

All my responsibilities towards my children are over! Linked lives and life course obligations among older adults with migrant children in India

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Introduction

This chapter investigates how life course obligations, expectations and practices are linked to older adults' sense of well-being. Linked lives, which is one of core dimensions of the life course approach, recognises that life trajectories of individuals are socially embedded and closely linked to the transitions of the significant others (Elder, 1975, 1985; Dannefer, 2003; Moen and Hernandez, 2009). The studies that have examined linked lives in the context of migration (Bailey et al, 2004; Cooke, 2008) tend to focus on western countries or on internal migration (Mulder and Hooimeijer, 1999; Thomas et al, 2017). However there are some new studies emerging on international migration (Kōu et al, 2015, 2017; Statham, 2020). Some strands of work in Asia focus on transnational families (Yeoh et al, 2005), aging in diasporas (Lamb, 2002, 2009; Fluit et al, 2019) and marriage migration (Charsley, 2005; Gallo, 2006; Shaw and Charsley, 2006; Gardner, 2009; Le Bail, 2017). In non-Western multi-generational co-residential families the determinants of well-being need to be evaluated in relation to the reciprocity and support exchanged between older adults and other family members (Ugargol and Bailey, 2020). In our study the concept of linked lives is translocal and broadened to include older adults in migrant households, their adult children (co-residing or migrant children), grandchildren, caregivers and non-kin social networks. The focus in this chapter is on how the broader well-being of the older adult is linked to the life course obligations of older adults towards their families. This chapter also discusses how we can better contextualise life course decisions and trajectories in non-Western settings.

Living arrangements, migration and care

The population aged 60 years and older in India constitutes over 7 per cent of the total population (1.21 billion) and is projected to triple in the next four decades, from 92 million to 316 million (James, 2011). In the past, the family has been the major source of support in later life. However, increased mobility may challenge the continued reliance on family in the future. Jamuna (2000) finds that in the Indian ethos elder care was generally seen as a duty of the adult children, which meant the primary caregiver was usually the daughter-in-law. The lowering of fertility in certain states in India (for example, Kerala, Karnataka and Tamilnadu) and among middle classes has led to nuclear families where adult children and the older spouse are the principal caregivers (Bhat and Dhruvarajan, 2002). Bloom et al (2010) observe that increased longevity has meant taking care of older adults has become more expensive due to increasing prevalence of chronic health conditions and due to reduced child-bearing the intergenerational care network has further reduced. With the migration of adult children the tasks of care giving are left to the aged spouse or to hired non-kin caregivers. The UNFPA–Building Knowledge Base on Population Ageing in India (BKPAI) data (2012) show that nearly 25 per cent of the older adults in India live in households without their children, with almost 10 per cent of older women living alone compared to 2 per cent men living alone. The recent Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (IIPS, 2020) shows that about 6 per cent of adults aged 60 years and above are living alone – the main reasons being not having children or children living in other cities. In a comparison of 43 developing countries Bongaarts and Zimmer (2002) find that older women were more likely to live alone compared to men, and in Asia older adults were more likely to co-reside with adult children. Studies carried out by the OECD (2011), as well as by Rajan (2012), show increasing trends in migration in recent years. Internal migration to large urban centres is linked to rapid industrialisation and an increase in service industries. This has led to smaller towns acting as escalator spaces (people move to these towns for education but have no plans to settle) for education and retirement spaces for older adults. Internationally, the Indian diaspora constitutes nearly 25 million people worldwide. This diaspora plays an active role in engaging with the country of origin and with their families who have remained in India. Indeed, India is now one of the largest receivers of economic remittances in the world (Mallick, 2012; Ratha and Mohapatra, 2013) and received US\$83 billion in international remittances in 2019 alone (World Bank, 2020). The sending of remittances can be seen as a form of care provision where the hired caregiver is seen to fill the gap created by migration.

