

## **GRAND PARENTS OR GLORIFIED SERVANTS ?**

### FINDINGS OF THE STUDY By Nandini Voice For The Deprived

#### **Objective of the study :**

With the nuclear family becoming the order of the day amongst the middle and higher income group and life expectancy increasing, senior citizens often find that they have to reposition themselves, particularly in the relationship with their sons, daughters and grand children.

With both husband and wife increasingly taking up jobs, both for economic reasons and to realize their potentials, many young couple expect their parents to take care of their children atleast upto fifth year of age.

The object of the study was to ascertain the views of the senior citizens about such expectation of sons and daughters / sons in law and daughters in law and the problems and difficulties that the elders face in meeting such demand.

#### **Methodology of the study:**

The study was carried out by contacting cross section of senior citizens and discussing the details in informal manner

The study was carried out by a team under the leadership of N.S.Venkataraman, Trustee, Nandini Voice For The Deprived.

#### **Findings of the study:**

No doubt, the grand parents love their grand children and cherish the opportunity to spend time with them by playing, story telling and guiding them.

At the same time, taking the responsibility of looking after the grand children is considered as burden by the grand parents, particularly in view of their frail health.

Several young couple living abroad particularly in USA and Europe and in big cities in India even seem to think that grand parents taking care of the grand children is not only necessary to ensure healthy bringing up of the children but also is a matter of economic necessity, as the working couple often can not afford payment to the maid servants specifically trained for the job.

After leading long years of life and knowing the ups and downs of living, grand parents generally have enormous experience of the vagaries of life. With the mind set developed due to such experience, they like to relax and view happenings around them in a dispassionate manner with wisdom and understanding, instead of starting all over again by bringing up young children.

Having spent decades of regimented working life, whether imposed or voluntary, they do not desire to be burdened with the responsibilities of bringing up children at this stage of life, once again.

Spending time with children is pleasure but taking responsibility for looking after them is a difficult and taxing exercise for grand parents.

In the event of their saying 'no' to look after the grand children, the fact that they may be mistaken as lacking in affection for their grand children or lacking consideration for own sons and daughters is the fear that haunt the grand parents . Many grand parents do not have courage to say 'no' and some who have courage to say 'no' are often not appreciated by their sons and daughters.

The ideal arrangement is that the grand parents would like to spend some time with grand children without being responsible for their up keeping and maintenance.

From this point of view, the sons and daughters who expect their parents to look after the grand children in their absence, can be viewed as lacking in understanding of the problems and mind set of elderly persons.

Perhaps, sons and daughters require some sort of counseling.

## **VIEWS EXPRESSED BY SELECTED ELDERS**

### **Looking after grand children is not menial job: Mrs.Hamsa Krishnan, Chennai -**

Looking after your own grand children should not be considered as a menial job. Grand parents and grand children are a gift to each other. Many grand parents are deprived of the opportunity to be with their grand children. How many languish alone, with their off springs being in foreign countries? How many are discarded and left in old age homes? How many crave to be independent and thus, deny themselves of the pleasure of enjoying the pranks, smiles and kisses of their grand children?

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### **Let the children come to you, if they want :Mrs.Saraswathi, Chennai -**

If the grand parents are glorified servants, there is no glory in being grand parents. What the grand parents need is understanding of their problems, respect from grand children, courtesies from daughter or son, daughter in law or son in law. Do they get it?

In these days ,children are smart and intelligent and they have their independent views about everything. In many cases, that does not make them realize that they have to show respect to the grand parents or elders .

Instead of being given love and affection on most occasions, grand parents are given some responsibility of taking care of the children and their hands are tied and they have little time and freedom to do their own personal things.

After reaching retirement stage when you are alone or with your husband or with your wife, if you have own money, go to paying guest accommodation or stay away from your own people to live in a small apartment . You will have peace of mind. If the children want to see you, they can come or if they don't want, leave them alone with their problem.

