INTERGENERATIONAL VOICES:

EXPLORING SOUTH ASIAN MULTIGENERATIONAL LIVING

By Umniyah Gilani (HBSc)

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By SYEDA UMNIYAH GILANI, HBSc

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TITLE: Intergenerational Voices: Exploring South Asian Multigenerational Living

AUTHOR: Syeda Umniyah Gilani, HBSc. (University of Toronto)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Anthea Innes

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Lay Abstract

This research explores what it's like for South Asian families living in multigenerational households in Canada, where grandparents, parents, and children share the same home. Through interviews with individuals across three age groups, the study looks at how families manage caregiving, pass down cultural and religious values, and navigate changing roles between generations. While living together can offer emotional support and help preserve traditions, it also brings challenges, like communication difficulties and unequal caregiving responsibilities. The study uses a life course approach to show how personal life changes, such as aging or starting work, affect and are affected by the family as a whole. The findings highlight the need for policies that better support migrant families, especially in areas like housing and caregiving. Overall, this research helps us understand both the strengths and struggles of multigenerational living from the perspective of those experiencing it firsthand.

Abstract

The growing prevalence of multigenerational households presents unique opportunities and challenges for families. Cultural values, such as filial piety, play a crucial role in shaping these living arrangements, but there is limited research on the self-reported experiences of individuals within these households, particularly in South Asian communities. This thesis explores the lived experiences of South Asian families residing in multigenerational households in Canada, with a focus on how caregiving, faith, cultural transmission, and generational roles are negotiated within these shared spaces. Drawing on in-depth qualitative interviews across three generational cohorts - young adults, middle-aged adults, and older adults - this research investigates how familial responsibilities, intergenerational dynamics, and cultural values are distributed, challenged, and maintained within these households. Using a life course perspective (Hareven, 1994), the study highlights the ways in which individual transitions (e.g., caregiving, entering the workforce, aging) intersect with the family as a whole. The findings were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage framework for thematic analysis and four key themes were identified. Participants highlighted the emotional and logistical complexities of caregiving in multigenerational homes, the dual role of faith, and the evolving expressions of identity and autonomy across generations. Findings reveal that while multigenerational living can foster emotional support and cultural continuity, it also creates challenges related to generational power dynamics, communication styles, and uneven caregiving burdens. Policy implications underscore the need for culturally sensitive support for migrant families, particularly in navigating caregiving, housing, and integration services. This research contributes to the growing literature on multigenerational living, migration, and family dynamics by offering insights into the everyday negotiations that shape shared households across generations.

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Contents

Declaration of Academic Achievement

This thesis is the result of original research that I designed and conducted under the supervision of Dr. Anthea Innes. I was responsible for the development, management, and execution of the project, with ongoing guidance from Dr. Innes and committee members (Dr. Meridith Griffin and Dr. Nicole Dalmer) who also provided valuable feedback during the editing process of multiple drafts. I independently conducted all interviews, transcribed the audio recordings, and carried out the data analysis.

Introduction

Over the past 16 years, there has been a noticeable rise in the prevalence of multigenerational households (He & Jia, 2022). In this context, multigenerational households are defined as three generational households that consist of children living with their parents and grandparents (Choi & Ramaj, 2023). Multiple factors have contributed to this change, some of which include: increasing life expectancies, so people are able to spend more time with their parents and grandparents; financial constraints which have led to more fledgling adults choosing to live at home to share resources; adult and child caregiving which has also forced individuals to live in a multigenerational household (Lee, 2023; Cohn et al., 2022). Many high-income countries like the US and Australia are also experiencing a long-term increase in women's labor force participation, where more women are entering and remaining in the workforce (Bardoel & Drago, 2016). At the same time, gender inequality in the distribution of unpaid care work continues, with women continuing to perform the predominant share of household chores, childcare and other responsibilities, often without recognition or compensation (Hoenig & Page, 2012). These intersecting trends may be contributing to the growing prevalence of multigenerational caregiving, defined as providing unpaid care for an adult while also caring for a dependent child within the same household (Bardoel & Drago, 2016).

Multigenerational living is also affected by increased immigration, as immigrant families often share the same household due to economic constraints or filial obligations (Pilkauskas et al., 2020). Due to language barriers and cultural differences, these immigrant families often have small social networks, which can limit their access to community resources and social support (Statistics Canada, 2024). This isolation can negatively impact their sense of belonging and integration within the broader community. For instance, South Asian immigrants often experience a significant

cultural shift when moving from a collectivist society, which prioritizes community relationships and extended family networks, to an individualistic society like Canada and the United States that emphasizes emotional independence (Ayika et al., 2018). This transition influences various aspects of family dynamics, including gender roles, parent-child relationships, expectations, and communication. Consequently, these changes impact the overall structure and functioning of South Asian families, necessitating an exploration of the self-reported benefits and challenges of living in multigenerational households within this cultural context.

Multigenerational households can create a socially enriched environment, fostering strong and meaningful relationships between grandparents and grandchildren, which can have a positive impact on their mental health and well-being (Langer, 2017). These intergenerational interactions promote emotional support and the sharing of cultural values, strengthening family bonds. Moreover, for older adults, this environment may serve as an early protective factor by stimulating cognitive engagement and reducing risk of cognitive decline (Lee et al., 2020). Living in a multigenerational setting can stimulate learning through language and reasoning while providing opportunities for socialization and positive interactions amongst different generations (Lewis & Lamb, 2003). However, it is also essential to consider that exposure to stressful environments within multigenerational households may have negative impacts on the cognitive development and later-life functioning of individuals, particularly older adults (Lee et al., 2020).

The growing prevalence of multigenerational households presents unique opportunities and challenges for families (Basavarajappa, 1998). As such, understanding the intricacies, benefits, and challenges experienced by individuals living in multigenerational households is essential in order to provide insight into the dynamics of this living arrangement and to contribute to broader discussions on societal trends and immigration.

Despite the growing presence of South Asian immigrant families in Canada, there remains a limited body of research exploring their lived experiences within multigenerational households, particularly regarding their emotional and psychological wellbeing. South Asian immigrants often face unique stressors shaped by migration, acculturation tensions, and intergenerational value differences (Zou et al., 2023; Islam et al., 2023). These challenges can contribute to emotional distress and strained family dynamics, especially as individuals navigate caregiving responsibilities and cultural expectations within the household (Browne et al., 2017). Youth and adults in these families report experiences of mental health stigma, conflict over autonomy, and the pressures of upholding familial obligations (Islam et al., 2023). For women, particularly in caregiving roles, these pressures are compounded by limited social support and the need to balance cultural norms with the demands of Canadian society (Zou et al., 2023). These findings highlight known collectivist family strengths in providing support, yet they also underscore the negotiation required to sustain such arrangements in contemporary contexts shaped by migration and shifting social norms (Ayika et al., 2018; Bayrakdar & Guveli, 2020). Given this context, more attention is needed on the self-reported emotional and psychological experiences of individuals within South Asian multigenerational households in Canada. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the self-reported benefits and challenges of living in South Asian multigenerational households.

Literature Review

In this literature review, I will begin by outlining key conceptual distinctions and definitions that frame the study of multigenerational living. I will then explore the historical context of multigenerational households to understand how these arrangements have evolved over time. Following this, I will examine the economic factors that influence families' decisions to live in multigenerational households, as well as the social and cultural dynamics that shape these living

arrangements, particularly within South Asian communities. I will also discuss the documented benefits of multigenerational living, including emotional support and shared caregiving responsibilities, before turning to the challenges, such as financial strain and intergenerational tensions. Through this review, I have established a comprehensive foundation for understanding the complexities of multigenerational living in contemporary contexts.

Conceptual Distinctions and Definitions

Although the terms multigenerational and intergenerational are often used interchangeably, it is important to distinguish between the two for the purpose of this study. In gerontological literature, intergenerational relationships refer to the interactions and exchanges between people of different generations, often explored in the context of social programs, caregiving, or emotional support (Brownell & Resnick, 2005). In contrast, multigenerational relationships describe the coexistence of multiple generations, typically within the same household, without necessarily focusing on the nature of their interactions (Brownell & Resnick, 2005). As such, in this paper, the term intergenerational highlights relational dynamics, while multigenerational focuses on the structural arrangements.

Historical Context of Multigenerational Households

Multigenerational living arrangements, which have long been a part of family structures worldwide, have evolved significantly over time (Bengtson 2001; Ruggles, 2003). Examining the historical trends and the various factors influencing these shifts is essential to understand the complexities of multigenerational households today.

In the 1960s, a pivotal shift occurred in scholarly research regarding family structures. Researchers began using quantitative analysis to re-examine the prevailing belief that multigenerational families were the norm in pre-industrial societies (Ruggles, 2003). One of the

key contributors to this new perspective was Peter Laslett (1959), whose research on pre-industrial English households challenged the traditional assumptions about extended kinship in these households (Laslett, 1959; Ruggles, 2012). His findings revealed that extended families were not as common as previously believed, leading to a re-evaluation of long-held ideas about historical family structures.

Laslett's work, coupled with emerging critiques from sociologists and anthropologists in the late 1950s, cast doubt on the theory that industrialization caused a shift from extended to nuclear family structures (Ruggles, 2012). New evidence, primarily demographic data from parish records and household listings in pre-industrial England suggested that nuclear families were already prevalent in England prior to industrialization, undermining the previously accepted theory that economic and social changes were solely responsible for the rise of nuclear households (Laslett, 1965; Ruggles, 2012). By the mid-1970s, this revised understanding gained widespread acceptance, becoming a standard part of sociology textbooks. It was now understood that nuclear families were not a product of industrialization but had existed in certain societies even before significant economic and social transformations.

Moving into the late 20th century, multigenerational living saw a revival. Pilkauskas and colleagues (2020) examined data from the 2018 American Community Survey (ACS) and historical census records from 1870 to 2010, identifying a significant increase in multigenerational households beginning in 1980. This trend was particularly evident in some developing countries, where changes in demographic factors, such as fertility and mortality rates, contributed to the rise of these living arrangements (He & Jia, 2022). As birth rates and life expectancies increased, more children began living with their grandparents. This trend was especially pronounced during the

Great Recession (2007-2009), when economic downturns led many young adult children to move back in with their parents due to job losses and labor market instability (He & Jia, 2022).

However, even after the economic recovery, multigenerational living continued to grow. In the United States, about one-quarter of children have lived in multigenerational households at some point in their lives, with this living arrangement being more common among non-White children (Amorim et al., 2017). Racial and ethnic factors have played a significant role in shaping multigenerational living trends, as evidenced by the increased prevalence of multigenerational households among Hispanics (17.6%) and Americans of two or more races (24.4%) during the Great Recession (Cohn & Passel, 2018). For Asian households, particularly among Chinese, Indian, and Malay families, multigenerational living is often rooted in the preservation of cultural values and expectations (Mehta, 2007).

The rising prevalence of multigenerational households can be attributed not only to economic shifts but also to demographic changes and cultural factors. For example, the increase in migration rates has contributed to more families co-residing across generations (Flake, 2012). Migration has often been linked to cultural practices and economic constraints, both of which influence multigenerational living arrangements (Flake, 2012). In South Asia, the demographic landscape has undergone significant changes in recent decades, particularly regarding the aging population (De Silva, 2003). The number of grandparents in countries like India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan has grown significantly, largely due to improved life expectancy, which rose from less than 40 years in the early 1950s to 65 years by 2010 (De Silva, 2003). This growing population has contributed to the persistence of multigenerational residence in these societies as families continue to live together across generations to provide mutual support and care (Babu et al., 2017).

These demographic shifts carry important implications for family dynamics. As more grandparents live longer, their roles in multigenerational households have become more vital.

The growing number of grandparents in South Asia has further strengthened the tradition of multigenerational living, as these older family members play integral roles in daily life (De Silva, 2003). This shift is driven by socio-cultural values that prioritize intergenerational solidarity and caregiving norms rooted in collectivist traditions (Mehta, 2007; Hortová & Souralová, 2019). In these households, grandparents commonly provide emotional support, help with childcare, and maintain the transmission of cultural and familial values to younger generations, thus reinforcing family cohesion (Babu et al., 2017; Winefield & Air, 2010). Empirical studies reveal multiple benefits arising from grandparental involvement. Mehta (2007) notes that active caregiving roles increase older adults' sense of purpose and social engagement. Grandparent participation in family life also fosters feelings of belonging among both older adults and grandchildren, enhancing emotional resilience (Babu et al., 2017). As such, grandparents often act as cultural and emotional anchors, supporting grandchildren's development and family unity through physical and social support and shared stories and traditions (Langer, 2017).

