

AGING, GENDER AND POVERTY: THE CASE OF A SLUM IN BANGALORE

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This paper attempts to analyse the relationship between aging and gender relations in a slum in Koramangala, in Bangalore, which is deeply influenced by poverty, the phenomenon of globalisation and the changed social relations that accompany these factors. The paper makes the argument that while aging is influenced by gender, usually negatively, certain other factors like health and modified social relations bring other influences to the experience of aging. Hence, while patriarchal structures in the slum remain oppressive, the role a particular woman may play in this structure can change with age, owing to factors such as poverty and her role in the family.

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Introduction

Studies on the relationship between ageing and gender relations typically focus on comparing the condition of elderly women with that of elderly men. Ginn and Arber, for example, examining inequalities in personal income, come to the conclusion that older women, in comparison to older men face a more severe disadvantage.¹ This approach is also prevalent when explaining other disadvantages faced by older women including the economic disadvantages and social exclusion caused by widowhood, a problem not usually faced by older men.²

While there is little doubt that there are differences in the conditions of elderly men and elderly women, there is a view emerging that such an approach does not capture the totality of the experiences of the elderly women. Even as it reveals the problems faced by older women, such analysis has obscured both the heterogeneity of older women as well as the advantages and sources of strength that arise from being “old and female”, such as the changed social status arising from the role played by the mother-in-law in a family.

If, as Gibson argues, the condition of elderly women is “continuous with and contingent upon a lifetime of disadvantage”³, there is a need for a less phalocentric analysis of women in old age, relying less on men as a relational category. This paper tries to understand the conditions faced by elderly women by focusing on how gender relations change with age. The focus is thus on gender relations faced by women in different age groups rather than a direct comparison between aged men and women.

¹ J. Ginn et al., *Gender, Class and Income Inequalities in Later Life*, 42(3) BRIT. J.L. OF SOC. 393, 369-96 (1991).

² See, T. Cleaveland, *Reproducing Culture and Society: Women and the Politics of Gender, Age and Social Rank in Walata*, 34 CAN. J.L. AFR. STUD. 2, 192, 189-217 (2000).

³ D. Gibson, *Broken Down By Age and Gender: The Problem of Old Women' Redefined*, 10 GENDER & SOC'Y 4, 436, 433-448 (1996).

As gender relations change with age they are also influenced by a number of other social and economic factors. The impact of age on women with adequate economic means, for example, could well be very different from that on women living in absolute poverty. To capture the impact of age then it is important to minimise the influence of other factors on women of different ages. This can be achieved, to some degree, by removing the variations in the social and economic factors. Conducting the study in a relatively homogenous social and economic milieu would ensure the impact of these factors would be largely even on all age groups.

The choice of such a milieu for this study has been influenced by two contemporary considerations: poverty and globalisation. Over the last decade, much of the attention on Bangalore as a city has been due to its growing software sector. Among the areas of the city that has benefited from this particular tryst with globalisation has been Koramangala. The area possesses new infrastructure such as the 'ring road' and popular teenage hangouts like shopping malls, coffee shops and also two of Bangalore's most prominent colleges. In the midst of this prosperity is the LR Nagar slum. This study looks at the relationship between age and gender in the LR Nagar slum in the heart of Bangalore's Information Technology success.

Methodology

Information on gender relations is invariably influenced by the perceptions of the persons being interviewed. Perceptions of domestic violence or the mobility of a woman would tend to be very different depending on whether we are talking to men or women. Since the focus of this study is on women of different age groups, it was decided to look at gender relations from the perception of women alone. The sensitive nature of some of the dimensions of gender relations also meant some amount of time had to be spent with the respondents to generate reliable information. Some familiarity was built with the residents of the slum during fieldwork in 2005, which also provided a broad picture of conditions in the slum. I

returned to the slum in 2006 to collect data through in depth interviews with 100 women of different age groups. The interview began with a structured questionnaire and went on to a detailed personal interaction which provided qualitative information.

At the same time, the 100 women could be considered representative of women in the slum as a whole as they belonged to all ages and were spread across the 34 cross roads that constitute LR Nagar slum. A degree of randomness was introduced into this coverage by interviewing an occupant from every fifth house of the slum. One cross road in the slum was, however, left out. The inhabitants of the road belonged to the transsexual community and did not wish to take part in the study. The questions relating to mobility and domestic violence were asked in specific time frames of the last week, month and year, in order to limit recall bias. The data that was generated thus allowed for both a quantitative analysis as well as case studies that captured the complexity of gender relations. The qualitative as well as the quantitative data focused on six specific indicators of the nature of gender relations.

