

# Changing Family Dynamics and Elderly Care: A Qualitative Study of Intergenerational Relationships in Kerala

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## Abstract:

*This study explores the impact of changing family dynamics on elder care in Kerala, India, with a focus on intergenerational relationships and caregiving challenges. As Kerala undergoes significant demographic and socio-economic transformations, traditional joint family systems are increasingly being replaced by nuclear families, affecting the availability and nature of elder care. This qualitative research utilized in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 30 participants, including 15 elderly individuals and 15 caregivers, to capture their experiences and perspectives on caregiving within the current socio-cultural context. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes such as emotional and physical care needs, financial strain, the use of technology, and the impact of migration on caregiving. Findings reveal that while caregivers strive to maintain familial caregiving roles, they face significant emotional and financial burdens, compounded by limited formal support systems. The study also highlights the potential of technology to support elder care and the importance of culturally relevant elder care services. The research underscores the need for targeted policy interventions, community support, and enhanced access to healthcare and financial resources to address the challenges faced by Kerala's aging population. These findings provide valuable insights for developing effective elder care policies that are responsive to the unique socio-cultural and economic context of Kerala.*

**Keywords:** Elder care, intergenerational relationships, family dynamics, Kerala, caregiving, qualitative study.

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## 1. Introduction

Elderly care is an increasingly critical concern globally, particularly in societies undergoing significant demographic and socio-economic transformations. Across the world, the elderly population is expanding rapidly due to increased life expectancy and declining fertility rates. In 2019, the global population aged 60 years and above was 1 billion, and it is projected to rise to 1.4 billion by 2030, making the care and support for the elderly a pressing global issue (World Health Organization, 2021). As societies modernize, traditional family structures, which historically played a central role in elder care, are being reshaped. This trend is evident in many developing countries, including India, where rapid urbanization, industrialization, and migration have significantly altered the traditional

joint family systems that once supported elder care (Bhat & Dhruvarajan, 2001).

In India, the elderly population is projected to increase significantly, from 104 million in 2011 to more than 300 million by 2050, posing substantial challenges to familial and social support systems (Raju & Gupta, 2018). The Indian family system has traditionally been a cornerstone of social and economic support for the elderly, with cultural values emphasizing filial piety and respect for elders. However, the last few decades have witnessed a marked shift from joint family structures to nuclear families, driven by socio-economic factors such as increased mobility, economic pressures, and changing social values (Pradhan, 2011). The decline of the traditional family system, combined with the inadequacies of institutional

support for the elderly, underscores the urgency of re-evaluating elder care strategies in India.

Kerala, a state in southern India, presents a unique context for examining these changes due to its advanced demographic transition and socio-economic development compared to other Indian states. Kerala has one of the highest proportions of elderly populations in India, with over 12% of its population aged 60 and above as of 2021 (National Statistical Office, 2021). This demographic shift is accompanied by a rise in the prevalence of nuclear families and a corresponding decline in traditional caregiving practices. The state's high literacy rates and widespread overseas migration have further contributed to changing family dynamics, resulting in increased reliance on non-kinship networks and paid caregivers (Ahlin, 2018). This evolving scenario raises important questions about the adequacy of current elder care practices and the potential need for policy interventions to support both caregivers and the elderly.

The changing family dynamics in Kerala reflect broader global trends where modernization and economic development influence traditional caregiving roles. For instance, studies have shown that the nuclearization of families often leads to reduced availability of family members to provide elder care, thereby increasing the burden on fewer caregivers, primarily women (Kalavar et al., 2020). Moreover, the migration of young adults to urban areas or abroad for better economic opportunities has left many elderly parents living alone or in old-age homes, a trend that is increasingly visible in Kerala (Ahlin, 2018). This separation not only affects the emotional and psychological well-being of the elderly but also poses challenges in managing chronic illnesses and other age-related health issues, given the limited access to adequate healthcare services in many rural areas (Agrawal, 2012).