Similar trends are observed in other parts of the world, including Canada, where multigenerational living has gained momentum in recent years. According to Statistics Canada's 2022 Census, nearly 1 million Canadians, or approximately 7% of the population, live in multigenerational households. This living arrangement is particularly prevalent among First Nations communities and immigrant families, both of which represent the fastest growing population groups (Battams & Mathieu, 2024). For many of these families, multigenerational living reflects cultural norms that prioritize interdependence and familial support such as caregiving between generations (Battams & Mathieu, 2024). Notably, new immigrants to Canada

are more likely to embrace multigenerational living than Canadian-born families, reflecting the cultural and economic factors that shape family structures in immigrant communities (Statistics Canada, 2017).

The history of multigenerational households reveals significant shifts influenced by a variety of factors, including industrialization, economic conditions, demographic changes, and cultural traditions. As we have seen, multigenerational living is not a new phenomenon, but rather one that has evolved over time in response to both societal needs or demands and individual family dynamics. From the mid-20th century's re-evaluation of family structures (Ruggles, 2003) to the contemporary rise of multigenerational households (Pilkauskas et al., 2020), these living arrangements continue to adapt and respond to changing economic, demographic, and cultural landscapes. Understanding these historical trends is essential for addressing the challenges and optimizing the benefits of multigenerational living in today's society.

Economic Factors Influencing Multigenerational Living

Multigenerational living arrangements are deeply influenced by economic factors that vary across different populations, particularly among minority groups and migrant households. Understanding the economic dynamics within these households is crucial for assessing how financial pressures, labor market conditions, and housing costs shape family living arrangements.

Minority populations are more likely to experience multigenerational co-residence compared to white populations, with several structural factors contributing to these differences (Keene & Batson, 2010). These factors include socioeconomic status, immigration patterns, marriage dynamics, and health conditions. These elements often interact in complex ways, influencing the decision to live in multigenerational households. One of the most significant

factors is the economic pressures that families face, particularly in the context of migration and labor force participation.

Flake (2012) conducted a study on migrant multigenerational households and identified distinct financial dynamics when compared to native households and migrant couple households. In migrant multigenerational homes, a greater number of household members contribute to the household's overall income, effectively distributing the financial burden between multiple individuals. This distribution can alleviate financial pressures on any one member, making it easier to manage household expenses, especially in a foreign country with potentially limited economic opportunities. This study also highlighted that children of migrant multigenerational households are less likely to participate in the labor force compared to native children or migrant children in couple households. This trend suggests that multigenerational cohabitation among migrants may not only be driven by economic constraints but also by the pooling of resources within the household. While the reduced labor force participation could point to limited economic opportunities, it may also reflect the strategic benefits of shared resources and familial support, which can offset the financial challenges faced by migrant families. This emphasizes the complex interplay between household structure, cultural background, and economic factors.

The differences in living arrangements between native and migrant populations may not always be rooted in cultural preferences, as is commonly assumed. Van Hook and Glick (2007) challenged the idea that household structures in migrant populations simply mirror those in the country of origin. Their research (2007) found that Mexican immigrants in the United States did not replicate the household structures of Mexicans in Mexico, indicating that cohabitation patterns are shaped by more than just cultural factors. This suggests that economic constraints, social support networks, and adaptation to the host country's context play a significant role in shaping

the living arrangements of migrant populations. Economic factors, such as labor market conditions and the rising cost of housing, often dictate living arrangements, and this can influence the broader patterns of migration and multigenerational living.

The rising cost of housing has become a pressing concern in many countries, including Canada, where approximately 22% of households were living in unaffordable housing situations in 2018, spending at least 30% of their income on housing costs (Randle, Hu, & Thurston, 2021). This financial strain is not only burdensome but also limits disposable income for other essential expenses, such as food, healthcare, and education (Choi & Ramaj, 2023). As a result, multigenerational living arrangements can serve as a safety net, providing both financial and social support during periods of economic difficulty and life transitions such as migration (He & Jia, 2022). By pooling resources and sharing living expenses, multigenerational households can help alleviate financial strain, especially when individuals face challenges like job loss, reduced income, or increasing housing costs.

The flow of economic resources between generations has long been studied in the context of intergenerational transfers. Traditionally, resources flow from parents to children until the children are well-settled in adulthood (Keen & Batson, 2010). However, as parents age or experience health issues, adult children may begin to transfer resources back to their parents, especially in times of need (Keen & Batson, 2010). Choi (2003) suggests that around 30% of coresidence involving parents and adult children occurs because aging parents require assistance with daily activities and rely on the instrumental support of their children. Exchange theory helps explain these patterns by viewing family support as a reciprocal process where family members negotiate care and assistance in a manner similar to the exchange of goods and services (Keen & Batson, 2010). For example, older parents may offer financial help in exchange for caregiving,

while adult children may provide care for future financial support (Keen & Batson, 2010). These expectations are informal and oftentimes grounded in cultural values around filial piety.

Adult children, particularly young adults, often turn to their parents for financial or emotional support during major life transitions such as job loss, divorce, or periods of economic hardship (Aquilino, 1990; Choi, 2003; Ward et al., 1992, as cited in Keen & Batson, 2010). However, intergenerational exchanges are rarely unidirectional. There is emerging evidence that parents also receive vital support from adult children when they themselves face needs or vulnerabilities. For instance, research from Canadian longitudinal data shows that older parents often provide financial assistance to their adult children during periods of transition, but adult children reciprocate with practical care or financial help when their parents age or experience decline (Mulder & Smits, 2013). Similarly, U.S data reveals that adult children step in to assist older parents, driven by reciprocal norms that become salient in response to parental need (Silverstein & Giarrusso, 2010). These longitudinal studies further indicate that such exchange of care from children to parents varies over time, closely corresponding to changes in parents' health, household composition, and need. Such findings highlight the dynamic and reciprocal nature of intergenerational support, underscoring that multigenerational living enables mutual aid when either generation experiences challenges.

The economic realities of modern life, particularly in times of economic crises, often make multigenerational living arrangements a practical necessity. While most individuals may prefer to live independently, the financial pressures associated with high housing costs, economic instability, and job insecurity often push families to co-reside to maintain financial stability. These living arrangements provide a safety net and can also offer emotional support, helping individuals navigate life transitions and economic hardships.

Social & Cultural Factors Influencing Multigenerational Living

Cultural values play a significant role in shaping multigenerational living arrangements, particularly through the lens of familial bonds and societal expectations. In many cultures, the concept of filial piety, a Confucian principle focused on honoring and caring for one's parents and older adults and completing a 'generational contract', is central to multigenerational living (Liu & Easthope, 2017). This cultural norm, which emphasizes mutual care and respect across generations, is particularly influential in South Asian and East Asian communities, where older generations are often seen as integral to the family unit. These deeply held cultural values can impact both the emotional and logistical dynamics of multigenerational living, offering both benefits and challenges for families who strive to uphold these traditions.

Non-white and socioeconomically disadvantaged parents, such as single, young, or less educated individuals, are more likely to live in multigenerational households (Pilkauskas et al., 2020). The family's lifestyle, cultural environment, housing situation, and the education levels of family members all influence the strength of these intergenerational bonds, and the level of support exchanged between generations (Hortová & Souralová, 2019). These factors come together to reinforce familial solidarity and the expectation that family members will support one another.

In South Asian communities, the cultural values of filial piety and family interdependence are particularly strong, with older adults playing an essential role in family and social life (Babu et al., 2017). Family interdependence, which refers to the mutual support and shared responsibilities among family members, reflects the principles of exchange theory, which suggests that relationships are maintained through a reciprocal exchange of resources, support, and care over time (Keen & Batson, 2010). Additionally, the increase in life expectancy in the post-industrial era has led to a shift in the role of grandparents, as they are now more likely to remain

physically active and socially engaged (Winefield & Air, 2010). As a result, many grandparents today are increasingly involved in caregiving roles for their grandchildren, as well as providing emotional and practical support to younger family members (Choi & Ramaj, 2023). The longevity not only extends the period during which older adults can contribute to family life but also redefines aging as a stage marked by active participation rather than withdrawal. This evolving role aligns with the World Health Organization's (2016) promotion of "active aging," which emphasizes the importance of maintaining physical, social, economic, cultural, and spiritual involvement among older individuals.

For grandparents in these households, engaging in childcare, participating in family decision-making, and imparting cultural values to grandchildren can provide a sense of purpose and belonging. Grandparents often take on the role of family patriarch or matriarch, providing emotional support and guidance to younger generations while maintaining intergenerational bonds (Babu et al., 2017). Their role extends beyond caregiving to include serving as mentors, storytellers, and transmitters of cultural traditions, such as language and customs, which are vital for maintaining family heritage and values. This role is not only significant for grandparents' emotional well-being but also contributes to their physical and mental health, as they feel needed and valued within the family system. This intergenerational relationship strengthens the family unit and provides a foundation of support for younger generations (Babu et al., 2017). This shift is in contrast with the role of grandparents just a few decades ago, when older adults were often more isolated or less engaged in the family unit (Hossen, 2012). The current trend, especially in South Asian communities, reflects the evolving nature of intergenerational relationships as older generations increasingly take on active and central roles in family life (Babu et al., 2017). This

engagement not only benefits the grandparents but also contributes to the overall health and well-being of the entire family.

For South Asian Muslims, cultural values are further intertwined with religious teachings that emphasize the importance of honoring and caring for one's parents (Khan, 2023). Islamic teachings highlight the duty of children to serve and respect their parents, with the Quran stating that this responsibility is second only to the duty of prayer (Khan, 2023). This religious perspective profoundly shapes family dynamics within South Asian Muslim communities, where caregiving for older parents is seen not only as a cultural obligation but as a religious one. These beliefs influence how intergenerational relationships are structured, with children being socialized to prioritize the care and well-being of their parents. Muslim families are often more likely to adhere to traditional caregiving practices, with adult children providing support to older parents in accordance with Islamic teachings (Hasnain & Rana, 2010). This cultural and religious intersection creates a framework for intergenerational living, fostering a sense of duty and responsibility that enhances familial ties and supports family cohesion.

In conclusion, cultural factors, including familial bonds, values of filial piety, and religious teachings, are integral to understanding the dynamics of multigenerational living arrangements. These cultural norms provide a framework for intergenerational support and caregiving, offering emotional, social, and practical benefits for families. In South Asian and other culturally similar communities, grandparents are not just care providers of social and practical support but central figures who maintain family values and pass down cultural traditions. As the family structure continues to evolve in a globalized world, understanding the cultural significance of multigenerational households is crucial for supporting the well-being of these families.

Benefits of Multigenerational Living

Multigenerational households offer several advantages, which encompass economic benefits, social and emotional support, and caregiving assistance.

Economic Benefits

As discussed earlier, financial constraints often serve as a primary motivation for families to adopt multigenerational living arrangements (Choi & Ramaj, 2023). By pooling resources and sharing expenses, multigenerational households offer significant economic advantages that can alleviate strain for all members involved. These benefits are particularly pronounced in households facing financial pressures, as shared living reduces individual costs and enables families to better manage their economic challenges.

Socioeconomic status plays a pivotal role in shaping the types of support exchanged within families. Families from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to exchange both financial and emotional support, given their greater resources. In contrast, families from lower-status groups, with fewer financial resources, tend to rely on more practical forms of assistance, such as shared housing arrangements (Keene & Batson, 2010). This distinction highlights the economic role of multigenerational living in offering support across different financial circumstances. For families experiencing economic hardship or limited financial resources, multigenerational living allows for a shared economic burden, where members contribute to housing costs, utilities, food, and other daily expenses. This pooling of resources can provide a more comfortable standard of living and reduce individual financial stress.