First, *employment or the ability to be employed outside the home* is considered to be a primary indicator of equality. This is due to the consequent lowering of the woman's dependence on the men in the family.⁴ This study examines the ability of women in the slum to gain market employment by gauging the percentage of women engaged in market labour and examining the kinds of jobs taken up by them.

Second, the *division of labour within the home*, is critical because research indicates that even in cases where there is acceptance of women employed in the labour force, male involvement in domestic labour is not accepted.⁵ This

⁴ J. Baxter and E.W Kane, *Dependence and Independence: A Cross National Analysis of Gender Inequality and Gender Attitudes*, 9 GENDER & SOC'Y 2, 194, 193-215 (1995).

⁵ E. Kane *et al.*, *Family Status and Criticism of Gender Inequality at Home and at Work*, 72 SOCIAL FORCES 4, 1079, 1079-1102 (1994). See also T.M. Calasanti and C.A. Bailey, *Gender Inequality and the Division of Household Labour in the United States and Sweden: A Socialist Feminist Approach*, 38 SOCIAL PROBS. 1, 34, 34-53 (1991).

unequal division of labour remains an indicator across different cultural milieus.⁶ In order to understand the level of involvement of men in domestic labour, this study isolates certain occupations traditionally defined as “female” and examines the number of men involved in these activities.

Third, *woman's contribution to family resources* does increase her influence in the family. This has been attributed to the greater options that the woman has both within and out of her marriage that correspond to her financial status.⁷

Fourth, *woman's control over family resources*, often influences her role in other decisions made in her family.⁸ This indicator is quite different from a woman's contribution to family resources, as she may have, at one extreme, no control over her own income and, at the other end, have a degree of control over family income even when she does not work outside the home. The degree of control in this study is measured by the percentage of family income a woman can spend without permission from any other member of her family.

Fifth, a *woman's experiences with domestic violence* provide a brutal indicator of the degree of control over her life. Domestic violence has been explained as being caused by low feelings of control on the part of the perpetrator.⁹ This is often caused by an inability to accept more equal control over the family and a need to re-establish gender dominance.

Sixth and last, the *restrictions placed on women's mobility*. Restraints on mobility, especially in third world countries serve as an indicator of gender relations as enforced both by the family as well as by societal pressures.¹⁰ In this study, the

⁶ See generally, In-Sook Lim, *Korean Immigrant Women's Challenge to Gender Inequality at Home: The Interplay of Economic Resources, Gender and Family*, 11 GENDER & SOC'Y 1, 31-51 (1997).

⁷ *Equity and Development: The World Bank Report, 2006* (New York: The World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2005) at 53. (Hereinafter “Equity and Development”)

⁸ *Ibid* at 54.

⁹ W.J. Goode, *Force and Violence in the Family*, 33 J.L. OF MARR. & FAM. 4, 627, 624-636 (1997). See also, D. Umberson et al., *Domestic Violence, Personal Control and Gender*, 60 J.L. OF MARR. & FAM 2, 442, 442-452 (1998).

¹⁰ *Equity and Development*, *supra* note 7 at 52.

restraints on mobility are measured through the distance women can move without the permission of other members of their family.

The LR Nagar Slum

The slum consists of 34 lines. Each of these lines is termed a 'cross'. There is one main road. The first few lines have covered drains and tarred roads. The rest are made up of mud roads and are flanked on either side by open drains. These cross roads are between ten and fifteen feet wide. There are two main types of houses in this slum. There are the authorised constructions and those that are unauthorised.