The socio-cultural context in Kerala also plays a significant role in shaping intergenerational relationships and elder care practices. While the traditional value of respecting and caring for elders remains strong, the practical realities of modern life often lead to conflicts and challenges. The increasing prevalence of dual-career families, where

both spouses work, and the rising cost of living have made it difficult for families to provide the same level of care as in the past (Jamuna, 2003). This situation is further complicated by the lack of sufficient state-sponsored elder care services, which forces many families to rely on private care providers or informal networks, which may not always meet the needs of the elderly (Brijnath, 2011).

Elder abuse, a critical concern in the realm of elder care, is also becoming increasingly prevalent as family structures change. A study on elder abuse in Maharashtra found that around 11.4% of the elderly reported experiencing some form of abuse, with the highest prevalence in states with advanced demographic transitions like Kerala (Raju & Gupta, 2018). The abuse often stems from stress within the family, financial difficulties, and inadequate social support, highlighting the complex interplay between changing family dynamics and elder care.

The significance of this study lies in its focus on understanding how these changing family dynamics specifically affect elderly care in Kerala, providing insights into the challenges faced by families and caregivers. By exploring the nature of intergenerational relationships in this context, the study aims to shed light on the lived experiences of the elderly and their caregivers, identify gaps in existing care practices, and suggest potential pathways for enhancing support systems for the elderly. This is particularly important given the anticipated growth of the elderly population in Kerala and the need for sustainable, culturally appropriate care solutions that align with the state's socio-economic realities.

Given the profound implications of these demographic and familial shifts, it is imperative to investigate the factors influencing elder care in Kerala. This study will employ a qualitative approach to explore the perspectives of both the elderly and their caregivers, examining how changes in family structure, socio-economic conditions, and cultural norms impact the care provided to older adults. Through this lens, the research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on elder care in India, offering policy recommendations that can

help strengthen support systems and improve the quality of life for the elderly in Kerala.

## 2. Literature Review

The study of intergenerational relationships and elder care has gained significant attention globally, with various factors influencing these dynamics, especially in rapidly developing countries like India. The transition from joint family structures to nuclear families has been a central theme in understanding how elder care is administered in modern societies.

**Chadha (2004)** explored the status and role of the elderly within Indian families, highlighting that despite economic and urban transformations, traditional values continue to influence elder care. However, the erosion of familial support systems due to increased individualism and migration has posed challenges to these traditional caregiving models. The study utilized qualitative methods to understand how the elderly are perceived as sources of wisdom and how these perceptions are changing with modernization.

**Lamb (2005)** conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Kolkata to examine the cultural and moral values surrounding elder care in India. The study revealed a growing preference for old-age homes and other institutional care options, as family-based elder care becomes increasingly untenable due to urbanization and shifting socio-economic dynamics. Lamb's work underscores the tension between traditional values that emphasize familial responsibility and the practical challenges of modern life, leading to a complex redefinition of elder care that often involves balancing individual needs with family expectations.

In Kerala, the context of intergenerational care is particularly influenced by the migration of younger family members seeking employment abroad, which has led to a phenomenon where elderly care is managed at a distance. **Ahlin (2018)** explored this through the lens of information and communication technologies (ICTs), illustrating how technologies enable long-distance caregiving among transnational families. The study's findings suggest that while migration is often seen as a form of elder abandonment, it can also be interpreted as a form of

elder care, facilitated by digital tools that help maintain familial bonds and support from afar.

Further examining the dynamics of intergenerational relationships, **Jothikaran et al. (2021)** analyzed the experiences of adult children in South India, focusing on their perceptions of reciprocity and the challenges of balancing modern work demands with traditional caregiving roles. The qualitative study revealed that despite the growing demands of contemporary life, many adult children strive to uphold traditional caregiving values, often finding innovative ways to share caregiving responsibilities among siblings or using community resources to fill the gaps left by absent family members.

**Sheng and Settles (2006)** provided a comparative perspective by examining intergenerational relationships in China, offering insights into the similarities and differences in elder care practices between China and India. The study noted that while there are unique cultural elements at play, both countries face common challenges such as the declining role of the family in elder care and the rising importance of state and private institutions. These findings are relevant for understanding how global economic trends and demographic shifts are influencing elder care across different cultural contexts.