Kamo (2000) identifies three primary types of extended family household formations, which help explain racial and ethnic differences in multigenerational co-residence patterns. These formations reflect distinct economic and cultural factors that influence the structure and needs of multigenerational households: 1) Downward-Extended Households: This type of arrangement

occurs when adult children return to live with their parents, often in times of economic hardship or life transitions (e.g., job loss, divorce). In these households, adult children seek financial or emotional assistance and share living costs with their parents. This arrangement typically arises due to financial constraints, where pooling resources helps the household weather economic difficulties. 2) Upward-Extended Households: These households involve adult children taking on caregiving responsibilities for aging parents, often due to widowhood, illness, or frailty. In these cases, the adult children provide emotional, financial, or physical care for older parents. This arrangement, while offering a different form of support, can also provide financial benefits by reducing the costs associated with eldercare, which might otherwise be unaffordable or unavailable. 3) Horizontal-Extended Households: These households involve adults, often siblings, sharing living arrangements and offering mutual support. In this type of household, sibling relationships play a central role in caregiving and resource-sharing. This arrangement can offer both financial and emotional support to family members and is particularly common in cultural and socioeconomic contexts where extended family networks are the primary means of survival and mutual aid. Each of these household types serves distinct needs, reflecting the diverse experiences of racial and ethnic groups. These multigenerational living patterns underscore the role of extended families in providing financial, emotional, and practical support in times of need.

In summary, the economic benefits of multigenerational living are substantial, particularly for families facing financial challenges. By pooling resources, sharing living costs, and providing practical support, multigenerational households can create a financial safety net for members during times of economic hardship. These arrangements allow families to access better housing, reduce the financial burden on individual members, and provide stability in the face of life transitions. Whether through downward, upward, or horizontal extended household types,

multigenerational living offers an essential support system for families across various racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic contexts.

Social Support Benefits

Another significant advantage of multigenerational living is the social and emotional support system it provides, which is particularly prominent in collectivist cultures that emphasize interdependence, cohesion, and commitment. In these cultures, more focus is placed on the family or community as a whole, where individual needs are often secondary to the group's well-being (Burholt et al., 2018). This encourages stronger reliance on interdependent support networks, particularly in providing social and emotional care among family members (Burholt et al., 2018).

In collectivist cultures, traditional tools used to assess social support networks may not fully capture the full extent of available support, primarily due to the widespread presence of multigenerational households. This can lead to an underestimation of the resources accessible to older individuals and an overestimation of the support they may need (Burholt et al., 2018). Multigenerational households, therefore, present a unique challenge in accurately assessing the depth of emotional and practical support available within these family structures. However, the strong support system provided by multigenerational households in collectivist societies significantly contributes to the positive well-being of their members, particularly older adults.

Support networks, in the context of multigenerational households, consist of a variety of relationship configurations, creating a complex matrix of sources that offer social, emotional, and instrumental support to older individuals (Burholt & Dobbs, 2014). Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework, support networks in multigenerational households extend beyond the immediate family to include friends, neighbors, and community organizations, reflecting the multiple environmental systems that collectively enhance the quality of life for older adults

(Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The diversity of these relationships highlights the different forms of support that may be needed or offered, ranging from emotional care to practical assistance with daily activities (Bengtson, 2001). In multigenerational households, these networks are often intricately woven into the family structure, establishing a web of interdependence and shared responsibility that strengthens familial bonds and provides a robust support system (Keene & Batson, 2010). Examining the composition and functioning of these support networks is crucial for understanding the experiences of these members in multigenerational households in various cultural contexts. This is especially true in collectivist societies, where the well-being of the individual is closely intertwined with the well-being of the family and the community (Ayika et al., 2018). The emphasis on collective support in such settings underscores the importance of preserving and supporting multigenerational living arrangements as a means of promoting both individual and communal health (Mehta, 2007).

In conclusion, the emotional support found within multigenerational households in collectivist cultures plays a vital role in enhancing the well-being of older adults. These living arrangements highlight the significance of cultural values that prioritize familial cohesion and shared responsibility, providing a strong foundation for mental and emotional resilience.

Caregiving Benefits

In addition to the numerous advantages of shared living, caregiving, both for children and adults, emerges as one of the most significant benefits of multigenerational households. As mentioned earlier in this paper, multigenerational caregiving typically refers to unpaid care provided for an adult while also caring for a dependent child within the same household (Bardoel & Drago, 2016). This dual caregiving role is often referred to as the *sandwich generation*, a term used to describe individuals, typically middle-aged adults, who are “sandwiched” between the

responsibilities of caring for their own children and their aging parents (Grundy & Henretta, 2006). Members of the sandwich generation often experience unique emotional, physical, and financial pressures as they balance these caregiving demands. Research has shown that this group may face considerable role strain, time scarcity, and burnout due to the simultaneous and competing demands placed on them (Pashazade et al., 2024). However, this paper also discusses caregiving in the reverse direction, where older adults take on caregiving responsibilities for their grandchildren, highlighting the bidirectional nature of care across generations. These living arrangements often facilitate the sharing of caregiving responsibilities, which can be particularly valuable for families with young children, older relatives, or individuals with disabilities or chronic illnesses.

The collaborative approach to caregiving in multigenerational households ensures, ideally, that the needs of both children and adults are met in a holistic manner. Family members can support each other by sharing daily tasks, providing emotional care, and assisting with personal needs. This distribution of caregiving duties not only alleviates the burden on any one individual but also fosters a sense of shared responsibility, and offers the opportunity to transmit cultural values, traditions, and life lessons between generations (Bayrakdar & Guveli, 2020). Older family members often play an active role in nurturing and guiding younger generations which strengthens family bonds. This intergenerational exchange not only benefits the younger members of the family but also contributes to the overall well-being of the family unit.

A particularly notable aspect of caregiving in multigenerational households is the role that grandparents play, especially in the context of rising single-parent households and maternal employment. Research indicates that as single parenthood and maternal employment continue to rise, there has been a marked increase in the need for grandparents' involvement in household

activities and childcare (Burgess & Muir, 2020). Grandparents often provide valuable support and stability, playing an instrumental role in navigating changing societal norms and the economic demands of modern life. In the United States, this reliance on extended family for childcare is even more pronounced due to the lack of public policies that adequately support single parents, divorced families, and dual-earner households (Baker et al., 2008). The absence of sufficient childcare resources has led many families to turn to grandparents and other relatives for assistance, providing a safety net for families as they balance work and home life (Winefield & Air, 2010). The presence of grandparents in multigenerational households offers numerous benefits, including reduced childcare costs, enhanced emotional support, and the preservation of cultural traditions and values across generations.

While availability of caregiving for children and older adults is a primary motivation for many multigenerational households, there are also other factors that drive this living arrangement. This support may not be limited to personal care but can also extend to assisting with everyday tasks and promoting overall family well-being (Burgess & Muir, 2020). In addition, multigenerational living arrangements often emerge as a response to unforeseen life events, such as the death of a spouse, illness, or divorce in later life. For some families, the decision to live together is a pragmatic response to these challenges, aiming to ease the burdens created by such life changes. For others, the choice to embrace a multigenerational lifestyle is driven by the desire to foster a close-knit family environment, where emotional connections and shared responsibilities are prioritized (Burgess & Muir, 2020).

One of the overarching benefits of multigenerational households is the way they facilitate the sharing of various responsibilities, such as childcare and household chores. This is especially advantageous for working parents and those caring for older adults, as it helps to balance the

practical and emotional demands of caregiving. Caregiving within multigenerational households offers substantial benefits, from resource-sharing to improved emotional well-being. These living arrangements provide a practical solution to many of the challenges families face today, especially in balancing caregiving duties with other responsibilities. Ultimately, these households offer not only economic and practical advantages but also emotional support systems that enhance the quality of life for all members involved.

Challenges of Multigenerational Living

While multigenerational living offers numerous benefits, it is important to recognize that this arrangement can also present various challenges for family members. These challenges may include financial strain, increased caregiving demands and potential conflicts over parenting styles (Choi & Ramaj, 2023). Caregiving, particularly within multigenerational households, can be a significant source of stress, often giving rise to emotional strain and tensions over household roles and parenting approaches (Brownell & Resnick, 2005). Moreover, caregiving for older adults has been identified as a chronic stressor, carrying long-term physical and psychological consequences for caregivers (Gupta & Pillai, 2013). The responsibilities involved in caregiving often limit the care provider's personal, social, and professional lives, increasing their vulnerability to psychological distress. Care providers supporting older adults with chronic conditions such as dementia, often face heightened emotional and psychological strain. For instance, research indicates that up to 48% of dementia care providers experience psychiatric challenges, highlighting the substantial mental health impact associated with intensive caregiving responsibilities (Gupta & Pillai, 2013). These stressors are compounded by the unpredictability of a care recipient's illness, which can leave care providers uncertain about future needs and their own ability to manage both their well-being and the well-being of their loved ones.

Moreover, care providers often face difficulties in balancing their caregiving duties with other family obligations, social relationships, and personal time (Brownell & Resnick, 2005). Managing difficult caregiving tasks, such as dealing with behavioral issues from care recipients, further intensifies caregiver burnout. As caregiving duties evolve and the care recipient's condition changes, caregivers may feel overwhelmed and isolated, which can exacerbate the emotional and physical toll (Gupta & Pillai, 2013). Thus, caregiving for older adults significantly impacts caregivers' physical, emotional, and social well-being, underlining the need for adequate support systems and resources to help them navigate these challenges.

In addition to caregiving obligations, multigenerational living can significantly impact individuals' sense of privacy and freedom, particularly when space is limited and opportunities to find personal space is scarce. Some residents report a loss of privacy due to the constant presence of family members and the lack of personal space, which can make it difficult to host guests or engage in private activities, such as expressing emotions or resolving conflicts, especially in front of older generations (Burgess & Muir, 2020). The loss of personal space and autonomy is a common concern in multigenerational households, and it can contribute to an increased tension among family members.

This reduction in privacy and autonomy also aligns with findings from a study conducted in Australia, where multigenerational living was found to be both enriching and stressful (Easthope et al., 2015). While the emotional benefits, such as companionship and shared family time, were appreciated, the challenges of limited privacy and interpersonal conflicts were also recognized. Similarly, another Australian study noted the advantages of companionship and support in multigenerational homes, while also highlighting concerns like conflicts over household chores and the struggle for personal space (Liu & Easthope, 2016).

Despite these challenges, many individuals in multigenerational households find that the positive experiences, such as emotional support, stronger family bonds, and shared resources, outweigh the difficulties (Babu et al., 2017). However, these households require careful navigation of interpersonal dynamics, including issues of privacy, household responsibilities, and caregiving duties. Multigenerational living offers a complex blend of positive and challenging aspects. While it provides valuable emotional support, resource-sharing, and opportunities for intergenerational bonding, it can also present significant challenges related to privacy, caregiving stress, and household responsibilities.

Theoretical Framework

This study used a life course perspective as the guiding framework for understanding intergenerational relations in both developmental and historical contexts (Hareven, 1994). The life course perspective views individuals' lives as socially sequenced timelines, acknowledging the importance of factors such as generational succession and age in shaping behavior and life trajectory (Elder et al., 2003). It encompasses three dimensions: 1) the timing of life transitions amidst historical change, 2) the synchronization of individual life transitions with collective familial ones and their impact on generational relations, and 3) the influence of earlier life events, shaped by historical circumstances, on subsequent events (Hareven, 1994). This approach combines these different dimensions by considering historical, social, and personal factors when analyzing generational relations.

Intergenerational relations can be better understood through the life course perspective by accounting for various factors affecting individuals throughout their lives (Hareven, 1994). Historical circumstances, individual experiences, and family experiences all contribute to shaping an individual's life trajectory (Elder, 1978; Hareven, 1994). A key tenet of this perspective is the

concept of "linked lives," which emphasizes the interdependence of family members whose well-being is closely interconnected (Choi & Ramaj, 2023). This interdependence often results in mutual caregiving and financial support, especially during periods of hardship (Greenfield & Marks, 2006). For instance, contemporary challenges such as housing unaffordability can significantly alter children's and families' living arrangements. A housing affordability crisis may hinder individuals' ability to establish or maintain independent households, causing families to pool resources to cover rent or mortgage payments (Choi & Ramaj, 2023). In such scenarios, intergenerational households may form out of necessity, reflecting the dynamic interplay between macro structural factors and familial support systems. These illustrate how broader economic trends can shape living arrangements and intergenerational support patterns within families.

This approach also considers individuals' experiences across multiple domains, including education, family, career, and community involvement (Hareven, 1994). By acknowledging the impact of structural forces on families' socioeconomic conditions, the life course perspective highlights the interconnected nature of individual and societal influences in shaping multigenerational living experiences (Carr, 2018; Elder, 1994). Additionally, it recognizes the role of cultural orientations in shaping family dynamics. Individuals socialized with values that emphasize familial support often experience a stronger sense of obligation to care for relatives, which can significantly influence the character of intergenerational relationships (Carr, 2018; Elder, 1994).