The unauthorised constructions are found in a bunch on the first cross. These unauthorised constructions are on an average small, mostly consisting of one room with thatched walls and sheet roofs. Often, they do not open directly onto the road and one has to pass two or three other homes through a foot wide passage, which doubles up as a drain, to reach them. Anthonyamma is a twenty-eight year old mother of three who lives in one of these houses. The house consists of one room, with thatched walls and an aluminium sheet for a roof. They have no toilet and no water connection. The rent on one of these shacks, her neighbour informs me, can be anywhere between Rs. 300 and Rs. 500 per month and is collected by a local delinquent

A police officer who mans the armed outpost within the slum describes LR Nagar as a 'problem area'. There are a large number of cases of rivalries between local 'gangs' leading to violent crimes. Fights are common and homicides are frequently registered within the slum. The officer points out, though, that cases of domestic violence are rarely reported. Also, according to the officer, owing to the all round weak financial situation of the residents of the slum dowry deaths are extremely rare. Urban dowry, he points out, is a largely 'middle class' practice and is not prevalent amongst the lower economic strata of urban society.

The slum is a multi-religious area with prominent Muslim, Christian and Hindu populations. The majority of the slum, 61 percent in our sample, was Hindu. The Hindu population belonged almost entirely to the Scheduled Castes, as all the persons interviewed belonged to these castes. Muslims constitute 19 percent of the slum and Christians 20 percent. There is a concentration of the Muslim population around the mosque in the slum. There is also a government Urdu primary school for the children of this community in the slum. The Christian and Hindu populations are spread evenly across the slum.

Primary education is a priority for the residents of the slum. Many of them send their children, both male and female to primary school. Free schooling is available in the form of government primary schools. Boys are rarely sent to these government schools as the medium of education is Kannada. The boys are more often sent to English-medium 'private' schools. A high premium is placed on knowledge of English, which many parents feel will help them in obtaining a better paying job later in life. This involves a huge sacrifice by the parents as these schools can cost between Rs. 4000 and Rs. 5000 a year, including a yearly "donation" the parents are expected to make.

For the girls, primary school is used as a form of day-care for working mothers or a way to keep them out of the house for a few hours. They are usually sent to the government school, which is free. As soon as the girl is old enough to work, she is usually pulled out of school. Higher secondary education for them is very uncommon. For boys, higher secondary education is possible

provided the family can afford it and if the boy shows some aptitude for it. If they cannot, and the boy shows no aptitude, the boy drops out of school and gets a job as well.

Poverty in the slum is evident both in the income earned as well as the access to basic amenities. When considering the degree of poverty an individual faces we must remember that this is influenced not just by the money she directly earns but also by the earning of the family as a whole. As such it was important to take the family into account when measuring poverty. This was done, for the purpose of measuring poverty, by looking at the income of the family as a whole. A dollar-a-day poverty line for a family would then be a dollar (or Rs. 45) multiplied by the number of members of the family. When calculated in this way 89 percent of the families in the slum fell below the dollar a day poverty line.

If we go on to define extreme poverty as earning less than Rs. 10 (approx 22 cents) per family member per day, 16 percent of the families in the slum fell into this category. The Muslims are the most disadvantaged with 93.75 percent of the Muslim families of the slum falling below the dollar a day line and 21.05 percent of these families living below the Rs. 10 a day mark. In comparison, 88.52 percent of the Hindu families fall below the dollar a day poverty line with 14.75 percent falling below the Rs. 10 a day line. 80 percent of the Christian families falls below the dollar a day line with 10 percent below the Rs. 10 per day poverty line.

Six Indications of Gender Inequality

The fact that an overwhelming majority of the slum is poor and a significant number live under conditions of extreme poverty is reflected in their access to basic amenities. 90 percent of the slum does not have access to water at home. Out of these households, 53 percent have no water connection at home while 37 percent have a dysfunctional water connection. While 57 percent have toilets in their homes, a majority of these are dysfunctional owing to the absence of a water supply. Often, residents of the slum who have borewells, sell water to other residents at 50 paise per pot. This water, though, can be used only for domestic purposes such as cleaning and bathing. It is not fit for drinking. Drinking

water, for the majority of residents, has to be fetched from a tap in Viveknagar, a neighbourhood 2 Km away, on a cycle. This cycle needs to be hired by the family at the rate of Rs 5 for one trip. 90 percent of the slum lives under roofs constructed with either tatch or tin sheets with only 10 percent able to afford a Reinforced Cement Concrete roof over their heads. It is under these conditions of overwhelming poverty that we have to look at our six indicators of gender inequality.

Employment or the Ability to be Employed Outside the Home

A majority of the women in the slum do not meet the criteria of being able to work outside the home, with only a third of the women being employed outside the home. The occupational profile of women also indicates a preference for work that allows the woman to spend more time at home. The occupational profile of men and women was sharply different in the slum. The men were employed in the construction industry, transport and security services. The women were predominantly employed as domestic help, with some presence in private services, petty shops and the garment industry.