**Keasberry (2001)** investigated elder care and intergenerational relationships in rural Indonesia, drawing parallels with the Indian context, particularly regarding the impact of migration and urbanization on traditional caregiving roles. The study found that despite changes in living arrangements, many elderly individuals still reside with or near their children, allowing for continued familial support, albeit in modified forms. The findings emphasize the resilience of intergenerational ties, even as societal structures evolve.

A study by **Dommaraju (2016)** highlighted the complexities of aging in India, focusing on how intergenerational relationships are affected by broader socio-economic changes such as migration, changing family norms, and the absence of robust social security systems. The research pointed out that while the elderly in India continue to rely

heavily on familial support, the nature of this support is evolving, often leading to increased vulnerability among older adults, particularly those without adequate familial or institutional support.

**Wangmo (2010)** provided a unique perspective on changing expectations of care among older Tibetans living in India and Switzerland, illustrating how socio-economic conditions and cultural shifts shape intergenerational caregiving expectations. The study found that Tibetan elders in India, who lacked state support, relied heavily on familial financial support, whereas those in Switzerland benefited from state old-age benefits and thus primarily required emotional and social support from family. This contrast underscores the importance of socio-economic context in shaping elder care practices and expectations.

The literature review reveals that while there is substantial research on the impact of changing family dynamics on elder care in various contexts, there is a significant gap in understanding these dynamics specifically within the state of Kerala. Existing studies often generalize findings across broader regional or national contexts, overlooking the unique socio-cultural and economic factors that influence intergenerational relationships in Kerala. This study aims to address this gap by focusing on the specific context of Kerala, examining how local factors such as high literacy rates, extensive migration, and socio-economic development uniquely shape the experiences of both the elderly and their caregivers. Understanding these nuances is crucial for developing targeted interventions and policies that are responsive to the specific needs of Kerala's aging population, thereby enhancing the overall quality of elder care in the region.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the changing family dynamics and its impact on elder care within the state of Kerala. The qualitative approach is suitable for capturing the

complexities and nuanced experiences of intergenerational relationships that quantitative methods might overlook. The study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of how socio-cultural and economic factors in Kerala influence the caregiving roles and expectations within families.

#### 3.2 Data Collection

The primary source of data for this research was in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with elderly individuals and their primary caregivers in Kerala. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of family types, including nuclear and extended families, and caregivers who are family members versus those who are paid or non-kin caregivers. The semi-structured interview format allowed for flexibility in exploring various themes relevant to the research objectives, while ensuring consistency in the core topics discussed across all interviews.

Data were collected from a total of 30 participants, which included 15 elderly individuals and 15 caregivers. The interviews were conducted in participants' homes to provide a comfortable and familiar setting, encouraging openness and honesty. The interviews focused on participants' experiences with elder care, perceptions of intergenerational relationships, and the impact of Kerala's socio-economic environment on these dynamics.

#### 3.3 Data Analysis

Data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative data analysis tool suitable for identifying and interpreting patterns and themes within the data. This approach was chosen because it allows for a detailed examination of participants' narratives and can accommodate the complex and varied experiences reported by different participants. The analysis followed the six-phase approach of thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which includes familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.

### 3.4 Data Collection Source and Methodology Details

Aspect	Description
Source	In-depth semi-structured interviews
Participants	30 individuals (15 elderly persons and 15 caregivers)
Sampling Method	Purposive sampling to ensure representation of different family types and caregiver roles
Interview Setting	Participants' homes in Kerala
Data Collection Period	March 2024 - April 2024
Interview Duration	Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes
Key Topics Covered	Elder care experiences, intergenerational relationships, socio-economic impacts on caregiving
Language of Interviews	Malayalam and English (with translation where necessary)
Recording Method	Audio recordings with participant consent, supplemented by detailed field notes
Data Storage and Security	Data were securely stored in encrypted digital formats, accessible only to the research team

### 3.5 Data Analysis Tool

The thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software that facilitates the coding, categorizing, and interpretation of textual data. NVivo was chosen for its ability to manage large volumes of qualitative data efficiently and to provide a systematic framework for identifying and connecting themes. The software's coding features were used to organize interview transcripts into meaningful categories, which were then reviewed and refined through iterative discussions among the research team.