Life course from a non-Western perspective

The life course framework largely focuses on Western societies and life course events that are more attuned to Western, individualised life goals. There is a pressing need to examine the life course framework and life events as played out in a non-Western context, embedding it within local ideologies, religious beliefs and cultural norms. In this study we examine the life stage conceptualization as presented within Hinduism as a worldview rather than as a religion (Saraswathi et al, 2011), as much of this conceptualisation permeates or crosses over into other religious groups such as Indian Muslims, Buddhists and Christians. The life stage conceptualisation underpins many of the behaviours and ideas employed by people to motivate their actions in relation to their own life course decisions and those of their significant others. The key difference here is that the life course framework considers family as a nuclear household whereas the life stage conceptualisation considers family as a multi-generational household.

According to the life stage conceptualisation in Hinduism, there are four main stages which are called as *ashramas*. The stages include Brahmacharya (stage of student), Grihasta (stage of a householder), Vanaprastha (stage of retirement) and Sanyasa (stage of disengagement). In these stages, in addition to age, it is the stage-specific roles, obligations and tasks which add to the personhood of being a Hindu both for men and women (van Willigen et al, 1995; Majumdar, 2005). Hence life satisfaction needs to be situated within this cultural prism and the ability of older adults to successfully transition to each stage. These stage-specific roles and obligations include acquiring a good education, marriage, procreation, educating children, arranging marriage of children and giving care during childbirth. Previous studies have shown in the South Asian context older adults who complete some or all of these obligations are able to then hand over their householder duties to the next generation (Nagalingam, 2007; Shrestha and Zarit, 2012). Completion of the duties need not be equal to retirement as these are cultural roles and responsibilities and not solely connected to work or occupation.

With higher levels of education among younger cohorts, as well as internal and international migration, many of these tasks and roles cannot be completed by older adults. Recent literature shows that the younger generation in India make different life course choices with regard to marriage (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2008; Banerji and Deshpande, 2020) and child-bearing (Pande and Malhotra, 2012; Das and Žumbytė, 2017), which has an impact on the roles of the older adults. In the Asian context, studies have shown that grandparental caregiving was integral to life satisfaction and well-being experienced by the older adults (Ang and O, 2012; Xu et al, 2012; Gray et al, 2019). In this chapter we argue that older adults who are able to carry out these life course obligations have a greater sense

of life satisfaction. This sense of life satisfaction is not only related one's own life course but the duties and obligations the older adults have towards their children.

Data and methods

The study was conducted in Dharwad city, in the southern state of Karnataka. Dharwad is part of the twin cities of Huballi-Dharwad. As per the last census in 2011 the population was 943,857. Dharwad city attracts many students from other cities and surrounding rural areas. The city hosts four universities, three medical colleges and many technical schools and has had a long history as an educational centre. There are very few jobs due to lack of industries and manufacturing companies, which prompts both internal and onward migration. Due to its temperate climate and access to tertiary health care facilities, many older adults prefer to stay in the city and many have returned to the city in retirement to live in close proximity to extended family members. In this study we use a mixed methodology approach; the qualitative study (37 in-depth interviews) was followed by the individual survey interviews of older adults (N=477). The data gathered from in-depth interviews and support network mapping fed into the formulation of the survey instrument. In this chapter we focus on the qualitative component as we aim to explore the lived experiences of older adults on their life course obligations, linked lives and their sense of well-being.

Selection of the participants

The city of Hubli-Dharwad has many higher education institutions but not many industries; therefore, those who are more highly educated tend to move to the nearest big cities in Karnataka, such as Bengaluru or outside the state to Pune or Mumbai. We observed that many of the international migrants had either lived part of the time in other cities in India before migrating to other countries. We had two criteria for selection: one was that the household must have at least one adult child who had migrated abroad or to a different city in India, and the other involved the living arrangement of the older adults (co-residing with other children/kin, living with spouse or living alone). Eligible households in the study area were listed and then approached for in-depth interviews. We used a snowball technique for identifying participants. We included different nodes in the snowball technique to avoid recruiting participants from the same social circle. Most of what we report in this chapter draws on middle-class Indians who have relatively high education levels (both the older adults and their children). The areas we chose are also places inscribed with middle-class aspirations such

as owning a house, areas populated by retirees with good access to health care and the ability to pay for care and who have children living abroad or in other cities. Therefore, the discussion in this chapter does not necessarily apply to those from lower socio-economic groups where their immediate concerns may be more about meeting day-to-day needs.