Table 1: Employment Profile of Women Living in the LR Nagar Slum

| Occupation | Percentage of Employed Women |
|---------------------|------------------------------|
| Private Services | 12.12 |
| Domestic help | 66.67 |
| Petty Shop | 6.06 |
| Government Employee | 3.03 |
| Construction | 3.03 |
| Manufacturing | 6.06 |
| Transport | 0.00 |

The women's occupation profile may have underestimated a few occupations such as women construction labourers as they may have been at work even in the afternoons when the interviews were conducted. Domestic help on the other hand were generally available during the afternoons. But conversations with women in the slum in general did not suggest that the profile the data generated was fundamentally off the mark.

And women themselves did not consider working outside the home to be a preferred option. Several women cited poverty as a reason for working. Anthonyamma, a twenty-eight year old Christian mother of three school-going children works as domestic help. She has to return home by one in the afternoon failing which she is subjected to abuse both verbal and physical. Her earnings are the only steady income the family has. Her husband, a freelance wall painter rarely goes to work. The family is therefore entirely dependent on her income of Rs.1000 per month, using it to pay school fees as well as to buy rations and other such necessities. Her husband cannot afford to stop her from working outside the house.

However, even overwhelming poverty does not mean that the other two-thirds of the women in the slum are able to work. Social restraints often prevent them from doing so. In cases where the husband has a regular job, he may prevent his wife from working outside the house. In some cases, even when the husband's income is not sufficient they prefer their mothers working to having to send their wives outside the home. Shanti is a twenty-one year old housewife who did not leave the house for any purpose. Even though she has no children, she is not permitted to leave the house and seek employment outside the home. Her husband, who is twenty-five, works as a dog-catcher for the Bangalore Corporation and earns a regular income of Rs. 2000 per month. In order to supplement this income, his mother works as a sweeper earning a further income of around Rs. 1500 a month. Shanti is not called upon to manage the affairs of the house in any way. Nevertheless, she is prevented from working outside the house. She points out that her having to work would be considered by her family as a sign of hardship rather than any form of control. There is therefore a delicate balance worked out by individual families between financial challenges thrown up by poverty and the need to preserve the social order they desire.

Table 2: Percentage of Women Employed in Each Age Group

| Age Group | Percentage |
|--------------|--------------|
| Less than 25 | 33.33 |
| 25 to 50 | 32.00 |
| 50 and above | 34.78 |
| Total | 33.00 |

With age, this percentage of women working remains more or less constant. A possible explanation for this lies in the changing social factors that affect the ability of women to seek employment. As a woman in the slum ages, the need for isolation from the rest of the population decreases, as this isolation is often enforced by the older women of the slum. Maryvincy, a twenty-one year old Christian housewife lives with her mother-in-law, husband and two children. As she is the only member of the family who stays at home, she 'manages' the affairs of the house. When asked whether she was free to do so as she chose, she said that she did run the decisions she made by her mother-in-law. When asked whether she left the house, she said that she did not leave the house at all and that her mother in law handled the shopping and other such matters. Her mother-in-law, she says, would not like her to leave the house as she was still "very young" and it would not "seem right". Hence, the role of the mother-in-law in the family extends to enforcing restrictions on younger women seeking employment outside the home.

As was seen earlier, men are often more comfortable with their mothers working rather than their wives. However, other factors like poor health tend to balance out this increased freedom of sorts, keeping the percentage of women working constant. For Lakshamma, a sixty five year old woman, the question as to whether she requires permission to work brings out cackles of laughter. "Who is there to tell me what to do? You tell me that, do you see anyone around who can tell me what to do?" she demands. For her, the main factor preventing her from working is poor health. She works as domestic help as and when she is able to do work. Her ailment has prevented her from holding a regular job for more than a decade now.

Division of Labour within the Home

Our second indicator, the division of labour within the home provides an interesting example of how different gender biases can come into conflict with each other. The woman was generally expected to do all the household chores. This was the case even with women who went out to work. Forty-five year old Pavitra works as a garbage collector earning Rs. 50 per day. Her unmarried son works as a barbender earning around Rs. 60 per day. He however does not contribute to the maintenance of the house making her the sole breadwinner of the family as her husband is unemployed. In addition to scouring dustbins, she has to perform all the tasks at home including cooking, cleaning, shopping and the paying of bills. She is subjected to physical abuse almost every day from her husband and does not dare to suggest that he help with the housework such as shopping or cleaning, though it would certainly ease the burden on her.