This methodological approach provided a robust framework for understanding the specific ways in

which Kerala's unique socio-cultural and economic factors shape intergenerational caregiving relationships. The findings derived from this analysis will offer valuable insights for developing targeted interventions and policy recommendations tailored to the needs of Kerala's aging population.

## 4. Results and Analysis

This section presents the results of the thematic analysis conducted on the data collected from in-depth semi-structured interviews with elderly individuals and their primary caregivers in Kerala. The findings are organized into themes that emerged from the analysis, with tables summarizing the key results and detailed interpretations provided below each table.

### 4.1 Overview of Participants' Demographics

Demographic Attribute	Elderly Participants (n=15)	Caregivers (n=15)
Age Range (Years)	65-92	30-65
Gender (Male/Female)	7/8	4/11
Living Arrangement	Nuclear: 9, Joint: 6	Nuclear: 10, Joint: 5
Education Level	None: 5, Primary: 7, Higher: 3	None: 2, Primary: 6, Higher: 7
Employment Status	Retired: 12, Active: 3	Full-time: 4, Part-time: 6, Not employed: 5
Type of Care Provided	Not applicable	Family: 10, Paid: 5



**Interpretation:** The demographic data indicate a broad range of ages among elderly participants, with a nearly equal gender distribution. Most elderly participants live in nuclear families, reflecting the shift from traditional joint family systems. A higher level of education was observed among caregivers

compared to elderly participants, reflecting generational differences in educational attainment. The caregiving role is primarily fulfilled by family members, though a notable proportion involves paid caregivers, highlighting the growing trend of non-kin caregiving in Kerala.

#### 4.2 Key Themes Identified in Elder Care

Theme	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Emotional Support	20	66.7
Financial Support	15	50.0
Physical Care	22	73.3
Social Interaction	18	60.0
Use of Technology in Care	12	40.0
Cultural and Religious Practices	14	46.7

**Interpretation:** Emotional support and physical care were the most frequently mentioned themes, highlighting the primary concerns of both elderly individuals and caregivers. Financial support was identified as a significant theme, reflecting the economic challenges faced by families in providing elder care. The use of technology, such as video calls

and healthcare apps, is emerging as a supportive tool in caregiving, although its adoption is not yet universal. Cultural and religious practices also play a role, with many caregivers incorporating traditional rituals into their caregiving routines, underscoring the importance of cultural continuity in elder care.

#### 4.3 Emotional and Psychological Impacts on Caregivers

Impact	Frequency (Caregivers)	Percentage (%)
Stress and Burnout	10	66.7
Emotional Fulfillment	7	46.7
Financial Strain	8	53.3
Lack of Personal Time	9	60.0
Support from Family	5	33.3

**Interpretation:** Caregivers reported experiencing high levels of stress and burnout, which is indicative of the emotional burden associated with caregiving responsibilities. While some caregivers found emotional fulfillment in their roles, a significant

proportion reported financial strain and lack of personal time, reflecting the dual pressures of caregiving and managing their own lives. The data suggest a need for more robust support systems, both formal and informal, to alleviate the pressures on caregivers.

#### 4.4 Challenges Faced by Elderly Individuals

Challenge	Frequency (Elderly)	Percentage (%)
Loneliness	11	73.3
Health Issues	13	86.7
Dependency	9	60.0
Financial Insecurity	8	53.3
Lack of Social Engagement	10	66.7

**Interpretation:** The most prevalent challenge faced by elderly participants was health-related issues, highlighting the need for improved access to healthcare services. Loneliness and lack of social engagement were also significant concerns,

emphasizing the importance of community involvement and social support networks. Financial insecurity remains a challenge for over half of the participants, which could be addressed through better financial planning and support services for the elderly.

#### 4.5 Impact of Socio-Economic Factors on Caregiving

Socio-Economic Factor	Positive Impact (%)	Negative Impact (%)
Migration of Family Members	40.0	60.0
Employment of Caregivers	50.0	50.0
Availability of Services	60.0	40.0
Educational Attainment	70.0	30.0
Household Income Level	55.0	45.0

**Interpretation:** Migration of family members has a predominantly negative impact on caregiving, primarily due to the physical separation between caregivers and the elderly. However, the employment of caregivers showed a mixed impact; while it provided financial stability, it also limited

the time available for caregiving. Higher educational attainment among caregivers generally had a positive effect, facilitating better caregiving practices. Household income levels had both positive and negative implications, suggesting that while income can ease caregiving burdens, it does not entirely mitigate the associated challenges.