In-depth interviews

Participants were asked about what meaning they give to the situation of living away from their children and how this shapes their experience of ageing. The interviews ranged from 30 to 90 minutes and explored the various domains where older adults perceive the absence of their children. They were conducted in Kannada, the main language spoken in Karnataka, by trained interviewers. Each household was visited by one male and one female interviewer. Where households had more than one person, the interviews with the different household members were held at the same time in separate rooms where possible. If this was not possible the interviewer made appointments to interview household members on separate days. The main sections in the interview guide included: daily neighbourhood activities, economic situation, living arrangements, information on migrant children and their family, marriage of children, caregiving during childbirth, provision of care for older adults, perceptions on the impact of their children's migration, autonomy and decision-making, health problems and treatment and comparison with older adults having different living arrangements. The interviews also focused on the manner in which older adults manage caregiving and -receiving from both kin and non-kin members, through the exchange of both material and non-material resources. We conducted 37 in-depth interviews with couples, widows and widowers. Participants in this study include both older adults co-residing with kin and older adults residing on their own.

Ethical considerations

The interviewers were trained to ask for consent. To gain trust of the participants each interviewer was given a badge and letter of reference about the study. Before the interview could start, the interviewer explained the nature of the project, that the information would remain anonymous and asked consent to digitally record the information. During the interview, if the older adults were observed experiencing any physical discomfort or if they became emotional, the interviewer halted the recording and offered to complete the interview at a later point in time. The interviews were transcribed and translated by the project staff. All identifying information was taken out of the transcripts. Each transcript

was assigned a code and linked personal information was stored safely with the principal investigators.

Analysis of qualitative data

The analysis followed the principles of grounded theory and derived a range of codes, categories and themes (Hennink et al, 2020). The interview transcripts were analysed using qualitative data software Atlas-Ti™. The first cycle of coding involved identifying both inductive and deductive codes and in the second cycle the codes were grouped together in code families. The main code families include life course obligations, caregiving, marriage of children, family relationships and plans for future. We report the findings below as related to these code families.

Findings and discussion: 'children responsibilities'

Many older adults felt a sense of contentment that they had completed their 'children responsibilities'. These responsibilities include life course obligations: providing education, arranging marriage, inculcating cultural values and caregiving during critical transitions such as pregnancy and childbirth. The successful migration, work and career of their children were seen as positive outcome of these life course obligations. Many of the older adults had invested their life savings to carry out these life course obligations; this was especially the case for the education and marriages of their children.

Education

Providing the right kind of education for their children was perceived to be one of the main responsibilities. In the study area, most of the older adults, especially men, were university educated and had been in working in the formal sector. Education and more specifically professional education such as medicine and engineering were seen to be the way of moving up in the social hierarchy. Older adults had saved and spent considerable resources in educating their children in private schools and colleges. In India education is a key cultural capital that would help the household to move into the higher brackets of middle-class lifestyles (Krishnan and Hatekar, 2017).

P: '... my opinion is different because half of our life will go in providing them good education and settling their life and if there are 2 children then we should give good education whether it may be boy or a girl then our responsibility will be over and we will be free.' (Older adult male)

For some of the older adults, adhering to these norms meant they had to move from rural areas to Dharwad to secure a better education. Due to smaller family sizes compared to previous generations, older adults could afford to send their children for higher professional education. Migration to urban areas and the setting up of the household meant that older adults could also host the children of the extended family members who were pursuing their education. Hence life course obligations in relation to education was not restricted to their own children but also extended as an opportunity for other members of the wider household. This illustrates the argument that obligations towards education are shared and the larger multi-generational household is responsible for the caring and development of younger members of the household.

