced the involvement of grandparents in child-rearing and family life. The findings reveal that grandparents provide emotional support, guidance, security, and cultural knowledge, which contribute positively to children's socialization, self-confidence, empathy, and psychological well-being. Intergenerational living arrangements offer children opportunities for daily interaction, learning, and emotional bonding with older family members. However, the study also identifies challenges associated with multigenerational households, such as conflicts arising from differences in parenting styles, values, and expectations between generations. Ding emphasizes that the impact of grandparents varies according to cultural background, family structure, and socio-economic conditions. The study suggests that effective communication, family support programmes, technological integration, and community-based interventions can strengthen intergenerational relationships. Overall, the research demonstrates the importance of grandparents in maintaining family stability and highlights the significant role of intergenerational bonds in promoting the emotional and social development of younger generations. This study provides valuable insights for understanding changing family dynamics and supports the present research on grandparent-grandchild relationships by emphasizing the importance of emotional attachment and intergenerational interaction.

Becker and Steinbach (2012) examined the relationships between grandparents and grandchildren within the broader family system using data from the German Family Panel (pairfam). The study explored how demographic changes, particularly increased life expectancy, have extended the duration of intergenerational relationships, allowing grandparents to remain actively involved in the lives of their grandchildren for longer periods. The researchers investigated the factors influencing the strength of



grandparent-grandchild relationships and the extent to which grandparents provide support to younger generations in the context of modernization, increased mobility, and work-family pressures. The findings revealed that grandparent-grandchild relationships were influenced more by social resources than by personal resources. In particular, positive relationships between grandparents and parents, grandparents' partnership status, and strong family-oriented values (familialism) significantly strengthened intergenerational ties. The study also found notable regional differences, with stronger grandparent-grandchild relationships observed in Eastern Germany. The authors concluded that supportive family relationships and strong social connections play a crucial role in maintaining meaningful intergenerational bonds despite the challenges posed by social and demographic changes.

Hantrais et al. (2019) examined the relationship between family change, intergenerational relations, and policy implications by highlighting how changing family structures and household patterns influence relationships between generations. The study explains that processes such as urbanization, migration, declining fertility, increased life expectancy, and the transition from extended to nuclear families have transformed traditional patterns of intergenerational support. The authors emphasize that grandparents and grandchildren remain important sources of emotional, social, and practical support despite changes in family arrangements. Intergenerational relationships involve various forms of exchange, including emotional care, financial assistance, knowledge transmission, and caregiving. The study points out that while close intergenerational bonds can enhance social support and well-being among older adults, geographical separation, changing lifestyles, and reduced family interactions may weaken traditional forms of solidarity. The authors also highlight that grandparents often contribute significantly to childcare and value transmission, while grandchildren and younger family members provide companionship and support to older generations. However, changing family dynamics have created challenges in maintaining these relationships, particularly due to migration, employment demands, and the increasing preference for independent living arrangements. The study concludes that strengthening intergenerational relationships requires supportive family practices, community initiatives, and policies that recognize the importance of intergenerational solidarity in promoting the well-being of both older and younger generations.

Objectives:

1. To analyze the relationship between grandparent-grandchild interaction and the happiness, emotional satisfaction, and quality of life of elderly persons.
2. To identify the factors influencing changes in intergenerational relationships, including urbanization, nuclear family patterns, migration, and digital technology.



3. To explore the perceptions of elderly grandparents regarding changes in family relationships compared to earlier generations.

Research Methodology

The present study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the changing dynamics of intergenerational relationships between grandparents and grandchildren in Imphal West District, Manipur. The study aimed to understand the lived experiences, perceptions, emotional bonds, and interaction patterns between elderly grandparents and their grandchildren, along with its influence on the quality of life of elderly persons. The study was conducted among 20 elderly grandparents and their corresponding 20 grandchildren, making a total sample size of 40 participants. The participants were selected through purposive sampling technique to obtain detailed information from individuals who had regular interaction and family connections. Primary data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, focusing on areas such as frequency of interaction, emotional support, companionship, changing family values, experiences of ageing, and perceptions of past and present family relationships.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, where responses were coded and categorized into major themes. The study was guided by the hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between the quality of interaction between grandparents and grandchildren and the quality of life of elderly grandparents. Ethical considerations were maintained by obtaining informed consent from participants and ensuring confidentiality of the information provided.