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### **Need for Welfare Board for Senior Citizens :Sri.V.Janardhanan, Chennai -**

Old age coupled with age related ailments force grand parents to be confined to their houses. In the absence of any busy schedule, so many thoughts swarm their brains. They may even think for a while about the treatment presently meted out to them and compare with the untold sufferings and hardships that they underwent to bring up their children, be it in the matter of education, healthcare and so on. In respect of grand parents, the expectations are too much and too much of expectations will bring forth only disappointment, which the grand parents may not be able to digest.

Often times, I have felt that the thinking faculty of human beings is the cause for their own ruination. Just like human beings, animals too bear and rear young ones. The animals care for their offspring only for a limited period and thereafter

neither the parent animal for the young one is aware of how they grow, where they live and how they survive. The dependency status is totally absent in animals. Grand parents should have an alternative course to live during the fag end of their lives, in that, they should have enough means to meet their needs. It is suggested that the Government should constitute a Senior Citizens Welfare Board which will chalk out ways and means according to circumstances prevailing to provide shelter and succor to senior citizens.

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**Stay aloof yet be of service : Mrs.Vanita K Kumta, Mumbai -**

When any work that we do is not taken for granted, is appreciated, it is a pleasant feeling. Especially nurturing one's grand children.

The seniors can find lot of love, solace in the company of grand children and it is a wonderful feeling bonding with them. It often reminds us of our own youth and also of our elders. These reminiscences are full of mixed feelings of joy and sometimes pain. But that is essence of life.

We are an old couple, presently retired from our active phase of life. We were a joint family till about 2 years back and have of our own accord insisted that our son, daughter in law and grand children live their lives separately away from us. We took this decision to avoid stepping on one another's toes and giving the much needed space in relationships as 'Familiarity breeds contempt'. Nevertheless we try to be active by way of extending support, especially in taking care of our little grand daughter.

On hindsight, we feel this decision has brought back a healthy bonding and we treasure it.

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**Shepherd the children and be wanted : Sri.M.R.Srinivasan, Chennai -**

The bottomline will be filial relationship that is seen evolving even as the family expands by natural growth. If one were to enjoy good health and harmonious living in old age, there is no reason why such a person would decline to shepherd the children in his free time during the day that would ipso facto act as sort of a diversion for self from the boredom that would otherwise result.

It is proverbial that in an ideal setting, kids like grand parents more than their parents and vice versa, thanks to the rapport established by being indulged to their pranks and as a story teller in the nights and as a guide in their activities. Such a lot will indeed have reasons to pat themselves for being 'wanted' as an important person in the family hierarchy, far from the image of a 'glorified servant' as generalized.

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**Mutual trust and care is the solution : Sri.A.Balasubramanian,Chennai -**

The love and affection that the grand parents shower on the grand children is absolute and undiluted. It flows down to the young ones without expecting any return, as water flows only downstream.

At the same time, it is an undeniable fact that the grand parents are in the declining phase of their health and wealth. But, still they ignore these shortcomings out of their noble intention to give the child the best, silently bearing physical pain, mental stress and even material shortfall at times . No doubt, this is a noble gesture on the part of the grand parents but their sons and daughters must realize this and extend support to the grand parents. What do the grand parents need? They require the much needed rest, relaxation and diversion from the routine chores. A sight seeing trip, a pilgrimage and such things may work wonder on the tired body and mind of the elderly. Sons and daughters on their part must schedule their programmes, so that the grand parents get these much needed diversions that would ensure their physical and psychological well being.

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**Not maids on payment considerations : Sri.E.M.Raghavan,Chennai -**

I feel that senior citizen as grand parents have a distinctive role to play in moulding their grand children, besides taking care of them and to see them grow as leaders of tomorrow.

The quality of creativity should be built in children, which grand parents can do competently.

In the present setup, the parents as working couple need to respect their parents while looking upto them to nurture their children and not view them as if they play the role of maids who work on payment considerations.

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