There are however times when the same gender bias that insists fetching water is a woman's job comes up against the gender bias against women going out of the house on their own over long distances. Fetching water, for example, is treated as a woman's job as long as the source of the water is nearby, that is to say, within the slum. When the source of water is outside the slum, the unwillingness to allow the woman to go out on her own gains prominence. Selvi is a twenty-one year old Hindu housewife. She lives with her husband and three-year-old son. The water has to be fetched on a cycle from a nearby neighbourhood. Her husband therefore performs this task most of the time. She does it too but less often than he does.

For forty-two year old Rehana, a Muslim housewife, this job is given to her nineteen-year-old son who also works as a car mechanic. While she and her daughters do all the other housework, this task is by necessity given to her son despite the fact that he holds a full time job. As Rehana points out, if it weren't for this arrangement, they would have to buy drinking water, an option that was economically unviable. In 33.33 percent of the households, water was fetched by a male member of the family. This however cannot be taken as an indicator into the division of household work as in the cases where the source of water is far away, fetching water which is traditionally termed as "household work" ceases to be considered as such.

While age *per se* does not significantly affect this division of household labour, the changing roles that older women play might have some impact on this division. In-Sook Lim, discussing the gender inequalities faced by Korean women, argues that often, mothers-in-law decide the division of household labour. Constrained by notions of 'women's work', these mothers-in-law, in cases where the daughter-in-law is unable to do housework would rather do the work themselves than assign it to any male member of the family.¹¹

This mode of thinking can be found in the slum as well. Mothers-in-law do take on large parts of the housework when daughters-in-law are unable to do so, provided that they are able to do the work themselves. Ruksar, a twenty-two year old Muslim housewife has two children under the age of three. Owing to the care the children require, Ruksar is unable to run the household. Her mother-in-law therefore handles shopping and other such transactions needed for the running of the house, which she is unable to do. Her husband does not participate in the running of the house at all.

This is a pattern which is repeated across religions. The change that comes with age and the status of the mother in law is that household work is usually done largely by the daughter in law, leading therefore to a reduction of the work itself. It is only in cases where the established patriarchal norm is challenged that the mother-in-law takes on a substantial amount of household labour. Hence while the division of household labour if examined as between male and female members of the family does not significantly with age, the division of labour between younger and older women in the family does, owing to the social status of the mother in law, with older women having a greater say in the role they are to play in the division of domestic labour.

Contribution to Family Resources

One indicator where the influence of age stands out quite clearly is in the contribution to family resources. In keeping with the percentage of women

¹¹ In-Sook Lim, *supra* note 6 at 44.

working outside the home only 31 percent of the women interviewed contributed in some part to the income of the family. And out of those who contribute, only 7 percent contributed more than 50 percent of the household resources. But what is interesting as that as age increases the number of women contributing more than fifty percent of family income increases. No woman under the age of 25 contributes more than 50 percent of family income and six percent of the women between 25 and 50 contribute more than 50 percent of family income.

Table 3: Age and Contribution of Self-Income to Family Income¹²

| Proportion of Self Income in Family Income (%) | Under 25 Age Group | Between 25 and 50 Age Group | Above 50 Age Group | Total |
|--|--------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|-------|
| Zero | 70.37 | 70.00 | 60.37 | 68.00 |
| Zero to 50 | 29.63 | 24.00 | 17.39 | 24.00 |
| Above 50 | 0.00 | 6.00 | 17.39 | 7.00 |

The telling factor is that more than 17 percent of women above 50 are the main breadwinners of their families. Furthermore, the percentage of women contributing nothing to the family's income also decreases from 70 percent to close to 60 percent through the three age groups. This is due to the fact that mothers-in-law often take on the burden of supporting the family. Also, as the men of the family, as was seen in the employment profile, are largely employed in the construction and transport sectors, which require a large physical strength, they are therefore unable to continue in it beyond a certain age whereas the wives, employed in the domestic help sector are able to continue for longer making the family increasingly dependent on her income.