In addition, the life course perspective acknowledges that one generation could transmit the ripple effects of historical circumstances to the next generation (Hareven, 1994). This means that children could be affected by these circumstances either directly or through intergenerational transmission. The life course theory examines individuals' lives within social and cultural contexts,

providing a framework for understanding diverse patterns of support throughout life and the expectations of both recipients and care providers, influenced by sociocultural contexts.

Methods

Research Paradigm and Epistemological Positioning

This study is grounded in a constructivist paradigm, which holds that individuals actively create meaning through their interactions, shaped by cultural histories, social roles, and everyday experiences within their households (Creswell, 2018). Given that multigenerational living is deeply embedded in cultural and familial traditions, this paradigm is well suited to exploring how participants interpret their roles, responsibilities, and identities within such arrangements. The study also draws on an interpretivist epistemology, which assumes that knowledge is not objective or fixed, but rather co-constructed through the dialogue between researcher and participant (Carter & Little, 2007). This approach allows the research to center participants' voices and lived meanings, rather than imposing external theoretical frameworks.

Ontologically, the research takes a relativist position, recognizing that there is no single reality but rather multiple, context-specific truths shaped by participants' positionality. such as their generational status, gender, migration history, or cultural background (Braun & Clarke, 2013). For example, a grandparent, parent, and a young adult child may experience the same household differently, influenced by age, values, and cultural expectations. This lens allows for a deeper appreciation of the internal diversity and complexity within South Asian multigenerational households, especially as they navigate shifting intergenerational roles in a diasporic Canadian context.

The study does not seek universal conclusions but instead aims to explore the rich, nuanced, and often contradictory experiences of individuals who both contribute to and are shaped by the

structure of multigenerational living (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017). A qualitative research design was therefore adopted to capture the complexity of these lived experiences, with a focus on how participants understand and make meaning of their daily lives, challenges, and sources of support within the household (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Through first-person accounts, the study explores the emotional, cultural, and relational dynamics of multigenerational living, elements often overlooked in more quantitative or policy-driven research. This approach also acknowledges the importance of reflexivity, researcher positionality, and context, which are essential in any inquiry involving culturally embedded family life (Morse, 2003).

Recruitment

Participants for this study were recruited from five South Asian families residing in multigenerational households across the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) and the Niagara Region. While the sample size is small, it includes families with varying backgrounds and experiences, offering valuable insight into the dynamics of multigenerational living within South Asian communities. The selection of these geographic areas was intentional, as they are home to some of the largest and most culturally diverse South Asian populations in Ontario.

Recruitment efforts aimed to ensure representation across different South Asian nationalities, languages, and religious backgrounds to capture a wide spectrum of experiences within multigenerational living arrangements. The inclusion criteria for participants was as follows: (1) individuals self-identifying as South Asian, from countries including Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the Maldives; (2) individuals currently living in a household with at least three or more generations (e.g., grandparents, parents, and children); (3) individuals who were able to communicate in English, Urdu, or Hindi; and (4) individuals aged 18 years or older.

To reach eligible participants, a snowball sampling method was employed. Recruitment strategies involved leveraging existing personal and professional networks and forming partnerships with local South Asian religious institutions, community-based organizations, and cultural associations. These included, but were not limited to, organizations such as the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) Canada, Indus Community Services, and various local community centres serving South Asian populations in the GTHA and Niagara Region. Flyers and digital recruitment posters (Appendix A) were distributed through these organizations, and word-of-mouth referrals were encouraged to further extend outreach.

In addition to organizational collaboration, social media platforms such as Instagram and X were utilized to share study information within South Asian networks. The target recruitment range for this study was 15 to 20 participants from at least 4 to 5 different families residing in multigenerational households. However, the final sample comprised n=10 individuals due to limited response to recruitment efforts and difficulties in reaching eligible participants. Despite the small sample size, the study included five distinct family groups, allowing for the exploration of a range of household experiences and perspectives within South Asian multigenerational families.

Participant Demographics

In this study, household members were categorized into three generational groups based on age and familial role: young adults - YA (first generation)**,** adults - A (second generation)**,** and older adults - OA (third generation). The younger generation was defined as individuals aged 18–34 years**,** typically representing children or grandchildren within the household structure. The middle generation included individuals aged 35–54 years, generally functioning as parents or primary care providers who may support both older and younger members. The older generation was defined

as individuals aged 55 years and older, often representing grandparents. These age categories were selected to reflect distinct life stages and caregiving roles relevant to household dynamics.

Among the 10 participants, 5 were classified as young adults, 3 as adults, and 2 as older adults. The sample consisted of 8 females and 2 males. Participants were ethnically from India, Pakistan, or of mixed Indian-Pakistani heritage. A detailed table of participant demographics is provided in Appendix C.

Interviews

The research project prioritized ethical integrity, with a particular focus on informed consent and participant privacy throughout its qualitative interview process involving South Asian individuals. Prior to each interview, participants were provided with detailed participant information sheets and consent forms. These documents explained the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any time during the study, how their data would be stored and used, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Given the potential for varied literacy levels in English among South Asian participants, I ensured that these materials were read aloud when needed, and verbal consent was obtained in cases where written consent was not feasible. This approach reflected a culturally sensitive approach to accessibility and inclusivity.

This study employed a qualitative research design using semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, which are well-suited to exploring the lived experiences of individuals within their unique cultural and social contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2018). Rooted in a constructivist paradigm and interpretivist epistemology, this approach recognizes that knowledge is co-constructed between researcher and participant and seeks to understand participants' subjective experiences in depth (Carter & Little, 2007).

Interviews were chosen for their ability to facilitate rich, in-depth narratives and allow participants to articulate their thoughts, feelings, and interpretations in their own words (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017). A semi-structured format offered the flexibility to adapt to each participant's experiences while ensuring consistency in addressing core themes. A topic guide (Appendix B) was used to ensure alignment with research objectives while allowing room for open-ended responses, particularly useful for capturing complex narratives of migration, family dynamics, caregiving, and cultural identity which were central themes in South Asian multigenerational households (Smith & Sparkes, 2016).

To prioritize culturally respectful engagement, a gatekeeper, typically a trusted family member or liaison, was designated as the initial point of contact for each household. This individual played a crucial role in building trust, organizing interview logistics, and facilitating communication within the family, particularly across generations. Gatekeepers were especially helpful when participants experienced language barriers, as they could explain the study's purpose and process in culturally familiar terms. Their involvement was instrumental in navigating intergenerational dynamics and cultural nuances that may have otherwise hindered participation or openness.

Interviews were conducted in the language most comfortable for the participant - English, Urdu, or Hindi - to ensure they could express themselves freely and clearly. This approach acknowledged linguistic diversity and sought to reduce power imbalances often present in cross-cultural research settings (Morse, 2003). Participants were given the choice to be interviewed either in-person, in their homes, or virtually via Zoom. While remote interviews provided accessibility and flexibility, especially for those with health concerns or caregiving

responsibilities, in-person interviews were prioritized, when possible, as they allowed for a richer contextual understanding.

Each interview lasted approximately one hour, which provided sufficient time to explore key topics in detail while avoiding participant fatigue. Interviews began with demographic questions (e.g., age, gender, place of birth, and migration history) to establish context, followed by deeper thematic questions related to household roles, caregiving responsibilities, decision-making processes, and broader family dynamics. To support the accuracy and integrity of data, an active transcription method was employed using Zoom's audio feature to follow the conversation in real time, whether interviews were conducted virtually or in person. This allowed for the capture of direct quotes and ensured that the interviewer remained fully present and responsive. Real-time transcription enhanced data reliability (Creswell, 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis (TA), as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed to analyze the qualitative data collected through interviews. This method was selected for its theoretical flexibility and systematic approach to identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. TA is particularly effective for organizing and interpreting complex lived experiences, such as those of individuals residing in multigenerational South Asian households, while remaining adaptable to the specific aims of the research. This approach focuses not only on describing individual experiences but also on understanding how those experiences are shaped by, and situated within, broader social, cultural, and relational contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis followed the six-phase process proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes,

defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This approach enabled a structured yet iterative engagement with the data, allowing themes to emerge both from participants' explicit accounts and from underlying patterns of meaning.

The analysis was conducted using NVivo 15 software, which supported systematic management and organization of the qualitative data. Transcripts were imported into the software and read multiple times to ensure familiarity with the content. Line-by-line coding was applied within NVivo to identify meaningful units of data, allowing for efficient storage, retrieval, and comparison of coded segments. These codes were then grouped into broader categories and examined for patterns that aligned with the study's aims. This process ensured coherence within themes and clear distinctions between them, resulting in a final thematic framework that reflected key patterns and shared meanings across the dataset.

Through this thorough coding process, several key themes and sub-themes were identified, highlighting the layered experiences of participants. Each of these themes reflected the different dimensions of multigenerational life, offering insight into the distribution of household roles, the emotional and physical aspects of caregiving, the evolving relationships between family members, and the influence of religious and cultural beliefs on daily life.

The themes collectively provided a rich, more comprehensive understanding of how cultural values, intergenerational relationships, and socio-religious factors shape the lived experiences of South Asian families in multigenerational households.

Findings

The thematic analysis of the data collected from interviews identified four main themes that capture the experiences and perceptions of individuals living in multigenerational households. These themes include: *1) The Multifaceted Nature of Multigenerational Living; 2) Managing*

Domestic Roles in Multigenerational Settings; 3) The Rewards and Strains of Intergenerational Care; 4) Faith as a Binding and Dividing Force. The following sections will explore each of these themes and the various aspects that shape the lives of family members within multigenerational homes.

Theme: The Multifaceted Nature of Multigenerational Living

This theme captured the complex interpersonal relationships within multigenerational households. While many participants spoke about the positive emotional and social support fostered by living with multiple generations, others noted the challenges that arise from differing values, communication styles, and the need for personal space. Two key sub themes were identified: 1) Intergenerational Bonds and Emotional Reciprocity; 2) Tensions in Value Systems across Generations

Intergenerational Bonds and Emotional Reciprocity

A common sentiment among participants was the appreciation for the sense of comfort, support, and shared values that multigenerational living fostered. Participants found reassurance in having older family members present, both for their own emotional well-being and for the positive environment it created for raising children. Older family members helped maintain a sense of order, tradition, and emotional grounding within the home.

One participant reflected on how the presence of her older parents positively influenced her family's emotional dynamics, noting how shared values created a respectful and nurturing environment:

> *"Me and my husband also have elders around, and it's kind of comforting for us. It reflects on how we are, when we're less burdened, we're softer, probably better parents. There's also this whole dynamic where everyone is living up to a standard.*

Everyone behaves a certain way because there's a code of conduct, and each generation brings their values into the household." (P3-A)

This insight points to the role that older generations can play, helping maintain respectful family norms and supporting healthier parenting practices. She also emphasized the role of her husband in helping her out within the household. She also expressed gratitude for his understanding and traditional upbringing, which made it easier for her parents to live with them without affecting their relationship negatively:

"I'm very lucky that I have a husband who supports me. [...] If his parents were in the same situation, of course they would stay with us, just like mine are now." (P3-A)

Such dynamics reflect the mutual respect and emotional understanding that are essential to making multigenerational living not only workable but emotionally fulfilling.

Shared leisure activities were also a meaningful way for family members across generations to spend quality time with each other. For many participants, these everyday interactions fostered a sense of togetherness and reinforced family cohesion over time.

"*During cold days, we used to play board games. We bought Scrabble, Monopoly, cards, and all those. But now we watch movies together and sometimes we play table tennis.... and we discuss things when we are sitting together." (P4-OA)*

Such reflections highlight how simple things like playing games and having conversations, become important avenues for nurturing intergenerational relationships and maintaining emotional reciprocity within multigenerational households.