- P: 'Yes our relatives were also staying here for education as we are a joint family and most of the peoples are illiterate so I was asking my relatives that let they complete their high school education in Sindagi and after that I was asking them to come here for further study and it was unavoidable for us. I have given education to 4 children and one is in New Zealand, one has completed Library Science and now he is in Bijapur working as Librarian, and one has done Diploma in Pharmacy and has opened Pharmacy and last one has done MBA and he did not go for higher job as he was willing to stay in Sindagi, so he has opened medical shop over there. What education I have to give to my children similarly I have given education to my brother's children as well. I have 5 brothers and some of our brothers' children got good education and job and some brother children did not get any education or job, so it nobody can be held responsible because if the children do not study well then who are responsible? So what I have done is I have given ₹50000/- to all three children to purchase some land and get settled.' (Older adult male)
- P: 'My mother was there, three children and we a total 5 members, later my sisters daughter was staying here, she was homeopathy doctor, after she completed her education she worked as a lecturer in Homeopathy colleges, also my younger sister daughter also was there, she was in the same class of my last child, as there were no good schools in Bijapur, so she stayed here for 2 years, after that only elder sister's daughter came for study and stayed for 7–8 years.' (Older adult female)

The successful transition of children from education to work, and in some cases to international migration, was seen by the older adults as an accomplishment of their goal of providing education.

‘When my son was going to Qatar we did not have even 10,000 rupees also. He had made loan, with the loan amount he had gone there and after working there continuously he had paid the entire amount. He says, if I stay here means I will also (in comparison to his lower educated brothers) not progress in life.’ (Older adult female)

Economic independence of adult children also ensured that the older adults could save the resources for their retirement. Among families who did not have a pension but depended on the adult children for their financial well-being, the successful transition to paid employment meant security for the older adults as well. Among families where adult children could not transition successfully into paid employment, older adults often faced feelings of anxiety and fear for the future as the older adults worried that their adult children would be continuously dependent on them economically.

P: ‘Even if they are here (in Dharwad) they should be good position if they don’t do job again it is burden only right? They should be educated and should be involved in some job either in Belgaum, Dharwad or in Bangalore. They should be educated and work till their retirement age. They should not be dependent of the parents and they should depend on parents only till they pursue education and job after that they should be independent.’ (Older adult male)

In some of the families that we studied, siblings of the more successful children who migrated took on the role of caregivers for the older adults. There was less pressure to conform to successful transitions to work on the younger siblings. Often these siblings who were not able to find work were self-employed or worked on a part-time basis in a family business or venture. In the case below, the elder son is unmarried and is living with the parents. This family has three sons and two daughters. All the children except the eldest son are married, have children and have migrated to other cities. The elder son is the primary caregiver and his siblings and parents supported him financially to set up a medical shop. This goes further to show that in families with greater numbers of children the expectations were not equally enforced, though educational opportunities were offered to all the children.

I: ‘You said that your eldest son is here (co-residing)?’

P: ‘Yes he is with us. He is running medical shop means he had done D.Pharma, diploma. He is has his own medical shop since 20 years. He is not married. We also feel sad for some time, if at least one daughter-in-law is with us means it could be better. Its their wish, we cannot force them. By seeing others family he might have been

disappointed. He tells no for it so we have not asked him. When he told no we did not force him.' (Older adult female)

The negotiation of who stays behind to provide care for the older adults is not often very explicit. The siblings who are not able to migrate or do not have the right skill set to find jobs often remain with the parents.

Building a house

Building a house for the family was seen as one of the key life events which the older adults aspired to achieve. The buying of land and construction of the house were seen as essential elements in the role of the Grihastha (householder). Men earlier in their career had taken loans or saved enough money to build houses for their families. Older men who were employed by a state-run organisation could secure loans at low interest rates and paid these loans back until their retirement. The building of a house was linked to the life course obligations on provision of shelter for the family. The house provided a sense of security for the older adults but was also a means of intergenerational transmission of wealth. The promise of transfer of the house to the next generation also came with the implicit understanding that reciprocal care was expected by the older adults. In some of the households older adults had used up all their savings and retirement benefits to build or buy a house/apartment for the family.