Thematic Analysis

The major themes that emerged from the study are discussed below:

Theme 1: Emotional Bond and Affection between Grandparents and Grandchildren

One of the strongest themes emerging from the interviews was the presence of a deep emotional bond between grandparents and grandchildren. Grandparents expressed that grandchildren brought happiness, companionship, and emotional satisfaction into their lives. Many elderly participants described their grandchildren as a source of joy and motivation, especially during old age when they experienced reduced social participation and increased feelings of loneliness.

The grandparents who reported frequent interaction with their grandchildren expressed greater emotional well-being and life satisfaction. Spending time together, sharing conversations, celebrating festivals, and participating in family activities strengthened their sense of belonging. Grandchildren also expressed



feelings of love, respect, and attachment towards their grandparents, considering them as sources of guidance, affection, and family history.

A grandparent expressed:

"When my grandchildren sit with me and share their thoughts, I feel young again. Their presence gives me happiness and makes me feel valued in the family."

Thus, emotional closeness emerged as an important factor contributing to the psychological well-being and quality of life of elderly persons.

Theme 2: Grandparents as Sources of Knowledge, Values, and Cultural Transmission

The study revealed that grandparents continue to play an important role in transferring cultural values, traditions, and family history to younger generations. Many grandparents viewed themselves as custodians of traditional knowledge and moral values. They shared stories about their childhood experiences, customs, festivals, traditional practices, and lessons learned throughout their lives.

Grandchildren acknowledged that grandparents provided valuable knowledge that was different from what they learned through formal education or digital platforms. They considered grandparents as sources of wisdom, life experiences, and moral guidance.

Many elderly participants expressed that earlier generations maintained stronger cultural connections because grandparents were actively involved in raising children and teaching family traditions.

One elderly participant stated:

"Earlier, children listened to elders and learned our traditions from us. We used to sit together and share stories. Now children are more connected to phones and the outside world."

This theme highlights the important role of grandparents in maintaining cultural continuity within changing social conditions.

Theme 3: Changing Patterns of Intergenerational Interaction

The study found that the frequency and nature of interaction between grandparents and grandchildren have changed a lot over time. While emotional attachment remains strong, many grandparents perceived a decline in everyday communication compared to the past.



Participants recalled that earlier families were mostly joint families where grandparents, parents, and grandchildren lived together. This arrangement allowed continuous interaction and stronger emotional connections. However, the increasing prevalence of nuclear families has reduced opportunities for regular face-to-face communication.

Grandparents often compared present family life with the "olden days," when elderly persons received greater attention, respect, and care from younger family members.

An elderly respondent shared:

"In our time, grandparents were always surrounded by children and grandchildren. We ate together, talked together, and shared our problems. Today everyone is busy with their own lives."

This theme reflects the impact of social transformation on traditional family relationships.

Theme 4: Influence of Modernization and Digital Technology

Technology emerged as a significant factor influencing grandparent-grandchild relationships. While grandchildren viewed smartphones and digital platforms as useful tools for education, communication, and entertainment, many grandparents felt that excessive use of technology reduced direct interaction within families.

Some grandparents expressed difficulty understanding digital technology and felt excluded when younger family members spent more time on mobile phones. However, some grandchildren reported helping their grandparents learn digital skills, such as using smartphones and video calling.

A grandchild explained:

"Technology sometimes reduces our conversations, but it also helps us stay connected when we are away from our grandparents."

Thus, technology was found to have both positive and negative effects on intergenerational relationships.

Theme 5: Mutual Care and Support between Generations

The findings showed that intergenerational relationships involve reciprocal support between grandparents and grandchildren. Grandparents provided childcare, emotional guidance, and family support, while grandchildren contributed companionship, assistance, and emotional comfort.



Many grandparents mentioned that their grandchildren helped them during illness, assisted them with technology, and provided emotional support. Similarly, grandchildren appreciated the care and sacrifices made by their grandparents.

The relationship was not only based on dependency but also on mutual exchange and emotional connection.

This theme supports the idea that strong intergenerational relationships benefit both younger and older generations.