In multigenerational households, emotional reciprocity is not solely built on shared activities but also on mutual respect for boundaries and personal space. Several participants noted that the ability to coexist harmoniously without constant intrusion was key to maintaining a healthy

relationship with other members of the family. The following participant highlights how a respectful and understanding relationship with an older family member can contribute to a peaceful domestic atmosphere:

> *"She's [Mother-in-law] a very understanding lady, she doesn't interfere. She mostly spends time in her room, watching videos on her tablet or doing her religious practices. She's not always sitting with us or hovering over us — that's a very good thing. She knows how to give space, so the atmosphere in our house is very smooth. If I'm watching TV, no one interferes, everyone follows their own schedule, and everything just flows." (P5-A)*

Emotional closeness in multigenerational living does not always stem from constant interaction. Instead, it can be nurtured through subtle gestures of respect. When each member recognizes and honours the preferences of others, it fosters a sense of ease, mutual understanding, and enduring connection across generations.

For some participants, intergenerational living was not a temporary arrangement but a deeply ingrained way of life, shaping their emotional development and sense of belonging from an early age. These experiences often fostered healthy relational bonds and a sense of reciprocity that transcended obligation or duty. One young adult participant reflected on her relationship with her grandparents, highlighting the emotional stability that stems from her living in a multigenerational household:

> *"I think it's always been good. I grew up in an intergenerational household, then we moved away for almost 8 to 10 years, and then we ended up moving back. So, I've never not known life without them in the sense that they've always been there. We have a good relationship." (P9-YA)*

This reflection underscores how emotional closeness can be developed through both proximity and continuity. For those who have spent most of their lives in multigenerational settings, familial interdependence becomes a natural thing, grounded in familiarity, shared routines, and consistent support.

In general, participants acknowledged that despite the logistical or cultural complexities, having older adults present enhanced their lives by creating a more emotionally supported family home. This sub theme revealed that multigenerational households can serve as emotionally enriching environments where shared values, mutual respect, and intergenerational support foster stronger family relationships. The presence of older family members contributed to a sense of moral grounding, and emotional reassurance, helping families feel more connected.

Tensions in Value Systems across Generations

Despite the emotional benefits of multigenerational living, participants also described persistent tensions stemming from generational gaps, conflicting values, and a lack of personal space. These challenges often surfaced when individual needs, particularly those of younger adults, clashed with traditional expectations held by older generations. While the presence of older family members often fostered a strong sense of belonging, it simultaneously required the constant negotiation of differing worldviews, lifestyle preferences, and communication norms.

One key area of tension involved the need for privacy. Several participants shared that after long work or school days, they needed time alone to recharge, needs not always understood or respected by older family members:

> *"When I come home from university or work [...] I just need to go to my room and chill, but my parents get very offended by this. My mom gets really, really upset with me all the time." (P10-YA)*

Another participant echoed this sentiment, noting the difficulty of maintaining emotional boundaries in a shared household:

> *"If I'm having a bad day and need space, I don't always get that privacy because I have to be present for the family." (P8-YA)*

These reflections point to a disconnect between generational understandings of self-care and familial obligation. While younger adults often viewed solitude as necessary for mental well-being, older adults could interpret it as emotional withdrawal or disrespect. This misalignment occasionally resulted in feelings of guilt and emotional strain.

Participants also described how broader generational value differences shaped their day-to-day experiences. Cultural shifts and differing social norms between generations often contributed to misunderstandings, particularly in areas related to identity, emotional expression, and autonomy. One participant reflected on this challenge with maturity and perspective:

> *"And I know that they are a product of their upbringing like it's kind of unavoidable, and I can't expect them to fully agree with every single thing that I believe in, because ultimately we were raised in completely different environments with different morals and values. So just kind of that radical acceptance and coming to terms with it, and kind of compromising a little bit. And I know that, like I've noticed a lot that ever since we've lived here, my parents have also changed and compromised a lot. So it's kind of a sacrifice on both ends." (P10-YA)*

She went on to reflect on how these efforts to maintain harmony also required softening one's approach and being more patient in daily interactions:

"Just being more patient with them. And you know sometimes just like being quiet and accepting things for the way that they are and communicating with them gently." (P10-YA)

This account captures the emotional and relational adjustments required to maintain harmony when living with members of different generations. The participant highlights how mutual compromise, patience, and gentle communication can help ease some of this tension, suggesting that these conflicts are not only inevitable but also potentially transformative.

Some participants found that communication became more difficult as generational distance widened. For example, younger adults often felt more comfortable sharing with parents than grandparents:

"I think it's way harder for my grandparents to hear me or my mom out and I feel like it gets easier as we move closer to our generation." (P1-YA)

This underscores how age and cultural distance can also complicate intergenerational understanding, especially when trying to express differing opinions or needs.

Communication challenges also extended into the realm of romantic relationships. Several participants described how the presence of older members in the home influenced how openly they could express affection toward their partners. For instance, one participant shared how her father-in-law's comment made her and her husband more cautious:

"Now we're overly conscious of it—we don't even sit too close to each other when they're around. [...] We want her [our daughter] to grow up seeing love and warmth between her parents, but we can't fully express that because of cultural expectations." (P8-YA)

Yet for others, the presence of family was viewed as a protective factor, discouraging arguments and fostering a more peaceful environment for children:

> *"Sometimes, between husband and wife, I feel like yelling at him, but then I remember that his [husband] mom is around. But in a way, that's a blessing too. It saves the house environment. It keeps negativity away because the kids don't see arguments happening." (P5-A)*

In conclusion, this subtheme revealed that tensions in value systems across generations are common but not unmanageable. Participants navigated ongoing struggles around privacy, emotional expression, and differing worldviews, often balancing respect for tradition with evolving norms. These findings highlight the emotional complexity and adaptability required to sustain meaningful relationships within multigenerational South Asian households.

Together, these accounts illustrate the dual nature of multigenerational living. While some forms of emotional expression may be constrained, other aspects of multigenerational living, such as restraint, mutual accountability and compromise can positively influence overall family dynamics.

Theme: Managing Domestic Roles in Multigenerational Settings

This theme revealed two interconnected subthemes: 1) Functional Benefits of Role Sharing and 2) Negotiating Cultural and Gendered Expectations. Participants described how household roles were distributed, and while many noted the benefits of shared living arrangements, others highlighted tensions that arose from gender norms and cultural expectations.

Functional Benefits of Role Sharing

A prominent finding across participants' narratives was the practical advantage of shared household responsibilities in multigenerational homes. Many described a cooperative system

where duties were distributed according to availability, strengths, and physical ability, making everyday life more manageable. This collective approach to domestic work was especially valuable in the Canadian context, where domestic help is less common and families juggle multiple work and home responsibilities.

One participant emphasized how multigenerational living eased the pressures of a fast-paced lifestyle:

> *"I think the biggest benefit is shared responsibility. That's huge, especially in Canadian culture, where there's a strong hustle culture and everyone is always working. There's no concept of having maids or drivers like back home, so you're responsible for everything. It's nice to have multiple people in the house with different strengths who can help with different things." (P8-YA)*

Domestic tasks can become less burdensome when they are shared across generations, each contributing in a way that fits their schedule or capacity. Rather than relying on external support systems, families in multigenerational households found efficiency through working together. Another participant illustrated the adaptive nature of shared responsibilities within their home:

> *"When she's [mom] home, she can cook if we don't have time." (P6-A)*

This reflects the flexibility and responsiveness of role-sharing. Tasks were not rigidly assigned but adapted to accommodate the rhythms of daily life, such as work or school schedules. This system allowed for smoother functioning of the household, as responsibilities could be taken on by whoever was available at the time.

Older adults also actively contributed in ways that aligned with their mobility and comfort. One participant described how she contributed to the domestic chores by helping with grocery shopping:

"There is no need to divide anything because, if I get time, I am always available. But I have stopped driving, so somebody has to drive me. I can go nearby. The shops are close, some of them, so I can go and fetch anything from there. And the other thing is, I will ask anyone, my daughter or son-in-law, to drop me and pick me up after an hour or two. When I finish my grocery shopping, I'll call them." (P4-OA)

This quote demonstrates how older adults continued to contribute meaningfully within their capacities. The willingness of younger family members to assist. through transportation, for example, allowed older members to maintain a sense of autonomy and purpose.

Finally, participants also emphasized that compatibility in values, especially around routines or cleanliness, influenced how well shared domestic roles functioned. Where values aligned, cooperation came more easily:

"But I've seen other families where the in-laws or other family members are messy, and it makes things difficult. One of my friends said that every time she entered the kitchen, she would get frustrated because it wasn't organized the way she liked. You can't always train adults to be different, it's just how they are. You can teach kids, but it's impossible to change older people's habits. But I'm very lucky that all of us in this house are on the same page. We're all very clean, organized, and like things a certain way." (P5-A)

This account shows how alignment in values contributes to a more peaceful household environment. It also underscores how shared domestic life depends not only on dividing labor but on navigating interpersonal dynamics and respect for each other's ways of living.

In summary, this subtheme illustrates how role-sharing in multigenerational households offers tangible benefits, allowing families to navigate busy lives more effectively. Flexibility, mutual

support, and an understanding of each member's capacities made it possible to sustain a well-functioning home, while still respecting cultural practices and individual preferences.

Negotiating Cultural and Gendered Expectations

While many participants praised the functional and emotional benefits of shared living, others pointed out significant challenges rooted in cultural norms and societal expectations. In particular, traditional gender roles often influenced how tasks were divided and perceived, leading to tension, especially among younger family members who were raised with different values.

Participants described growing up with implicit and explicit messages about how women and men should behave and contribute within the home. One young adult participant recounted the struggle of navigating gender expectations instilled by her immigrant parents:

> *"With me growing up here and my parents growing up in Pakistan, they believe women should be a certain way; my dad and I always fought about this growing up. He's like you need to be more soft-spoken, and I feel like, whenever they would like lecture me, it would be like in a way where it's like I have to be well-behaved, so that when I grow up I can be good to my husband, even if they didn't say that directly, it would always feel like it was coming from that lens just because of the environment that they were brought." (P10-YA)*

This quotation captures the generational and cultural tension that can exist within multigenerational households. It reveals how ingrained gender norms can persist even when they are no longer explicitly voiced. These expectations were not only passed down but also reinforced through everyday behaviors and the uneven distribution of responsibilities within the home. The same participant continued to share an example of how these patterns play out in practice:

"Yeah, honestly, household responsibilities are entirely on my mom. Like, my dad doesn't really do anything. My brother doesn't do anything because he works at a huge accounting firm, so he works insane hours, and he's barely ever home... But even in his time off he doesn't really help around the house. And I think a big part of that plays into the fact that they were never expected to do any of that growing up... all of that kind of gets dumped on my mom, who's been told that her sole responsibility is to cook and to clean." (P10-YA)

This illustrates how traditional expectations not only influence how labor is divided in the present but also how certain family members are excused from domestic responsibilities altogether. The normalization of such patterns, especially when men are not expected to contribute to household work, reinforces long standing gender roles and can place a disproportionate burden on women. These experiences were not always easily categorized by generation alone. Participants pointed out that openness and attitudes toward gender roles often varied within the same generation and were shaped by both gender and personality. One young adult highlighted the complexity of negotiating these norms:

"It's not just about generational differences, it also varies within the same generation. For example, I'm much more open with my mom than with my dad. When I tell my mom certain things, she's careful about what she communicates to him. I think that's because my dad has a less Westernized perspective. So it's not as simple as saying, 'Oh, the grandparents are the most strict, the parents are liberal, and I can tell them anything.' It really depends on the person. Like, I'd feel more comfortable talking to my grandmother about certain things than I would my dad. Gender roles also play into it—who I feel comfortable confiding in varies depending on the topic." (P2-YA)

This quote adds further nuance, showing that experiences of gendered expectations are shaped by intersecting factors, including personality, relational dynamics, and the specific cultural views of individual family members. It also underscores how the enforcement of gender roles can subtly affect emotional intimacy and communication within the family.

Despite these pressures, some participants acknowledged that their family arrangements still reflected traditional divisions of labor, with men typically responsible for outdoor or physically demanding tasks and women managing the kitchen and caregiving duties. For instance:

> *"The outdoor tasks—my husband does a lot of those. He takes out the garbage, vacuums, and even does the dishes sometimes." (P5-A)*

Another participant shared:

> *"In terms of household responsibilities, I'm in charge of the kitchen. My husband does the outdoor work—it's very traditional. He does the driving and groceries. We try to share the load, but if not, I do most of it. My husband will make eggs and toast, but that's about it." (P3-A)*

These accounts demonstrate how traditional gender norms continue to shape domestic arrangements, even in cases where there is intention to distribute responsibilities more equitably. While some flexibility exists, deeply rooted expectations can limit the scope of change.