- P: 'When I was working in Hubli I took a site with help of my brother who was working in P&T, in housing society, so I built a house there. For education of my children Dharwad Hubli is good so I did that.' (Older adult male)
- P: 'Large expenditure means, at present I do not have any. All the responsibilities have got over, daughter got married, son is working and I have my own house, so no problem. So now as large expenditure I do not have any thing.' (Older adult male)

The owning of property and building of a home was also meant that they could establish roots there and make a place for their children. However, in the neighbourhoods we studied, the higher-educated children had left the parental home. Migration to other cities and countries meant that adult children had set up new households and bought homes in these cities. Older adults often travelled to these cities or countries as a way to reconnect with their children. In the course of the interviews, participants who were either living on their own or were living close to a daughter were asked if they would like to migrate to live with their children. Most of the participants said they would prefer to live in Dharwad as long as they are able to care

for themselves and their spouses. They would agree to move only if there was a health care emergency or the death of a spouse.

P: 'Ours is a retired life, so we only have to go [to Bangalore] if we need to go for treatment. Nowadays it is not possible for them to come here and stay with us for a month or fifteen days, it would be problematic. Besides which, we can't inconvenience them. Till now that type of situation has not happened, but if it comes then we can explain the problem and pain: if I am sick I would need 15 days treatment, which means I can go to Bangalore for that and stay with them ... [That way] they can take care of me without missing any work. It is difficult for them to come here and take care of us, so ...' (Male, 60 years, living with spouse)

With regard to international migration, the parents preferred to live in Dharwad and to visit their children once a year. They found they could not adjust to the cold climate, different cultural settings and the fact that they had to depend on their children for most things.

P: 'No, there (in USA) they don't care for us in the hospital, [the insurance] only allows treatment of his wife and children; they don't have that facility. Anyway, we can only stay for six months, and they don't check us nor even give tablets, so we are afraid to go there. Also, if he were to call us now [and ask us to], we wouldn't be ready to go because it would be problematic for him. My sugar level fluctuates [dramatically], so I will not go. Sir (husband) went once, but I will not go.' (Female, 65 years, living with spouse)

Living in their own house and close to friends and relatives was perceived to be the ideal choice. They thought that they had more time with their children when the children came to visit them than when they went to visit the children. The shorter visits to their children were something that the older adults also looked forward to. This gave them an opportunity to spend time with their grandchildren.

In living arrangements where at least one adult male child was living with them, the maintenance of the house was passed on to the son. We present here two cases where older adults have divided the property to maintain social ties and connections with adult children and their families. In these cases, older adults had divided the land and built houses for their children (see [Chapter 6](#), which describes how house building can also be a way to secure proximity of care provision). In the first case, an older adult, from relatively low economic group, had built three houses on the small piece of land and had divided them among his sons. He had built these houses from the funds he received on retirement from a private company. He had invested all his

earnings and resources into creating separate houses for his children. The only drawback was that he had not created a household or a living unit for himself and his wife. This led to the older adult and his wife moving into the house of the migrant son and were also economically dependent on him. In situations where there was a family conflict between the siblings or between the parent and the siblings, the living situation of the older adults became more precarious. Such precarious situations where older adults are exposed to abuse and neglect has been observed in other parts of India as well (see [Chapters 8 and 10](#) for further examples; see also Jahangir et al, 2018; [Pazhoothundathil and Bailey, 2020](#)).

In the second case, the older adult had extended his house and built two apartments around it. This he rented out to his daughters. With patrilocal residence, his daughters could not stay or be part of his household where sons-in-law would move into the household of the older adult. By creating two separate homes/apartments, the older adult still manages to retain independence for himself and his wife and when needed could still call on his daughters and their families for support. In the second case, the older adult was formally working in an educational institution and had greater financial literacy for planning his retirement and for distributing his resources between his daughters. Given that he does not have a son who will inherit his property, this was his approach to divide his wealth between his daughters (see also [Chapters 6, 8 and 9](#) on inheritance and care dynamics). In both cases the older adults were satisfied that their children and grandchildren were living close by. This improved their interpersonal relations and produced a feeling of security that support was available to them.