Theme 6: Loneliness, Neglect, and Emotional Challenges among Elderly

Although many grandparents shared positive experiences, some elderly participants expressed concerns regarding reduced attention and feelings of loneliness. The decrease in family interaction, migration of younger members, and busy lifestyles were identified as factors contributing to emotional distance.

Some grandparents felt that younger generations were less patient and had limited time for conversations. They expressed concern that traditional respect for elders was declining.

However, participants emphasized that emotional neglect was not always intentional but often resulted from changing social and economic circumstances.

Theme 7: Nostalgia for the Past and Perception of Declining Family Values

A noteworthy theme emerging from elderly participants was nostalgia for earlier family life. Many grandparents believed that relationships between generations were stronger in the past because families lived together and followed collective values.

They described the past as a period when elderly persons had greater authority, respect, and involvement in family decision-making. They felt that modernization has brought comfort and opportunities but has also weakened traditional family interactions.

However, grandchildren had a more balanced view. They acknowledged changes in family relationships but believed that love and respect for grandparents continue despite changing lifestyles.

Theme 8: Factors Strengthening Intergenerational Relationships

The study identified several factors that strengthen the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. Regular communication and spending quality time together emerged as the most important elements in fostering emotional closeness and mutual understanding. Respect for one another, along with acceptance of



differences in opinions, values, and lifestyles, further contributed to maintaining harmonious relationships. Participation in family activities, cultural celebrations, and festivals provided opportunities for meaningful interaction and reinforced family bonds. Moreover, the sharing of personal experiences, life lessons, and cherished memories helped preserve family traditions and enhanced emotional connections across generations. Providing emotional support during times of stress or difficulty also played a vital role in strengthening trust, affection, and intergenerational solidarity between grandparents and grandchildren.

Participants emphasized that maintaining interaction and emotional connection is more important than simply living in the same household.

The thematic analysis demonstrates that close and meaningful interaction between grandparents and grandchildren contributes positively to the happiness, emotional security, and quality of life of elderly persons. Although intergenerational relationships have changed due to modernization, migration, and technological influences, affection, respect, and family attachment continue to remain important foundations of intergenerational solidarity in Imphal West District, Manipur. The findings suggest that strengthening communication and shared experiences between generations is essential for promoting healthy ageing and maintaining family cohesion.

Findings, Suggestions and Conclusion

The study found that grandparents who maintained frequent, meaningful, and emotionally supportive interactions with their grandchildren reported higher levels of happiness, emotional satisfaction, and overall quality of life. Positive intergenerational relationships fostered a sense of belonging, purpose, and emotional security among the elderly. At the same time, the findings revealed that traditional grandparent-grandchild relationships have undergone significant changes due to rapid urbanization, the growth of nuclear family structures, migration for education and employment, busy lifestyles, and the increasing use of digital technology. Although these social transformations have reduced opportunities for regular face-to-face interaction, the study found that mutual affection, respect, effective communication, and participation in family gatherings and cultural celebrations continue to strengthen intergenerational relationships and promote family cohesion.

Suggestions

Based on the findings, the study offers the following suggestions:



- Families should encourage regular communication and meaningful interaction between grandparents and grandchildren through visits, shared activities, and family gatherings.
- Grandchildren should be encouraged to spend quality time with their grandparents to strengthen emotional bonds and facilitate the transmission of family values, traditions, and life experiences.
- Community organizations, educational institutions, and local governments should organize intergenerational programmes, cultural events, and recreational activities that promote interaction and mutual understanding between younger and older generations.
- Digital literacy programmes should be provided for older adults to help them use communication technologies effectively and maintain contact with family members living away from home.
- Policymakers should develop family-friendly and elderly-inclusive policies that support intergenerational solidarity and enhance the social participation and well-being of older persons.

Conclusion

The study concludes that intergenerational relationships between grandparents and grandchildren play a vital role in enhancing the happiness, emotional satisfaction, and overall quality of life of elderly persons. Meaningful interactions provide emotional support, strengthen family cohesion, and contribute to healthy and active ageing. Although rapid social changes, including urbanization, migration, nuclear family patterns, and technological advancement, have influenced traditional family relationships, strong emotional bonds can still be maintained through regular communication, mutual respect, and shared family experiences. Strengthening intergenerational relationships is therefore essential not only for improving the well-being of older adults but also for preserving family values, promoting social cohesion, and ensuring continuity between generations in a changing society.

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