¹² It may be noted that the total percentage mentioned in each of the tables need not add up to a hundred as women who chose not to respond to this particular question, or did not wish their answers to be recorded, have not been included, while the total remains the total number of interviewees.

Control over Family Resources

On the face of it, the data on control over family resources throws up a surprising picture of gender equality. Women in the slum have a greater control over family resources than is warranted purely in terms of the income they earn. If we measure control as being the percentage of household resources a woman spends without the permission of the husband or any other member of the family, 80 percent of the women of the slum control some part of the household income while 47.37 percent control more than half the family income. This means that nearly half the women in the slum control more than fifty percent of the income of their household. This is well above the number of women, 7 percent to be precise, contributing more than 50 percent to their family's income. The figure of 80 percent, controlling some part of the income of their households vastly exceeds the 32 percent that contribute to these household resources.

This picture of equality however masks a much more painful reality. For some families, maintaining this control over the resources of the family can involve a constant struggle. The methods used can range from lying about the quantity of income earned to physical struggles. In the case of Sandra Rani, a twenty-eight year old Christian mother of three, her husband, an unemployed painter, who drinks heavily, does not know the exact amount of her income. With her Rs. 1000 per month income she manages to pay school fees as well as run the house. Her husband demands money from her almost every day, a demand that she resists by lying about the amount she gets paid. This does not work at all times though. The previous night, her husband, irked by her refusal to give him money had beaten her up. She had to then give him a small amount, but still resisted giving him any more. In her family, maintaining control over her income involves a constant struggle, which at times turns violent.

In cases where the wife does not earn her own income, this struggle for control takes on different forms, which range from open fights to lying about spending. Ratamma, a thirty-two year old mother of three, feels that her husband should hand over more of his income to her, as she handles the buying of what

her children need. This leads to fights between them that at times results in physical violence being used on her. Most of the time, her husband does hand over a part of his income.

Table 4: Age and Control of Family Income in the LR Nagar Slum

| Proportion of Income over which Control is Exercised (%) | Under 25 Age Group | Between 25 and 50 Age Group | Above 50 Age Group | Total |
|--|--------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|-------|
| Zero | 28.00 | 3.00 | 15.00 | 14.74 |
| Zero to 50 | 36.00 | 36.00 | 20.00 | 32.63 |
| Above 50 | 32.00 | 48.00 | 65.00 | 47.37 |

The extent to which the overall picture hides the functioning of a patriarchal relationship becomes evident once we bring age into the picture. With age, the struggle for control changes leading to a greater percentage of women controlling more than 50 percent of the income of the family. More than 65 percent of women over 50 control more than 50 percent of the resources of the family. There are several reasons for this trend. The percentage of women in this age group contributing more than 50 percent of the family income is the maximum leading to some of them having a proportionate amount of control over family spending.

More important, this pattern points to the position of the mother-in-law and her control over the family. Most of the women who were over 50 years old were mothers-in-law. This position provided them control over finances as the son often gave his income to his mother, a practice that continued after marriage. This factor also accounts for the relatively high percentage of women below 25 having no control over family spending. This control in most of these cases rests with the mother-in-law, who is usually in the above 50 age group.

This throws up another role of the aged woman in the slum, namely that of a possible enforcer of patriarchal norms. This role is not reflected in the comparison between aged men and women but is highlighted in the comparison

between women of different age groups. Chandrika is a twenty five year old Hindu housewife. Her mother-in-law, aged around fifty-three does not work. Chandrika's husband works as a watchman earning Rs. 2000 per month. He gives this entire sum to his mother who makes decisions related to the spending of the house. These decisions are not questioned by any member of the family and the mother-in-law enjoys full control over these finances. For Rehana, a twenty-two year old Muslim housewife, the situation at home is similar. Her twenty-six year old husband runs a spare parts shop and earns between Rs. 2000 - Rs. 3000 per month. He gives the entire amount to his fifty-two year old mother, who again handles it. She makes all the decisions relating to this money including decisions related to small investments. She enjoys complete control over her son's salary, which forms the entirety of the family's income.

Experiences with Domestic Violence

Domestic violence serves as an indicator of inequality in two ways. Firstly, the very presence of violent abuse of women indicates coercive gender relations. Secondly, the way in which domestic violence is perceived by the victims lends a further insight into the entrenched nature of these coercive gender relations.