Marriage

The key life course decisions, such as arranging a marriage, were in most cases jointly taken by the parents and their children. In some cases we observed that in addition to the immediate family members the close kin or relatives also played a role in the process of match-making and the final marriage. The older adults believed that it was their duty to find a suitable bride or groom. The adult children were also involved in the decision making and often took the final decision. In addition to religion and caste, older adults also searched for professionally qualified spouses for their children. In some cases caste boundaries were overlooked if the girl or the boy was professionally educated and was living abroad. In such cases the social and cultural capital of being highly educated and living abroad was perceived as being of higher value than caste boundaries. A deeper reading of such practices also reveals the slackening of caste rules and regulations on the one hand, and on the other hand neo-local residence (living abroad) meant that couples did not have to face caste-based prejudice or everyday discrimination

in their hometown. The 'arranging' of the marriages also involved agreements on sharing of costs by the parents and the location of the wedding. Many of the older adults had saved money over the years or taken loans to pay off the expenses of their daughter's marriage.

I: 'Did your children tell you anything while searching for their partners?'

P: 'Nothing, what Elders (hireyaru) people will do is final, they used to tell "my parents are not separate from us they will select whoever is suitable for us" like this they had put responsibilities on us so according to that we did that. We felt that this is good and suitable for our children and they also told ok for it, so we arranged the marriage.' (Older adult female)

P: 'Right from the beginning I started accumulating money in the form of Recurring Deposit (RD), and plus I use to get money from exam duty and book publication and with that I arranged the marriage. During those days ₹20000/- (\$ 275) was enough to do one marriage and if it is our daughter marriage then maximum of ₹80000/- (\$ 1100) was required to do the marriage. I did not take any loan and within what I have I have managed.' (Older adult male)

The marriage of adult children was seen as an important life course obligation which led to the creation of a separate household, and for the older adults this meant that they were then passing on their householder tasks to the children. For the older adults who had not yet completed this life course obligation it was one of the main stressors and one of their main goals. This was more so in families with only daughters. They were concerned that their other relatives or close kin would not take on the responsibility of finding a suitable groom and arranging the marriage of their daughter. The example below shows the relational nature of life course and ageing. The successful transition of the offspring is linked to the accomplishment of goals of the older adult.

P: 'I will decide everything and inform each person what things have to be done by him or her, no one should quarrel after my death, I will prepare a will and die, still I have responsibility of my younger daughter marriage. I have to do that and I will.' (Older adult female)

We also found instances where the sons/daughters have found spouses by themselves or through online match-making services and then had involved the parents to create the semblance that it was a family decision.

P: 'First son we have only selected (the bride). She is of our community but last two sons are love marriage. Our son said that he is in love

with a girl and even she also informed their parents about her love and later they came to see our house, both the parties liked each other because both the families were good so we all said yes and they married. I used to tell them and it was routine daily at Tiffin time and it had become a slogan that as you all are going to college it is normal thing you get attracted towards opposite sex, so it is a natural thing but you all keep in mind that girl should be of a good family she should may not be a Brahmin at least Hindu I don't like Muslim and Christian girls because they will not know our culture.' (Older adult female)

In situations where the parents were not involved in the decision making or the choice of the spouse, this created animosity between the parents and the adult children. We found one such instance where the son was no longer in contact with his family due to the family conflict surrounding his marriage.

