

# Children of Migrant Parents Living Under the Care of Grandparents in India

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## Introduction

Parental migration for employment is a growing phenomenon in India, particularly in rural areas where economic opportunities are limited. (Bhagat, R. B. 2011). As parents migrate to cities or even abroad to seek better livelihoods, children are often left behind in the care of their grandparents. This phenomenon raises multiple complex issues, as elderly caregivers assume the responsibility of raising the next generation while managing their own age-related concerns. (Steiner, A. M., & Fletcher, P. C. 2017). This caregiving dynamic creates a distinct set of challenges, from emotional strain to financial burdens, while also presenting opportunities for the preservation of cultural values and intergenerational learning. (Maldonado, L. 2017).

India's cultural fabric traditionally supports extended family structures, where caregiving by grandparents is not uncommon. However, the context of long-term parental migration presents a more intense and prolonged caregiving role for the elderly. (Gangopadhyay, J. 2021). The responsibilities placed on grandparents transcend those of occasional or part-time caregiving and may stretch their physical, emotional, and financial capacities (Odon, B. W. 2002) this paper delves into the various aspects of this caregiving arrangement, examining the challenges and opportunities it presents for both children and their elderly caregivers.

## Challenges Faced by Grandparent Caregivers Emotional Well-Being of Children

Children separated from their parents due to migration face emotional challenges, which can manifest as anxiety, stress, or feelings of abandonment. The absence of parental presence leaves a void in the children's emotional lives, which elderly caregivers, despite their best efforts, might struggle to fill (Rao & Singh, 2016). The lack of immediate emotional support can lead to long-term psychological impacts, including identity confusion and low self-esteem, particularly in children navigating between the traditional values of their grandparents and the modern expectations of society.

1. **Separation Anxiety:** Children often experience anxiety due to the prolonged separation from their parents. This anxiety can manifest in behaviors such as sleep disturbances, difficulties concentrating in school, or increased dependency on caregivers. Lebowitz, E. R., & Omer, H. (2013)
2. **Feelings of Abandonment:** Prolonged absence of parents can foster a sense of abandonment in children. They may believe that their parents' work and migration are prioritized over their own well-being, leading to lower self-worth. (Jackson, M. 2013).
3. **Identity Confusion:** Growing up under the care of grandparents, children may struggle with their sense of identity, caught between traditional values and the more modern influences they encounter through media, school, and peers. (Kornhaber, A. 1995).
4. **Emotional Burden on Grandparents:** While grandparents may be devoted to their grandchildren, their ability to provide emotional support can be hindered by their own aging process and lack of awareness about modern psychological and emotional needs of children.

The emotional well-being of these children is deeply tied to the caregiving practices of their grandparents. (Trute, B. 2003). If grandparents are unable to adapt to the children's emotional needs, the children may suffer in their psychosocial development. This highlights the need for tailored support mechanisms to assist elderly caregivers in addressing the emotional needs of their grandchildren.

### Generational Gap and its Impact

The generational gap between grandparents and grandchildren often presents distinct challenges. Elderly caregivers, rooted in traditional values and practices, may find it difficult to relate to the more modern, globalized outlooks of the younger generation. (North, M. S., & Fiske, S. T. 2015) This gap affects not only their daily interactions but also broader areas such as discipline, education, and the use of technology.

1. **Cultural and Technological Divide:** Grandparents are often products of a different era and cultural background, with limited exposure to technology (Kornhaber, A. 1995). Meanwhile, children today are growing up in a digital world. This disconnect may result in communication barriers, differences in lifestyle preferences, and a lack of alignment in day-to-day activities
2. **Disciplinary Differences:** Grandparents often adhere to traditional notions of discipline and authority, emphasizing respect and obedience, while modern parenting styles are more flexible and focused on negotiation. (Mwangi, M. W. 2020) This can lead to conflicts between the values imparted by grandparents and those taught in school or through peers.
3. **Health and Physical Activity:** Grandparents, due to their age, may struggle to engage in physical activities with their grandchildren, which can impact the quality of their shared experiences (Kornhaber, A., & Woodward, K. L. 2019). For children accustomed to active play, this might create a gap in their social and physical development.

Despite these challenges, the generational gap also provides opportunities for mutual learning. Children often assist their grandparents in navigating new technologies, while grandparents offer valuable lessons in cultural heritage, ethics, and resilience.

### Financial and Logistical Burdens

Grandparents, particularly in rural areas, often face financial constraints when tasked with the additional responsibility of raising grandchildren. Migrant parents may send remittances, but these are not always sufficient to cover the costs of education, healthcare, and other essential needs.