Around 35.79 percent of the women in the slum have at some point in their lives been subjected to domestic violence. These figures in general may be an understatement of the actual state of affairs. A prominent reason for this is social pressure to keep the subject under wraps. Jayamma is a forty-five year old Hindu housewife who works as domestic help to support her family of five. When she was about to discuss the issue of domestic violence, two other women, who had until then been standing on the side intervened and asked her to be quiet. "You have no problems" they said to her, and followed it up with a "she has no problems" addressed to this writer, who was then forced to leave it at that.

Also, in cases where they have been widowed for a considerable period, women are unwilling to discuss past abuse. Suryamma, a seventy-year-old widow acknowledges that she has been beaten in the past by her husband. She however refuses to let me write it down saying, "It happens in every house, there is nothing

unusual to take down". Her husband has been dead for forty years, and while she does not appear in any way to be unwilling to talk about him, she draws the line at allowing a stranger to take down what she thinks might insult his memory. Her case is therefore not reflected in the figures and is taken as "no response".

When asked for what they thought the causes of the violence were, 58.82 percent of the women blamed it on the husband's alcoholism. A further 23.53 percent cited control over money as the main 'cause' for this violence. Not one woman saw the existence of violence to be a problem in itself. Most of them believed that if their stated cause of the violence were to be removed, the violence would cease. Some respondents further stated that the violence was 'just' or even 'deserved'. Ludviga, a thirty-three year old Christian mother of three admitted, off the record, that she is beaten as many as two times a week. She refuses to let me take it down however, commenting that "if you give women too much freedom, they act funny". She expressed her approval of her husband's conduct and even gratitude that he doesn't drink. This is a possibly worrying trend. It indicates a certain entrenchment of the practice of domestic violence that results in a refusal to take it as a serious problem in itself and a possible acceptance of the situation in the mind of the victim indicates, perhaps more than any other indicator, the level of inequality in gender relations in the slum.

The main perpetrator of domestic violence is the husband, with 96.07 percent of the respondents naming the husband as the perpetrator. In a few cases however, the mother-in-law can also be a perpetrator of domestic violence.

Table 5: Age and Domestic Violence

| Age Group | Percentage of Women Subjected to Domestic Violence in the Last year (%) |
|--------------|---|
| Less than 25 | 25.93 |
| 25 to 50 | 34.00 |
| Above 50 | 0.00 |
| Total | 17.89 |

In order to understand the change in the circumstances of women with age, we look at instances of domestic violence within the last year. While the frequency of domestic violence peaks in the 25 to 50 age group, the usual married years of a woman's life in the slum, it decreases sharply in the above 50 age group. This is due to a set of factors. Firstly, high percentages of widowhood ensure that the main perpetrator of such violence no longer lives in the family. Secondly, as was discussed earlier, the ability to remain economically independent longer than the man of the family leads to a situation where he no longer controls the finances. Thirdly, men in the slum are more likely than women to be faced with ill health. When this happens, the man is no longer physically capable of violent abuse lowering instances of the same.

Forty-five year old Pavitra is a garbage collector. Her sixty year-old husband is no longer capable of working. He used to hit her almost every day around ten years ago. Today, he is economically and physically dependent on her and no longer subjects her to abuse. It has been more than ten years since she was last subject to domestic abuse. Fifty-eight year old Shanti lives with her son and stepson in an unauthorised shack measuring six feet by seven feet. While she has to take her stepson's permission before spending any money, she has not been subjected to domestic violence since her husband died. She laughed when we posed the question of when she was last abused. She tells us that the last time she was abused was more than ten years ago. "No husband to hit me now," she laughs.

For many of these women, old age has brought freedom from physical abuse. Either due to economic independence from family, or better health than their spouses, these women start to take more control over the family after this age. Hence, for women subjected to domestic violence all their lives, old age combined with widowhood is not considered as an added problem. It is rather, in cases, looked upon as an improvement over their former lives.