Care at critical transitions

Caregiving and -receiving are some of the main binders of interpersonal relationships. The care cycle is not limited to the children but also extended to grandchildren. Participants in this study provided care during pregnancy and childbirth. This was seen as one of the life course responsibilities of the parents of the daughter. In another study from Karnataka, [Bailey \(2017\)](#) discusses how the exchange of food made specially for post-natal recuperation is exchanged between transnational households to create a sense of co-presence and to ensure that care is circulated between the households. In our study older couples with children living abroad had travelled to the countries to provide care. Where this could not be arranged this task was carried out by the parents-in-law. In other situations, the daughters had returned to the place that they were brought up to be cared for by their family. Depending on the availability of care facilities, in some of the cases the daughters-in law had preferred to stay with the parents-in-law for the birth of the child and subsequent care.

I: 'Where did your daughter deliver?'

P: 'Here in Dharwad, first delivery has to be in mother's place, so we did it here. All care for the mother and the child was done here in our home. Care after delivery (banantana) everything was here. Five months, four months completed and in fifth month her in-laws came and she went with them.'

I: 'Daughter-in-law's delivery?'

P: 'Daughter-in-law's delivery happened in their own maternal home. (...) It was in Dharwad hospital so we used to visit regularly until they went to hospital, I think for 10 to 12 days. Afterwards she went to her mother's place for delivery care (banantana). Elder daughter-in-law's delivery was conducted in America. I did not go. Her mother had gone.' (Older adult female)

Some of the participants who were not able to provide care themselves had hired domestic helpers to prepare food and to take care of the newborn. In the following case the care was still provided in the house as the older adults were working at the time of the childbirth. The older adult female had hired a woman to take care of the young mother and the child. As families become smaller there are fewer people to provide care, hence additional people are hired. This service is emerging as a niche market of female caregivers who live in with the families for a period of 40 days to provide post-natal care.

P: 'I had a vacation during that time (birth of grandson) and even my mother also came at that time and helped us and even my daughter in law was also with us and she also helped me. 10 days we faced problems in hospital and after coming home I used to prepare food for all and we hired a woman (live-in caregiver) who used to prepare food for the lactating mother. She (daughter) stayed here for 4 and ½ months and after that she went home.' (Older adult female)

Grandparenting was seen both as the continuation of care cycle but also as a way to maintain intergenerational personal relations. The latter was more difficult when children were living abroad. Intergenerational care relations were instrumental for the older adults to continue this idea of 'family' across national and international boundaries and contributed to their sense of being embedded in these transnational relations (see [Gray et al, 2019](#); [Ho and Chiu, 2020](#); see also [Chapter 6](#) in this volume). For some older adults it was difficult to care for grandchildren due to their own health situation. In the following case the grandchild was born in the USA but was later brought back to India and was cared for by the maternal grandparents as the paternal grandparents were not able to do so.

P: 'No, now we cannot take any responsibility as such because of that only we have kept our grandson in Bijapur. So openly we have said everybody'

I: 'He can come here and stay?'

- P: 'No we cannot manage him at this stage and so we have told everybody that we cannot take that responsibility.'
- I: 'Do you miss you grandchildren?'
- P: 'Yes some time we feel but taking him to hospital or school is all done by my daughter-in-law parents and we cannot do as we have grow old but they are comparatively younger to us.' (Older adult male)

Life post-responsibilities

Participants also reflected on their lives after these life course obligations. Among those who had retired there was a sense of satisfaction that they had completed all their life course obligations. As a result, the availability of time on their hands gave the older adults the freedom to think about their own lives and things they had not been able to accomplish when they were working and caring for their children. Activities such as social work, cultural activities and travel figured in the discussions.

- P: 'I am happy because in my childhood stage we have faced many problems and somebody have held our hand and we reached this stage without giving any money to anybody and with the grace of god I got good job without anybody's recommendation and I have struggled to come to this stage and have done my responsibility in a good manner and now I am leading happy retired life.' (Older adult male)

Both older men and women were involved in religious and cultural activities. The range of religious activities included participating in religious discourses, visiting temples, organising special worship events, observing the rituals of the holy months and group pilgrimages to shrines and temples. In the excerpt below we see the combination of travel and cultural activities that this older adult took part in post-retirement. The respondent refers also to other women who are in the same situation as her and that the completion of their responsibilities has given them more free time to pursue their hobbies and dreams. For older adults who had completed their life course obligations, the spare time provided them the opportunities to re-engage with the society. Some older women who were living alone or with a spouse formed groups and organised day trips or longer travels to pilgrimage sites. [Dhal \(2017\)](#) observes that among Indian middle-class retirees, women were more successful in combining multiple activities with caregiving, compared to men.