1. **Limited Financial Resources:** Many elderly caregivers live on fixed incomes, such as pensions or small savings, which may not be sufficient to meet the needs of growing children (Disney,

R. 1996). Healthcare Costs: The rising costs of healthcare, particularly for the elderly and their grandchildren, can place a significant financial strain on grandparents (Sharma, 2017).

- 2. Access to Education:** The financial burden of sending grandchildren to school, purchasing educational supplies, and paying for extracurricular activities may be overwhelming for elderly caregivers.
- 3. Logistical Challenges:** Grandparents often face logistical difficulties in managing the day-to-day needs of their grandchildren, such as transportation to school or healthcare facilities, particularly in rural areas where infrastructure is limited (Schneiders, M. L. 2020).

These challenges underscore the need for policies and programs aimed at providing financial support to elderly caregivers and improving access to education and healthcare for children in their care.

### **Educational Support and Challenges**

The academic development of children raised by grandparents is another critical concern. Grandparents may not be familiar with modern educational methods, and their age-related health issues may hinder their ability to provide consistent academic support.

- 1. Technological Gap:** The use of digital learning tools and online education, which has become more prevalent, presents a challenge for many elderly caregivers who may not be familiar with such technologies (Ferri, F., Grifoni, P., & Guzzo, T. 2020).
- 2. Outdated Educational Approaches:** Grandparents may emphasize traditional learning methods, while modern curriculums encourage interactive and technology-driven approaches (Tohit, N. F. M., & Haque, M. 2024). This gap can lead to a disconnect in educational support.
- 3. Health and Energy Constraints:** Elderly caregivers may lack the physical stamina and mental focus to engage actively in their grandchildren's education, which can affect the children's academic performance. (Arpino, B., & Bordone, V. 2014). Despite these challenges, grandparents offer invaluable wisdom, stability, and life experiences that can enrich children's personal and academic growth. Strengthening support systems for these families is essential to ensuring that children receive the educational foundation they need.

### **Discipline and Boundaries**

Setting discipline and boundaries is another area where grandparents face unique challenges. The generational and cultural differences between grandparents and grandchildren often lead to inconsistent disciplinary practices.

- 1. Generational Disciplinary Approaches:** Traditional forms of discipline, such as strict obedience and respect for authority, may not align with contemporary educational approaches that prioritize critical thinking and self-expression (Gidney, C. 2022). This can lead to confusion and behavioral issues in children.
- 2. Cultural Expectations:** Grandparents often enforce traditional values, which may conflict with the more progressive views of their migrant children. (Gu, X. 2022). This can create inconsistencies in rules and expectations for children.
- 3. Emotional Bonding:** Grandparents may struggle to balance the need for discipline with maintaining a nurturing relationship, often resulting in leniency or difficulty enforcing boundaries (Martin, S. 2016).

Addressing these challenges requires open communication between migrant parents and grandparents to ensure a unified approach to discipline and boundary-setting.

## Healthcare and Nutritional Needs

The healthcare needs of children under grandparental care are another significant concern, particularly in rural areas with limited access to medical facilities (Burnette, D., Sun, J., & Sun, F. 2013). Grandparents, often dealing with their own health issues, may find it difficult to provide adequate healthcare for their grandchildren.

1. **Access to Healthcare:** The lack of healthcare facilities in rural areas, coupled with logistical challenges, can result in delayed or inadequate medical care for children (Robinson, L. R. 2017).
2. **Nutritional Challenges:** Financial limitations and limited knowledge of modern nutritional needs can lead to poor diets for children, affecting their physical and cognitive development (Keeley, B., Little, C., & Zuehlke, E. 2019).
3. **Mental Health Concerns:** The emotional and psychological strain on children separated from their parents can have long-term effects on their mental health (Uphold-Carrier, H., & Utz, R. 2012). Elderly caregivers may not have the skills or resources to address these issues effectively.

Providing healthcare education and resources to elderly caregivers, along with improving access to medical facilities, is crucial to ensuring the well-being of both grandparents and grandchildren.

## Conclusion

The caregiving arrangement between grandparents and their grandchildren due to parental migration presents both challenges and opportunities. While grandparents offer invaluable emotional stability, cultural wisdom, and a sense of family continuity, they also face significant physical, emotional, and financial burdens (Cox, C. B. 2000). Addressing the generational gap, emotional well-being, healthcare needs, and educational challenges of children under grandparental care requires a multifaceted approach that includes policy interventions, community support, and enhanced access to resources (Minkler, M. (1999)). By recognizing and supporting these caregiving arrangements, society can better ensure the well-being of both children and their elderly caregivers, fostering stronger family units and resilient communities.

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