Restrictions Placed on Mobility

A common form of control over the woman is placing restrictions on her movement. These mobility restrictions are in some cases socially enforced, such

as the *ghunghat* amongst Hindus in some communities or religiously enforced such as the *purdah* for many Muslim women.¹³ In the case of the slum, space constraints and a lack of access to amenities makes an absolute bar on movement close to impossible. Only 4.04 percent of the women interviewed did not move at all from the house. Hence, a more meaningful measure of the movement of women is in measuring the distance to which they can move without the permission of any other member of the family. The person most likely to place restrictions on the mobility of the woman is the person in whom control of the family deposited. This varies depending on the individual family. In most cases, this control is deposited with the husband (71.88 percent of the cases). However, mothers-in-law in some families too exercise such control (12.5 percent of the cases). In order to avoid recall bias, all data for this section is measured in terms of actual movement of the respondent over the last week.

Of the women interviewed, 83.58 percent could move within the slum without permission. Within this percentage, 77.27 percent could move out of the slum and into the city without permission. Therefore a majority of the slum are not restricted in the movements. For the minority however, restrictions on mobility are used as a form of control. These restrictions on mobility are enforced using either direct physical violence or by using certain social factors. Looking at the case of Amthonyamma again, this twenty-eight year old mother has to take the permission of her husband to step out of the house. She refuses to submit to this. This refusal though is usually met with physical abuse. Even though she is the sole economic support of their family of five, she is brought under the control of her husband using physical violence and restrictions on mobility. This is an example of direct physical violence restricting mobility to maintain control. Social factors play a role in these restrictions as well. These social factors are used mainly to control the mobility of the younger unmarried women of the slum, a factor illustrated in a study of absolute restrictions on movement.

¹³ Equity and Development, *supra* note 7 at 52.

Table 6: Restrictions on Mobility Across Age Groups

| Age Group | Movement within Locality Only | Movement to City | No Movement From The House |
|--------------|-------------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| Less than 25 | 55.56 | 33.33 | 11.11 |
| 25 to 50 | 51.85 | 48.15 | 0.00 |
| Above 50 | 66.67 | 27.78 | 5.56 |

While 11 percent of women younger than 25 did not move at all from the house, this percentage is significantly lower in the above 50 age group. For women in the under 25-age group, such a complete restriction on mobility is common if they are not married or if they have been newly married. For seven

For example, Maryvincy, a twenty-one year old Christian housewife lives with her mother-in-law, husband and two children. As she is the only member of the family who stays at home, she 'manages' the affairs of the house. When asked whether she was free to do so as she chose, she said that she did run the decisions she made by her mother-in-law before acting on them. When asked whether she left the house, she said that she did not leave the house at all and that her mother in law handled the shopping and other such matters. Her mother-in-law, she says, would not like her to leave the house as she was still "very young" and it would not "seem right". The relationship shared by the two was cordial with Maryvincy referring to her as "more like a mother". However, even in the atmosphere of cordiality, the running of the house is still subject to the rules laid down by the mother-in-law. This control establishes her as an important authority figure with control over factors like Maryvincy's movement and finances. Hence, apart from poor health, mobility and control over movement increase substantially with age.

Conclusion

This study looked at certain distinct aspects of women's lives in the slum in order to examine the changes in gender relations with age. Firstly, with regard to *employment*, the percentage of women employed does not change with age. While poor health does have its impact on the working ability of older women, this factor merely replaces the social restraints placed by the family on younger women, keeping the percentage of women employed constant. Older women are not subject to the control of other family members in this sphere. Secondly, a woman's *contribution to household resources* increases with age owing to several factors such as older women's ability to remain employed for longer as well as failing health preventing older men from continuing in the occupations that formerly employed them. *Control over family resources* increase as well, owing to several factors including the increased contribution to family resources as well as the social position of the mother in law, a category into which most of these older women fall. The frequency of *domestic violence* decreases for older women owing to factors such as ill health of the spouse as well as widowhood. With regard to *restrictions on mobility*, social restrictions almost disappear with only factors like ill health restricting mobility.

One possible reason for this could be the positive changes in social status that are seen with age. The status given to the mother-in-law in the family changes the role of some women, with age, from being the victim of enforced patriarchal norms to the enforcer of these norms. This role played by the mother in law, in terms of decision making, along with an increased control over their own, as well as the female members of the families' movement and family resources therefore can act opposed to factors which otherwise serve to increase inequality with age.

Hence, while it cannot be argued that inequality disappears with age or that disadvantages associated with being old and female do not exist, with age is seen an ability to cope with these social equations, in addition to a certain lessening of social restrictions owed largely to factors like the change in social status that come with the by products of age, which allow older women to in certain contexts, modify inequality.