This subtheme reveals the ongoing negotiation of identity, culture, and gender within multigenerational households. While shared living can provide practical and emotional support, the weight of societal and cultural expectations can complicate these arrangements, particularly for women and younger family members who are more inclined to challenge or reimagine traditional roles.

Ultimately, this theme reflects both the strengths and the struggles of multigenerational living. On one hand, the household can work as a team where everyone shares tasks and helps reduce each other's workload. On the other, traditional gender norms and intergenerational tensions can reinforce inequities, restrict open communication, and place undue stress on certain family members. As families continue to evolve, these dynamics highlight the need for honest dialogue, flexibility, and shared accountability in building more equitable and supportive home environments.

Theme: The Rewards and Strains of Intergenerational Care

This theme captured the reciprocal care dynamics in multigenerational households. Participants described caregiving as a shared responsibility that extended beyond parents to include grandparents, children, and even grandchildren. This theme revealed how caregiving was not only a practical necessity but also a source of emotional closeness and cultural transmission. Two key sub themes were identified: 1) Mutual Support and Benefits of Shared Caregiving and 2) The Emotional and Practical Complexities of Caregiving

Mutual Support and Benefits of Shared Caregiving

Participants consistently highlighted the substantial and varied benefits of caregiving within multigenerational homes. Instead of being a one-way flow of support, caregiving was identified as a reciprocal system that eased practical burdens and reinforced cultural continuity. Whether through physical assistance, emotional support, or transmission of values and traditions, caregiving was seen as a vital, shared responsibility that fostered a sense of belonging and interdependence.

One of the most compelling aspects of this caregiving dynamic was its dual nature. Care did not only flow from adults to children or from children to older adults, but it also often moved in both

directions. For example, one participant described how her young grandson assisted his grandfather, who uses a wheelchair:

> *"Yes, especially with my husband. The younger one looks after him so well, he transfers him from the recliner to the dining table. There are so many things he does for him, so he's very happy." (P4-OA)*

This reveals how children can become active agents in caregiving, not just recipients. It challenges common assumptions about dependency and age, illustrating how even younger family members can contribute meaningfully to household life and wellbeing.

Childcare was another dominant theme across participants' accounts. Many described how grandparents played a central role in raising their grandchildren, providing not only financial relief from daycare costs but also a deep sense of trust and emotional comfort:

> *"The first and foremost benefit is childcare. You don't have to worry about the expensive daycare costs. And you don't have to feel guilty about leaving little kids with outsiders while you go to work." (P5-A)*

This underscores how shared caregiving helped alleviate working parents' anxieties, both financial and emotional. The presence of trusted family caregivers allowed some parents to make more flexible or values-based decisions about employment and family life. One participant shared how she balanced her role as a mother with support from her mother-in-law:

> *"From the very beginning, I had this mindset. Even though my mother-in-law is here, I always made sure I was available for the kids. I never worked full-time... I always had a flexible job. And, moreover, she was always there for the kids." (P5-A)*

Here, caregiving becomes a collaborative structure. Rather than replacing the role of the parent, older family members complemented it, offering both practical support and moral alignment.

In several cases, participants reflected on how caregiving was deeply embedded in cultural values, particularly within immigrant families. One participant recalled how her grandparents' involvement in childcare stemmed from a cultural reluctance to use formal childcare services:

> *"When my parents came to Canada, they had to work… so in our culture, in our family values, we don't like to do the babysitting outside. We would prefer if my mom's parents or my dad's parents would take care of me." (P1-YA)*

This quote emphasizes that caregiving is more than a logistical solution, it is a cultural choice rooted in interdependence and familial trust. Within immigrant contexts, where external support may be culturally unfamiliar or financially inaccessible, the presence of grandparents filled a crucial void, allowing families to uphold values while managing new demands.

Importantly, the emotional and psychological benefits of caregiving were frequently cited by older adults. Participants spoke about the joy, purpose, and social engagement that came from living in close proximity to grandchildren:

> *"I like it, it's a nice way to kill time. If you're alone, you're either on your phone, or are reading a newspaper or books... but if we have children around, we become like children too… we don't feel lonely." (P7-OA)*

This illustrates how caregiving can help with isolation and loneliness for older adults. By being involved in the lives of their grandchildren, grandparents felt more valued relevance, and it provided them with a sense of connection to everyday family life.

In addition to emotional support, caregiving also offered distinct cultural and developmental advantages for children. Several participants described how the involvement of grandparents helped expose their children to multiple languages, values, and caregiving styles, enriching their social and emotional development:

"I also appreciate that there are other people helping instill values in her. Sometimes I might miss things, but there are others watching and teaching her in their own ways... she's exposed to a variety of experiences that will help her develop socially." (P8-YA)

Language, in particular, was a key domain where caregiving supported cultural preservation. Grandparents often acted as the custodians of heritage languages, enabling children to stay connected to their roots:

"I want her to know Urdu well, but also English and Punjabi. Since my husband and I mostly speak English, she might not pick up Urdu from us, but she will from her grandparents. That's important to me because I want her to stay connected to her roots." (P8-YA)

These comments reflect how caregiving in multigenerational homes is not just about physical presence or logistical support, it also helps preserve cultural identity across generations, particularly in immigrant families navigating life in a dominant culture.

Another widely noted benefit of multigenerational caregiving was the peace of mind it offered to adult children, especially when caring for aging parents:

"Another benefit is that when they live with us, we don't have to worry about how they're doing. If they were living back in our home country, we'd always be worried about their well-being but when they live with us, we have peace of mind." (P6-A)

This quote highlights how living together also helps families stay connected across countries. When parents and grandparents live in the same home, it makes caregiving easier and gives adult children peace of mind, knowing their loved ones are safe and cared for, especially if they would otherwise be living far away.

This subtheme highlights how caregiving in multigenerational households is more than a functional arrangement, it is a multifaceted, reciprocal practice that binds families together. Whether through physical help, emotional presence, cultural guidance, or linguistic transmission, caregiving builds webs of support that span across generations.

This caregiving system offers vital resources, especially for immigrant and working families, allowing them to navigate economic pressures, cultural transitions, and daily challenges with the support of their family members. While it requires coordination and compromise, the rewards are very meaningful - children benefit from broader emotional and cultural networks, older adults feel more connected and purposeful, and caregivers enjoy practical support and peace of mind.

The Emotional and Practical Complexities of Caregiving

While caregiving in multigenerational households offered numerous benefits, participants also described a range of challenges that made these responsibilities difficult to manage. These included caregiver burnout, emotional strain, financial limitations, communication barriers, and intergenerational disagreements, each affecting both the care provider's well-being and broader family dynamics. This subtheme explores how these stressors manifest in daily life and the impact they have on the caregiving experience.

One of the most significant challenges described by participants was caregiver burnout, particularly among women who often shoulder the bulk of caregiving duties. The demands of caring for older relatives, especially those with cognitive or physical health concerns, can be emotionally exhausting and mentally taxing. A young adult participant reflected on how her mother, despite working tirelessly to care for her grandmother, receives little appreciation in return. Instead, persistent criticism adds to her mother's mental load:

"The biggest challenge is especially like with my grandma because, like, no matter how much like you will do for her. She will always find something to complain about, and it's not even about like the work that you do. It's about the fact that she's always like complaining, which takes a huge like mental toll on her caregivers, especially my mother, who works tirelessly to provide care for her." (P9-YA)

This quote underscores how emotional fatigue can accumulate not only from the physical labor of caregiving but also from feeling unacknowledged or emotionally depleted by care recipients, particularly when those relationships are fraught or shaped by chronic illness.

In addition to emotional strain, mobility and dependence emerged as recurring themes. Participants emphasized that limited physical independence among older adults increased the demand for continuous availability, disrupting the routines of care providers across generations. One participant described how her grandparents' restricted mobility made everyday tasks difficult and placed pressure on the whole household:

"For my grandparents, I think the biggest challenge is mobility. Since they can't move around as easily, it limits their independence, which means someone always needs to be available to help them. That can be hard sometimes because, even though there are multiple people in the house, everyone has different schedules." (P9-YA)

Even seemingly routine tasks, such as getting to appointments or running errands, could become logistical challenges, particularly when transportation was involved. As one adult child explained:

"The only thing is that she can't drive. So, she depends on us for getting around. If she needs to go to the store, she can take the bus, but in bad weather, especially in winter, we have to take her ourselves. If she could drive, she could be more independent, go to more places, and roam around freely." (P6-A)

These reflections illustrate how even basic forms of assistance, like transportation, can place ongoing demands on family members providing care, especially in climates or communities with fewer public transit options.

Financial constraints added another layer of difficulty. While some participants expressed interest in hiring outside help (like personal support workers), others noted that these services were prohibitively expensive. Even when families could access assistance, language and cultural barriers sometimes reduced the effectiveness of care and created discomfort for older adults who struggled to communicate with hired caregivers.

Another complexity stemmed from the moral and cultural expectations of caregiving in immigrant families. In many cases, the responsibility to care for aging parents was deeply tied to cultural values of duty and self-sacrifice. While these values fostered intergenerational commitment, they also sometimes led to emotional conflict or feelings of being overwhelmed. One participant described how the focus on caregiving could distort family dynamics:

> *"When you cling so much to these values, to the idea that 'I have to take care of this person,' it can almost become a burden. It can create unhealthy dynamics between different generations within the family. Sometimes, too much attention is focused on younger children, and the grandparents feel neglected. Other times, if a grandparent is very ill and requires constant care, the children might feel abandoned because their parents are too busy taking care of their parents. So, while multi-generational living does promote selflessness, it can also reach an extreme where certain family members feel left behind." (P2-YA)*

This highlights how the emotional and time demands of caregiving may unintentionally result in neglect or disconnection elsewhere in the family. One participant, a mother juggling care for her

own parents and raising children, echoed this tension. Despite her best efforts, she often felt torn between competing roles and questioned whether she was fully present for her children:

> *"So between my job, taking care of my parents, and being there for my kids, I always feel like I'm trying to make an effort to be present for my kids, but I don't know if I'm doing enough. My friends have told me, not in so many words, but they feel I do too much for my parents. They feel I should give more attention to my children, so I try." (P3-A)*

This reflection captures the strain many care providers particularly women, face when they must act as providers, parents, and daughters all at once. The cultural weight of fulfilling caregiving responsibilities, combined with social pressure and personal expectations, can lead to guilt, emotional exhaustion.

Tensions also arose around parenting practices, where generational differences sometimes led to misunderstandings or conflicts. In one case, a participant shared how her mother-in-law's criticism of her son's swimming progress impacted her child's self-esteem:

> *"Sometimes, you want to teach your child something, but the grandparent teaches them differently. Then the child gets confused. For example, my son was taking swimming lessons. He was in Grade 2 swimming, but the teacher said he could move to Grade 3. So, my daughter got promoted to Level 3, but my son didn't. When they came home, my daughter said, "Oh, I got Level 3," and she told him, "Oh, you failed again." She used the word "failed," and my mother-in-law picked up on it. She kept saying, "Oh, you failed again! Every time you fail!" That pinched me. I told her, "No, no, he didn't fail. He just wasn't promoted this time, but he'll do it next time." I don't want negativity like that affecting him." (P5-A)*

Although the intention may have been supportive, the delivery created emotional discomfort, forcing the participant to step in and manage the situation more gently.

Another participant described how differing beliefs around infant feeding led to conflict with her mother-in-law. While she supported baby-led weaning, a method that encourages infants to self-feed and explore textures, her mother-in-law was alarmed by it, holding more traditional views on puree feeding:

> *"I wanted my daughter to have more texture exposure, so I gave her a whole chicken leg to hold and nibble on. [...] However, my mother-in-law was horrified because, to her, that's a choking hazard. She grew up only seeing babies eat purees, so introducing this new concept was difficult for her to accept." (P8-YA)*

Such examples illustrate how even well-meaning caregiving can be complicated by differing generational norms, which sometimes require the younger generation to negotiate between respect for elders and trust in their own parenting choices.

This subtheme sheds light on the emotional, physical, financial, and relational burdens that often accompany multigenerational caregiving. While care can be a profound expression of love and loyalty, it also requires careful emotional management, open communication, and adaptability. The strain of caregiving, especially when layered across generations, can create conflicts, misunderstandings, and stress unless roles are clearly defined and negotiated.