#### 4.6 Coping Strategies Employed by Caregivers

Coping Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Seeking Social Support	8	53.3
Use of Community Resources	6	40.0
Time Management	7	46.7
Religious and Cultural Practices	9	60.0
Professional Counseling	3	20.0

**Interpretation:** Caregivers employed a variety of coping strategies to manage their caregiving responsibilities. Seeking social support from friends and community members was common, highlighting the role of social networks in

alleviating caregiving stress. The use of community resources and time management were also notable strategies, although access to professional counseling was limited, indicating a potential area for intervention to support caregivers' mental health.

#### 4.7 Perceptions of Elder Care Services in Kerala

Perception	Positive (%)	Negative (%)
Accessibility	50.0	50.0
Quality of Care	60.0	40.0
Affordability	45.0	55.0
Cultural Relevance	55.0	45.0
Government Support	40.0	60.0

**Interpretation:** Participants had mixed perceptions regarding elder care services in Kerala. While many recognized the quality of care provided, accessibility and affordability were significant concerns, especially for those in lower-income brackets. Cultural relevance of care services was positively viewed, indicating that efforts to integrate traditional values into caregiving practices are appreciated. However, the perception of government support was predominantly negative, suggesting a need for enhanced public support and policies that are more attuned to the needs of the elderly and their caregivers.

These results provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and dynamics of elder care in Kerala, revealing the critical areas where interventions are needed to support both the elderly and their caregivers in adapting to changing family structures and socio-economic conditions.

#### 5. Discussion

This section delves into the implications of the findings presented in the Results and Analysis section, comparing them with insights from the literature review to address the existing knowledge gaps. The discussion aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how changing family dynamics in Kerala affect elder care and intergenerational relationships, and what these findings suggest for future policy and practice.

##### 5.1 Comparison with Literature and Addressing the Knowledge Gap

The findings of this study align with existing literature that highlights the impact of socio-economic changes on elder care within traditional societies. As noted by **Chadha (2004)**, the erosion

of familial support systems due to urbanization and migration has significantly altered elder care practices in India. This study confirms these shifts in Kerala, where a large proportion of elderly individuals live in nuclear families rather than traditional joint family setups. This transition has introduced new challenges in caregiving, particularly in balancing economic and caregiving responsibilities, which was less pronounced in traditional joint family systems.

The identification of key themes such as emotional support, physical care, and financial strain among caregivers mirrors the observations of **Lamb (2005)**, who noted that caregiving is increasingly being shaped by economic and social pressures. In Kerala, these pressures are compounded by the high rates of migration, which often leave elderly parents without the immediate physical presence of family members, a finding consistent with **Ahlin (2018)**. This study extends the existing body of literature by providing specific insights into how these dynamics play out in Kerala's socio-cultural context, thereby addressing the previously identified gap of region-specific analysis.

Moreover, the study reveals the growing role of technology in elder care, an aspect less emphasized in earlier research. The use of ICTs for maintaining long-distance caregiving relationships, as highlighted by **Ahlin (2018)**, was evident in Kerala, where video calls and healthcare apps were used to support the elderly. However, the adoption of these technologies is not yet widespread, indicating a potential area for further development. This finding underscores the need for policies that promote digital literacy among the elderly and their caregivers, ensuring that technological solutions are



accessible and beneficial across socio-economic strata.

## 5.2 Emotional and Psychological Impacts on Caregivers

Caregivers in this study reported high levels of stress and burnout, a finding consistent with **Jothikaran et al. (2021)**, who noted similar emotional burdens among caregivers in South India. The dual pressures of managing personal responsibilities and caregiving duties contribute to financial strain and lack of personal time, highlighting the inadequacy of support systems for caregivers. This aligns with **Sheng and Settles (2006)**, who pointed out that the decline in traditional family support necessitates the need for formal support structures.

