

Challenges of ageing for the immigrants from India in the UK

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Migration both international and internal is not an instinct action of human beings and is not generated by a single impulse. The process of relocation certainly involves some sort of benefit-cost calculations, both tangible and intangible. The intangible component of costs and benefits of migration is neither measurable nor quantifiable even though its overwhelming preponderance on the “migration journey” of the individual and his family has been acknowledged time and again by migration experts.

The intangible cost and benefits of migration may assume different dimensions as one approaches the retirement from active working life in a modern, capitalist society of the West (UK), characterized by markedly different socio-cultural milieu embedded in individual freedom, achievement and materialism. Here, diminished socio-economic standing along with ageism can pose serious challenge for immigrant population while they age in their land of destination away from the “collective” culture of India based on joint-family system encompassing mutual cooperation and interdependence. The non-migratory cost of migration may escalate after retirement for them. Thus I tried to interview the high-income professional Indians in UK who have spent 20 years or more in the land of destination and were aged 50 years and above and were about to retire or had retired already along with some community leaders who have actively contributed to the community life Indians here through telephone, e-mail, post, in 2006. In all I could gather the views of 20 respondents. The prime ageing challenges as mentioned by them were the following:

1. Loneliness and isolation;
2. Retirement and accompanying void and lack of activity;
3. Ill-health;
4. Climate-wet and cold;
5. Stress;
6. Decline in income;
7. Changing values and sharp inter-generational conflicts;
8. Loss of touch with India;

The coping strategy primarily focused on frequent travels to India – spend the winter there and summer in the UK; to be relocated near their children; to participate in the social functions and interact more intensively with friends steeled in the land of destination after retirement and lastly “not to retire” as long as possible.