In summary, this theme reveals the dual reality of multigenerational care. While the presence of extended family can provide support, cultural continuity, and emotional security, the demands involved can also lead to burnout and relational strain. Balancing these competing pressures requires patience, flexibility, and shared responsibility, particularly in families navigating changing values, resource limitations, and evolving social roles.

Theme: Faith as a Binding and Dividing Force

This theme explored how spiritual beliefs, religious practices, and values function within the dynamics of multigenerational households. Faith emerged as both a unifying force, but also one that caused division, depending on the level of alignment or divergence across generations. Two key sub themes were identified: 1) Shared Faith-based Values and 2) Negotiating Diverse Beliefs.

Shared Faith-based Values

Many participants emphasized the positive influence of faith within their households, particularly when it was introduced and modeled by older family members such as grandparents. These older adults often acted as spiritual guides, teaching religious texts, leading by example through daily prayer, and sharing stories and lessons rooted in religious teachings. Such exposure to faith within the home fostered a natural integration of spirituality into everyday life, reinforcing moral values and encouraging younger generations to reflect on their own beliefs.

For example, one participant shared that having grandparents around enriched the spiritual environment of the home. Simply observing their religious routines, such as daily prayer or engaging in faith-based discussions, contributed to a presence that influenced younger family members over time:

> *"Having my grandparents around means that we get exposure to more religious discussions or practices than we might have if we were just living with our immediate family. [...] It kind of keeps that connection alive, even if we're not always consciously thinking about it. It's just part of the household environment." (P9-YA)*

Another participant recalled reading the Quran alongside his grandfather, who not only guided the reading but also offered interpretations and reflections on moral teachings. This intergenerational

experience not only strengthened the participant's understanding of the text but also built a sense of closeness through shared learning:

> *"My brother and I read the Quran with the guidance of my grandfather, who had read it numerous times before. We not only read the English translations, but he also attempted to explain certain sections, helping us glean some moral lessons from the text as a whole." (P2-YA)*

Others highlighted how grandparents and parents served as both spiritual and cultural resources for their children. One participant explained how his parents' knowledge of religion enhanced the household's moral framework, especially for the younger generation:

> *"Yes, it has impacted us positively. There are a lot of things we don't know about religion, but our parents do. So, they can teach the kids, and the kids can really learn from them. The older generation knows more than us, so it's definitely been a positive impact." (P6-A)*

In other cases, participants shared how faith shaped their caregiving motivations and served as a source of emotional resilience during difficult periods. One participant spoke about how her spiritual beliefs not only reinforced her sense of duty toward her parents, but also gave her the strength to cope with her father's sudden illness:

> *"For me, faith is important, it's probably one of the driving forces that makes me do what I do. I know that I need to take care of my parents. That's both faith-based and culture-based. [...] When [my father] got sick, it was really hard for me to accept. He was my backbone. And when he became paralyzed, I felt paralyzed too, metaphorically. But then I had to believe that this was meant to be... I was meant to*

take care of him. That belief helped me accept everything. It made me feel like I was doing the right thing for my parents." (P3-A)

This quote illustrates how faith can offer care providers a framework of meaning and acceptance, transforming emotionally difficult situations into acts of spiritual purpose and affirmation.

However, some participants described a more nuanced experience of shared faith. One parent noted that although her children were influenced by their grandparents' religious presence, her parents' non-imposing attitude toward faith allowed for a more comfortable spiritual environment:

"So in some ways, my parents' presence has influenced my children. But because my parents themselves are pragmatic about faith and don't force their ideas, I think it's been easier for my kids. Had my parents been very religious, it might have made things harder." (P3-A)

This underscores how the way in which faith is transmitted, whether through modeling or rigid enforcement, can shape whether it becomes a source of connection or tension.

Finally, not all spiritual growth was attributed directly to family influence. One participant reflected on her personal religious journey, emphasizing that while her upbringing played a role, her increased religiosity stemmed from individual exploration:

"But it's interesting, like when I look at my siblings like, I think we're all in different places in our [faith], like I just recently started wearing hijab like 2 years ago, and I think a lot of the things that I have learned about Islam for myself has been less to do with my family but more to do with like a personal change within myself. Of course I've learned a lot from my parents but I don't think that is something that inspired me to be more religious." (P10-YA)

These varied experiences reveal that while multigenerational households often provide a strong foundation for faith-based learning and values, individual trajectories of belief are also shaped by personal journeys and broader social influences.

Taken together, this subtheme highlights the powerful but complex role that shared faith can play in multigenerational homes. When passed down with compassion and flexibility, spiritual traditions can deepen family bonds and reinforce moral development. At the same time, the space for individual interpretation and growth allows faith to remain personally meaningful across generations.

Negotiating Diverse Beliefs

While shared faith offered many benefits, participants also expressed the challenges that arose when navigating differing beliefs or levels of religiosity within the household. Tensions often emerged when religious practices were questioned, inconsistencies were pointed out, or when grandparents imposed rigid interpretations that conflicted with younger generations' evolving perspectives.

One participant described how questioning religious customs occasionally led to uncomfortable interactions with his parents:

> *"For example, if we're at dinner and pork is on the menu, I'll ask them why they don't eat it because they're not strict about other things. They eat non-halal meat, and they'll even drink alcohol on occasion, but pork is still off-limits. I think that's pretty common for a lot of Muslims, but I find it interesting and contradictory, so I'll ask them about it. Those kinds of conversations can sometimes cause tension. They tend to dismiss my questions and accuse me of being self-loathing or hating my culture,*

which I think is unfair. I'm not rejecting my background—I'm just questioning inconsistencies." (P2-YA)

This example reflects how generational differences in understanding or interpreting religious practices can provoke miscommunication and conflict, particularly when open dialogue is discouraged. Another participant shared her mixed feelings about her older parents' moderate approach to religion. While initially wishing for stronger religious guidance from her children's grandparents, she later appreciated their pragmatism, recognizing that a more rigid approach could have led to resentment or strained relationships:

"Some grandparents have a strong influence on their household when it comes to religion, and at first, I wished my parents were more like that so they could pass down more of those traditions. But now, I realize that it's probably for the best that they weren't." (P3-A)

This highlights the delicate balance families must strike between transmitting religious tradition and allowing room for individual spiritual exploration, especially among younger members. Some participants also described the impact of physical proximity and shared space on their ability to practice religious boundaries. For instance, one participant discussed how wearing the hijab created complications in a multigenerational living arrangement:

"For example, I wear a hijab, so if my husband's brother unexpectedly comes downstairs, he might see me without it. That's a boundary I try to maintain, but sometimes it gets broken simply because we share a home." (P8-YA)

This example illustrates how the social structure of a multigenerational household can make it difficult to uphold personal religious practices.

In some cases, participants spoke of negative religious messaging that impacted their perception of faith. One individual reflected on how her grandmother's use of religion during emotional outbursts, wishing harm upon others or invoking divine punishment, shaped not her view of religion itself, but of the way it was communicated:

> *"I kind of got a negative connotation of religion from my grandma, because it feels like she would sometimes use it almost like curse people out when she's upset. [...] It didn't affect my perception of Islam so much as it impacted my perception of her."* (P10-YA)

This account points to the emotional impact that tone, context, and delivery of religious language can have, especially on younger individuals still forming their views.

This sub theme underscores the challenges of balancing religious expectations, personal beliefs, and generational perspectives in a shared household. While some participants benefited from a more flexible approach to faith, others experienced tension when attempting to question, reinterpret, or distance themselves from certain religious practices.

Overall, this theme revealed the deep and complex role that religion plays in shaping intergenerational relationships and household dynamics. While shared religious practices can serve as powerful tools for cultural transmission and emotional connection, differing levels of religiosity and evolving beliefs can lead to conflict or emotional strain. The findings highlight the importance of compassionate dialogue and mutual understanding in fostering both spiritual and familial harmony.

Discussion

This exploratory study focused on the self-reported benefits and challenges of living in South Asian multigenerational households, drawing on participants' lived experiences to

understand how cultural and generational dynamics shape everyday family life in these living arrangements. The findings affirm that multigenerational living is neither uniformly beneficial nor entirely burdensome but rather marked by a complex interplay of support and strain. Across the narratives, participants described a wide spectrum of experiences, emphasizing the emotional, practical, and cultural advantages of multigenerational living, while also voicing frustrations rooted in unequal labour and constrained autonomy. Participants consistently reported that living in this arrangement fostered a strong sense of emotional and practical support system. Daily interactions, shared responsibilities, and collective religious or cultural practices were identified as protective factors that contributed to family cohesion, resilience, and intergenerational bonding. These benefits are consistent with existing literature, which suggests that the growing presence and significance of multigenerational bonds offer a valuable resource for families navigating the complexities of contemporary life in the 21st century (Bengtson, 2001).

However, these positive aspects were challenged by a range of stressors such as emotional fatigue and interpersonal tensions that can arise from prolonged caregiving, unclear household roles, and intergenerational disagreements. While some household tensions might superficially appear to be the result of personality clashes or interpersonal discord, the consistency of reported themes across a diverse participant pool suggests deeper structural and cultural factors. For instance, gendered divisions of labour were not isolated or unique to certain households but reflected broader social expectations embedded in both South Asian cultural traditions and religious norms. Similarly, recurring issues around authority, respect, and obedience were more closely tied to cultural values such as filial piety than to individual relationship dynamics.

A consistent pattern across the thematic findings was the multifaceted and complex nature of multigenerational living. This was especially prominent in the domain of shared domestic and

caregiving responsibilities. While participants commonly identified household tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare, as sources of practical support and a reflection of collective responsibility, these same practices also caused tension. Expectations around domestic labor in multigenerational households often reflect traditional gender norms, leading to an unequal distribution of responsibilities. Female family members, in particular, are frequently tasked with the majority of household chores, including caregiving for older family members. This imbalance is further complicated by the dynamics between female in-laws, especially in the division of household labor. This is significantly shaped by the presence of mothers-in-law, who can influence both the quantity and type of labor women are expected to perform (Srivastava, 2020). These dynamics align with the observations of Liu and Easthope (2020), who noted that traditional gendered divisions of labour often persist within migrant and multigenerational households, even as younger generations increasingly advocate for more equal distribution of responsibilities. The generational divide in attitudes toward was identified as a central theme, illustrating the ongoing negotiation between cultural continuity and evolving social norms.

In relation to caregiving dynamics, shared responsibility among household members was generally associated with reduced individual burden, reinforcing earlier findings in the literature (Lee, 2023). Participants who reported shared caregiving, particularly in relation to older adult care or childcare, often described a more sustainable and manageable experience. In many cases, rotating duties or informal coordination among family members helped ease the time and emotional commitments typically borne by a single individual.

However, despite these benefits, several participants also highlighted underlying challenges that complicated caregiving arrangements. Financial constraints, uneven distribution of labor, and the emotional toll of long-term caregiving emerged as recurring concerns. These

challenges are consistent with the work of Cohn et al. (2022), who emphasize that while multigenerational support systems can effectively distribute caregiving responsibilities across household members, they also have the potential of obscuring individual accountability. When responsibilities are shared informally or without clear agreement, it can become unclear who is ultimately responsible for certain tasks. This ambiguity can lead to frustration, unmet needs, and even resentment among caregivers, especially when one person feels they are contributing more than others or when their contributions go unrecognized (Cohn et al., 2022).

Moreover, the redistribution of caregiving tasks does not necessarily eliminate emotional labor; instead, it can diffuse it in ways that make it harder to identify and address sources of stress. As a result, emotional strain may persist or even intensify, particularly when caregivers are managing not just the practical needs of dependents, but also interpersonal tensions, guilt, or differing expectations within the household.

The emotional complexities of caregiving, as highlighted by participants, underscore the importance of deliberate and ongoing communication within the household. Setting clear expectations, defining roles, and maintaining mutual understanding are essential in preventing burnout and ensuring that caregiving remains a sustainable, shared commitment rather than a burden on some members of the family (Lee, 2023; Cohn et al., 2022).