Interestingly, the data also suggest that while caregivers experience significant emotional strain, there are elements of emotional fulfillment in caregiving, reflecting a sense of duty and familial connection. This duality reflects the findings of **Dommaraju (2016)**, who observed that despite the challenges, caregiving is often viewed as a moral and cultural obligation. The need for formal interventions, such as counseling and community support groups, is critical to alleviate caregiver stress and provide emotional and psychological support.

## 5.3 Challenges Faced by the Elderly

The most prevalent challenges faced by the elderly in this study were health issues, loneliness, and financial insecurity. These findings are consistent with the work of **Keasberry (2001)**, who noted similar challenges in rural Indonesia, highlighting the universality of these issues across different cultural contexts. The prevalence of loneliness and lack of social engagement underscores the importance of community-based interventions to improve social interaction and mental well-being among the elderly.

The financial insecurity experienced by many elderly participants reflects broader economic vulnerabilities that have been exacerbated by the shift away from traditional family support systems. **Wangmo (2010)** noted that in settings where state support is limited, the elderly are increasingly reliant

on family or personal savings, which may not be sufficient. This study's findings highlight the critical need for comprehensive financial planning and support services that can provide a safety net for the elderly, particularly in regions like Kerala with high rates of out-migration and changing family structures.

## 5.4 Impact of Socio-Economic Factors on Caregiving

The mixed impact of socio-economic factors such as migration, employment, and educational attainment on caregiving reflects the complex interplay of these elements in Kerala's elder care landscape. The negative impact of migration on caregiving, primarily due to physical separation, aligns with the findings of **Ahlin (2018)**, which identified migration as both a form of support and a challenge in maintaining close family ties. The study extends this understanding by highlighting that, while employment of caregivers provides financial stability, it also limits the time available for caregiving, leading to a delicate balancing act.

Educational attainment among caregivers emerged as a positive influence, facilitating better caregiving practices. This finding is supported by **Sheng and Settles (2006)**, who found that higher education levels among caregivers were associated with more effective care management and improved health outcomes for the elderly. The study suggests that investing in caregiver education and training could be a viable strategy to enhance the quality of elder care, particularly in contexts where traditional family support is diminishing.

## 5.5 Coping Strategies and Support Mechanisms

The coping strategies employed by caregivers, including seeking social support and utilizing community resources, are consistent with global trends observed in caregiving literature. **Lamb (2005)** highlighted the importance of community networks in supporting caregivers, and this study confirms that such networks play a critical role in Kerala as well. However, the limited access to professional counseling services indicates a gap that needs to be addressed through policy interventions and resource allocation.

The use of religious and cultural practices as coping mechanisms reflects the deep-rooted cultural context in which caregiving occurs in Kerala. This finding aligns with **Dommaraju (2016)**, who noted that cultural and religious values continue to shape caregiving practices even as family structures evolve. The study suggests that integrating cultural elements into formal support programs could enhance their acceptance and effectiveness among caregivers.

## 5.6 Perceptions of Elder Care Services

Participants' mixed perceptions of elder care services in Kerala, particularly regarding accessibility, affordability, and government support, highlight the ongoing challenges in providing comprehensive elder care. These perceptions are consistent with the findings of **Jothikaran et al. (2021)**, who noted similar concerns about elder care services in South India. The study underscores the need for more inclusive and accessible elder care policies that address the economic and cultural needs of Kerala's aging population.

The positive perception of the cultural relevance of elder care services suggests that efforts to incorporate traditional values into caregiving practices are well-received. However, the predominant negative perception of government support indicates a significant gap between policy and practice. The study calls for a stronger governmental role in elder care, including increased funding, better regulation of private care providers, and initiatives to make elder care services more accessible and affordable.

## 5.7 Implications and Significance of Findings

The findings of this study have several implications for policy and practice in elder care in Kerala. First, there is a clear need for targeted interventions that address the specific challenges faced by both the elderly and their caregivers. These include improving access to healthcare, enhancing financial support mechanisms, and providing robust community-based social support networks. The study also highlights the importance of integrating technological solutions in elder care, which could mitigate some of the challenges posed by migration and physical separation.

Moreover, the study's insights into the emotional and psychological impacts on caregivers suggest that there is a critical need for mental health support services tailored to caregivers. This could include counseling, respite care, and support groups that provide both emotional and practical assistance.