- P: 'Yes, we are three to four ladies of same age, all finished children's responsibilities. Recently, I went to Dubai. I have also been to

America when my son called me there. At that time I was still working. I did not have enough leave that time so I went only for 3 months. Now again he is calling to see his children and his house which he bought there, but first I want to go to Kashi tour. Next month there is an Author's Conference and Poetics Conference. (...) For that also I am member from the past 5 to 6 years. They usually only hold annual functions. They do all cultural activities. There will be seminars during the poetry conference. I participate in all the seminars.' (Older adult female)

Some older men were still working or were economically dependent on their children, therefore, they did not have the leisure time to pursue cultural and religious activities. Older women in low-income households had to continue their caregiving activities often across generations. Many older women cared for their spouses who were ill, other older adults in the same household and for grandchildren. Among older adults who had moved to the urban area, very few of them had local contacts or social capital to ask for help. Older adults who had returned to Dharwad from other cities post retirement often rented or bought homes close to siblings or extended family members. [Pandya \(2016\)](#) notes that among higher-educated and retired women, caregiving still took more than half of their daily time. Economic independence, lessened caregiving tasks and independent living had a larger role to play in a sense of well-being and satisfaction among the older adults.

Discussion and conclusions

This chapter explored how the well-being of older adults is linked to their life course obligations towards their families. Through in-depth qualitative research we have shown that different stages and transitions that are part of the life courses of older adults and their family members. The empirical material clearly shows the need to embed the life course framework and life events within local ideologies, religious beliefs and cultural norms. In this study we examine the life stage conceptualisation as presented within Hinduism as a worldview. Life stages and expectations of successful transition from one stage to the next was perceived as crucial for both the older adults and their offspring. Hence successful ageing was intricately connected to the lives of family members. In line with [Lamb \(2000, 2002\)](#) and [Brijnath \(2012\)](#), we emphasise the need to take a cultural lens in understanding family reciprocities and care within and across generations. In relation to criticisms by [Hagestad and Dannefer \(2001\)](#) on the 'microfication' of life course approaches, we take a broader view to go beyond the nuclear family and examine the asymmetrical care and power relations within the families ([Kōu and Bailey, 2014](#); [Bailey, 2017](#)).

This chapter clearly shows the need to better contextualise life course decisions and trajectories in non-Western settings and to specifically move the discussion beyond the culturalist discussion on ‘filial piety’. The theoretical concept of linked lives (Elder, 1985) aids in getting an interactional approach to situate the actions of the individual towards his/her own well-being and that of his/her linked significant others. This is one of few studies in India (Lamb, 2000, 2002; Bomhoff, 2011; Brijnath, 2012; Bailey, James and Hallad, 2017; Ahlin, and Sen, 2020; Ugargol and Bailey, 2020), which has investigated the family lives and care reciprocities of older adults from an in-depth qualitative perspective. Such rich qualitative descriptions provide us with a deeper insight into older adults and how they make sense of their lives with the migration of their children. The embedding of the life course obligation into the cultural meaning system of *ashramas* provides us space to further explain the motivational schemas associated with life course obligations. The successful completion of these life course obligations was perceived to lead to better well-being. What emerges from other narratives as well is a process of individualisation wherein the older adults are focusing once more on their own lives and how to lead them and make plans independently of the lives of their children. The experience of this individualisation was, however, dependent on their caregiving roles and the economic situation of the household. One of the limitations of this chapter is that it focuses on middle-class households who have the resources to realise their life course goals; this may not be possible for older adults from lower socio-economic groups. Economic security, social support, health and better living conditions aid in realising the life course obligations and contribute towards the overall well-being of the older adults.

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