A significant relationship was also identified between shared religious or spiritual values and the overall sense of familial harmony. Common faith-based practices such as collective prayer, observance of religious holidays, or moral teachings were frequently described as fostering cohesion and a shared sense of purpose. Religion, in this context, functioned not only as a cultural anchor but also as a way to maintain solidarity and uphold family values. However, this positive correlation was not universal. In households where members differed in levels of religious

observance or adhered to diverse belief systems, tensions often surfaced. These tensions around religious views emerged particularly where generational differences led to misaligned values or practices. This sometimes led to arguments or conflict among the different family members. Moreover, the influence of religion on family dynamics is complex, as it can both support and challenge family cohesion. While shared religious values can promote unity, differing interpretations or practices can lead to conflicts, particularly when family members hold divergent beliefs (Mahoney, 2010).

These findings highlight that family dynamics within multigenerational households are deeply shaped by broader cultural frameworks, particularly those rooted in collectivist values, filial piety, and religious obligations. These cultural expectations often reinforce traditional gender roles, where women are expected to assume caregiving and domestic responsibilities, while men maintain authority and are primary providers (Bengtson, 2001), as narrated in many of the accounts above. Filial piety emerged as a strong driving force of intergenerational caregiving and respect for older members of the family, often taking priority over personal preferences or needs. Similarly, religious norms contributed to preserving family structures, particularly in households where faith was a central organizing principle. However, migration experiences and the exposure to more individualistic social norms as a result introduced both challenges and shifts in these traditional patterns. Younger generations, in particular, often demonstrated a desire to renegotiate family roles, values, and communication practices, resulting in both intergenerational tension and adaptation. These generational differences reflect the broader societal evolution where families are maintaining cultural continuity and navigating the pressures of social change (Mayer et al., 2013; Furstenberg, 2019). This duality, preserving culture while adapting to shifting societal norms, underscores the complexity of family life in multigenerational households. As such, the themes

discussed above cannot be viewed in isolation. Instead, they are deeply interconnected and form part of the ongoing negotiation of identity, values, and responsibilities across generations.

To make sense of these interwoven dynamics, the life course perspective proved highly relevant to this research. It was particularly useful in understanding the dynamics between individual life transitions and collective family transitions, such as leaving home changes in family status, and entering the workforce (Hareven, 1994). This framework was also instrumental in examining family and gender roles, as each family member's unique life experiences shaped their roles within the multigenerational household. For example, grandparents in these households had to adapt to their children's lifestyles and parenting styles, while adult children often relied on their parents to instill traditional values in their own children, allowing them to focus on work. Children, in turn, had to navigate the dynamics of having multiple authority figures from different generations. While these roles could offer social and emotional support or guidance, conflicts might arise when individual goals and collective family needs diverged (Hareven, 1994).

Several unexpected findings also were identified during the analysis. One observation was the extent communication breakdowns across generations were described not merely as a challenge, but as a significant emotional burden. Despite the physical proximity and shared living space that typically characterize multigenerational households, some participants, especially younger adults, reported feeling emotionally disconnected or misunderstood by older family members. This disconnect may suggest that multigenerational living does not automatically translate into emotional intimacy, and in certain contexts, may even intensify relational strain when generational expectations misalign. This finding challenges the common assumption that closeness in physical space necessarily leads to stronger familial bonds (Langer, 2017), highlighting instead

the importance of intentional communication practices, especially in households marked by generational and cultural gaps.

Another finding within this small sample was the variation of self-disclosure and openness across age groups. The older adult participants tended to report predominantly positive experiences, with limited acknowledgment of challenges or conflict. In contrast, younger participants from the same families were more forthcoming in describing tensions, frustrations, and emotional strain within the household. While this contrast cannot be generalized beyond the study due to the limited number of older adult participants, it nevertheless raises important questions about how self-reported experiences may be shaped by cultural norms around respectability, emotional expression, and the desire to maintain family harmony. It is possible that older adults, influenced by values of filial loyalty and social preservation, may have been more inclined to present an idealized version of family life, even when conflicting accounts were shared by younger relatives. This does not negate the authenticity of their positive experiences but rather highlights a potential generational difference in how challenges are perceived, processed, and communicated.

The openness and vulnerability of younger participants, many of whom challenged traditional authority structures or expressed emotional needs that diverged from established norms, reflect a broader generational shift in attitudes toward mental health, autonomy, and transparency. These accounts suggest that younger generations are actively renegotiating the terms of familial belonging and responsibility within the multigenerational context. Their willingness to critique or question established dynamics may be a crucial driver for adaptation and change in these households, even as it creates friction with more conservative or reserved family members.

Collectively, these findings point to the nuanced and sometimes contradictory nature of multigenerational living. While shared responsibilities, cultural or spiritual values, and shared caregiving can serve as supportive forces, they may simultaneously bring about inequities, misunderstandings, and physical and emotional burden. The interplay between structural arrangements and interpersonal dynamics suggests that the success of multigenerational living is contingent not only upon familial ties or cultural continuity, but also upon active negotiation, adaptability, and shared expectations.

Limitations

This study offers rich, qualitative insight into the lived experiences of individuals residing in multigenerational households. However, some limitations must be acknowledged. First and foremost is the small and uneven sample size, particularly the underrepresentation of older adult participants. While the perspectives of younger and middle-aged participants were well represented, only two interviews were conducted with older adults. This limits the ability to make robust claims about the experiences, perceptions, or needs of this demographic, especially in comparison to younger family members. For example, observed generational differences in openness or conflict reporting, should be interpreted with caution, as they may reflect sampling bias rather than a generalizable trend.

Additionally, as with many qualitative studies, the findings are contextually situated and may not be broadly generalizable beyond the specific sociocultural backgrounds of the participants involved. Most of the families in this study appeared to share similar cultural and religious frameworks, particularly within Muslim households, which shaped their experiences of caregiving, faith, and intergenerational negotiation. While this focus allows for a deeper cultural analysis, it may not fully capture the diversity of multigenerational living arrangements across

other religious, ethnic, or socioeconomic groups. Future research would benefit from a larger, more demographically varied sample, as well as the inclusion of longitudinal or observational methods to further unpack how intergenerational dynamics shift over time and across life course transitions.

Another limitation relates to the nature of self-reported data, which is inherently shaped by participants' willingness and ability to reflect on their experiences. Some participants may have downplayed negative experiences to preserve family reputation or align with cultural norms of respect and loyalty, while others, especially younger participants, may have felt more empowered to voice critique. Furthermore, as interviews were conducted within a single point in time, they offer only a snapshot of evolving family dynamics. Capturing ongoing negotiations that occur in multigenerational households would require a longitudinal design to track how roles, relationships, and belief systems shift over time in response to major life transitions such as illness, aging, marriage, or migration.

Policy Implications

As multigenerational living arrangements continue to serve as an integral component in the social and economic integration of migrant populations, understanding their policy implications is essential in addressing both the benefits and the challenges that such households experience. This study reinforces the notion that while multigenerational cohabitation provides a vital source of social, emotional, and financial support, it can also intensify stress and obscure the visibility of care needs and structural disadvantage, particularly for women and younger caregivers (Cohn et al., 2022; Tufte, 2019). In this context, policy must move beyond assumptions that co-residence automatically ensures support and well-being and instead account for the nuanced intra-household power dynamics and role expectations that were evident in participants' experiences.

One key implication lies in the potential for multigenerational households to unintentionally mask social and economic vulnerability. As Flake (2012) suggests, intrahousehold support may substitute for public assistance but can also reduce the motivation or visibility needed for individuals, especially migrants, to seek or access external economic opportunities. This can be particularly problematic when caregiving or domestic responsibilities fall disproportionately on women, limiting their participation in education or the labor market (Lee, 2023). Policies aimed at migrant integration must therefore account for hidden caregiving burdens within these households and invest in programs that offer accessible and culturally appropriate support, such as mental health services, and family mediation services that can help ease intergenerational tensions. Furthermore, targeted employment services, including flexible work arrangements and childcare subsidies, could improve opportunities for adult children and caregivers, especially women, in multigenerational households.

Future policies should recognize the household, not just the individual, as a unit of policy intervention. Additionally, culturally sensitive support systems that bridge generational and linguistic gaps, such as multilingual family counseling services or intergenerational programs could reduce conflict while promoting wellbeing across all age groups.

In conclusion, supporting migrant families in multigenerational households requires a shift from viewing these arrangements solely as a cultural preference or a coping strategy to understanding them as complex, evolving systems that interact with broader socioeconomic structures. Policymakers must engage with the lived realities of these households and craft interventions that recognize care work, promote intergenerational well-being, and foster meaningful integration. Doing so will not only enhance the resilience of migrant families but also

contribute to a more inclusive and socially cohesive society (Mayer et al., 2013; Furstenberg, 2019).

Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the self-reported benefits and challenges of living in South Asian multigenerational households, aiming to understand how individuals across generations experience and navigate multigenerational living. Using a qualitative approach, the research captured a spectrum of lived experiences through semi-structured interviews, offering insight into the interpersonal, cultural, and structural dynamics that characterize these family settings.

The analysis revealed that multigenerational living is deeply multifaceted. Participants described households that function as sources of emotional connection, cultural preservation, and shared responsibility. Yet, these same households also served as sites of tension. While these findings affirm common understandings of collectivist family strengths (Ayika et al., 2018; Mehta, 2007), they also highlight the negotiation and complexity required to sustain such arrangements in contemporary contexts shaped by migration and shifting social norms. Importantly, the study sheds light on subtler dynamics often overlooked in broader discussions, such as the emotional disconnect that can exist while sharing the same spaces, or generational variations in how family life is narrated and understood. These findings underscore the importance of recognizing that multigenerational households are not static or uniformly experienced, but rather are shaped by evolving identities, power dynamics, and cultural expectations.

This research contributes to a growing body of literature (Allen et al., 2024; Ayika et al., 2018; Easthope et al., 2016) on family diversity by centering the voices of South Asian participants and emphasizing the contextual nature of familial support and strain. Future studies might extend this work by exploring how these dynamics shift over time or in response to life transitions such

as marriage, aging, or migration. Additionally, culturally responsive support systems and services will be essential for addressing the specific needs of multigenerational households, particularly those navigating intergenerational change in diasporic settings. Ultimately, this thesis highlights that while multigenerational living offers valuable support structures, it also demands continuous adaptation, empathy, and open communication. Understanding these complex dynamics is critical for academics, practitioners, and policymakers aiming to support the wellbeing of families living within culturally complex and intergenerational frameworks.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Interview Guide:

- Can you describe for me what a weekend in this home with your family look like?
- Can you describe your relationship with your parent/grandparent/grandchild?
- How do you feel after spending time with your parents/grandparents/children?
- What is your fondest memory you share with your parents/grandparents/children?
- What are some things you have learnt from the family members in your house?

Benefits & Challenges to Multigenerational Living

- In your view, what are the benefits of living in a multigenerational household? Can you share some specific instances where you have experienced these benefits?
- Do you think intergenerational interactions promote social connection and healthy well-being?
- In your view, what are the challenges of living in a multigenerational household? How have you coped with these challenges?
- How has sharing the same space with your family members impacted your freedom? Do you find it difficult to create and maintain boundaries when sharing the same space?

Household & Caregiving Responsibilities

- How are household responsibilities and chores divided among your family members?
- How does your family manage caregiving responsibilities? What support systems do you rely on to manage these needs?
- Are there any challenges to providing care?

Faith

- How important is faith to your family members?
- Has living in a multigenerational household impacted your faith?
- Are there any cultural or religious practices that you participate in together with your family members?
- Are there any differences in religious beliefs among the family members in your home? If so, how do you navigate these differences?

- Is there anything else you would like to share that I haven't asked you already?

Appendix C: Participant Demographics

Legend:

YA - Young adult (18-34)
A - Adult (35-54)
OA - Older adult (55+)

Participant #	**Age Range**	**Generational Group** (YA/A/OA)	**Gender**	**Born in Canada** (Yes/No)	**Length of residency in Canada** (in years)	**South Asian Country of origin**	**# of years in the family home**
P1	18-24	YA	Female	No	5+	India	5+
P2	18-24	YA	Male	Yes	N/A	Pakistan	5+
P3	50-54	A	Female	No	5+	Pakistan	5+
P4	80-84	OA	Female	No	3-5	India & Pakistan	3-5
P5	40-44	A	Female	No	5+	India	5+
P6	40-44	A	Male	No	5+	India	5+
P7	65-69	OA	Female	No	5+	India	5+
P8	25-29	YA	Female	No	5+	Pakistan	2
P9	18-24	YA	Female	Yes	N/A	Pakistan	Preferred not to say
P10	18-24	YA	Female	Yes	N/A	Pakistan	5+