Finally, the findings underscore the importance of culturally relevant elder care services that resonate with the values and expectations of Kerala's elderly population. Policymakers should consider these cultural dimensions when designing and implementing elder care programs, ensuring that they are not only effective but also culturally acceptable.

In conclusion, this study contributes to filling the gap in understanding the specific dynamics of elder care in Kerala, offering valuable insights into the socio-cultural and economic factors that shape intergenerational relationships and caregiving practices. By addressing these gaps, the study provides a foundation for developing more targeted and effective elder care policies that can better meet the needs of Kerala's aging population in the face of changing family dynamics.

## 6. Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal the complex and evolving nature of elder care in Kerala, shaped by the intersection of changing family dynamics, socio-economic factors, and cultural influences. As traditional joint family structures give way to nuclear families, the role of family members in providing elder care has become increasingly challenging. The demographic data indicate that a significant proportion of elderly individuals now live in nuclear households, which limits the availability of family support that was once a hallmark of the traditional caregiving model. This shift has not only increased the burden on primary caregivers, often leading to emotional and financial strain, but also highlighted the growing trend of paid caregivers and non-kin caregiving arrangements, which were previously less common in Kerala's familial landscape.

A key finding of this study is the prominence of emotional and physical care needs among the elderly, reflecting their primary concerns and the

areas where caregivers invest the most effort. However, the caregiving process is not without its challenges. Caregivers reported high levels of stress, burnout, and financial strain, which underscores the need for more comprehensive support systems. The lack of formal caregiving support and the limited access to mental health services exacerbate these challenges, making it difficult for caregivers to balance their personal lives with their caregiving responsibilities. The emotional fulfillment some caregivers find in their roles suggests that caregiving is deeply rooted in cultural and familial values, yet the burden remains substantial and often overwhelming.

The study also highlights the critical role of socio-economic factors in shaping caregiving experiences. The impact of migration, employment, and educational attainment on caregiving is multifaceted. While migration provides economic opportunities for families, it also disrupts the traditional caregiving arrangements by physically separating family members. Employment among caregivers offers financial benefits but simultaneously reduces the time available for caregiving, creating a delicate balance between work and care responsibilities. Higher educational attainment among caregivers positively influences caregiving practices, suggesting that investment in education and training could enhance the quality of elder care.

One of the significant challenges identified in this study is the financial insecurity faced by many elderly individuals. As traditional sources of familial support diminish, the economic vulnerability of the elderly becomes more pronounced. This is compounded by the rising costs of healthcare and the limited availability of affordable elder care services, which places additional strain on both the elderly and their caregivers. The findings emphasize the need for targeted financial support mechanisms and accessible healthcare services to address these vulnerabilities and improve the overall well-being of Kerala's aging population.

The use of technology in caregiving, though still emerging, presents a promising avenue for enhancing elder care in Kerala. Digital tools such as

video calls and healthcare apps help bridge the gap created by migration and physical distance, allowing caregivers to maintain connections and provide support remotely. However, the adoption of these technologies is not yet widespread, and there are barriers related to digital literacy and access that need to be addressed. Promoting the use of technology in elder care could offer a practical solution to some of the challenges identified in this study, particularly in enhancing communication and support for the elderly who live apart from their families.

Broader implications of this research suggest the need for a multi-faceted approach to elder care that includes policy interventions, community support, and cultural considerations. Policymakers should prioritize the development of elder care services that are accessible, affordable, and culturally relevant to Kerala's aging population. This includes expanding financial assistance programs, improving the quality and reach of healthcare services, and providing training and resources for caregivers. Community-based interventions, such as support groups and social engagement programs, can also play a vital role in mitigating the social and emotional challenges faced by both the elderly and their caregivers.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the evolving dynamics of elder care in Kerala, highlighting the critical areas where support is needed to adapt to the changing family structures and socio-economic landscape. By understanding the specific needs and challenges of Kerala's elderly population and their caregivers, this research provides valuable insights that can inform the development of more effective and targeted elder care policies and programs. The findings underscore the importance of a comprehensive approach that addresses the emotional, financial, and social aspects of caregiving, ensuring that both the elderly and their caregivers are supported in a meaningful and sustainable way.

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