

## **Autobiographical Reflection – Social Work with Aging Populations**

Growing up in a Bangladeshi household in Canada, I have always been hyper aware of the weight of expectations from my parents. My mother, in particular, equates success with conventional milestones, academic prestige and early career stability. When I struggled to secure a computer science internship, she said she couldn't even look at my face without being disappointed. That stung more than I expected. At first, I dismissed it as a generational or cultural disconnect. But when I was introduced to the field of social work with aging populations and immigrant communities, I started to understand this tension more deeply.

I listened to the podcast episode *Aging and the Immigrant Experience* from the *Students of Aging* podcast. The discussion focused on how older immigrants often face a loss of status, independence, and identity in their new environments. What stood out to me most was how some aging parents project unprocessed dreams, regrets, or anxieties onto their children, sometimes without realizing it (Students of Aging, 2024). That insight struck a nerve. Suddenly, my mother's criticisms didn't feel like condemnation, they felt like protection, like her way of clinging to security in a world where everything else feels unstable.

I began to notice how emotional labor often becomes invisible in immigrant families. My mother has never accessed mental health care or support services in her entire life. She likely wouldn't know where to begin, and language or cultural barriers would probably make the process feel unsafe or alienating. In our family, these stressors get absorbed quietly, often disguised as "discipline" or "motivation."

I used to see her pressure as something personal, almost targeted. But I'm starting to realize it's structural. Migration isn't just a change in geography; it's a disruption of identity, power, and routine. Immigrant parents, particularly as they age, often fear being left behind, not just physically, but emotionally and culturally. Their children's achievements become their only tangible proof that the sacrifices were worth it (Ives, Denov, & Sussman, 2020).

Learning about how social workers navigate these complex dynamics has shifted how I respond to my mother. I now try to meet her expectations with more empathy and less defensiveness. I also see how values like cultural humility, trauma informed care, and anti oppressive practice aren't limited to professionals, they can guide how we show up for our own families.

I used to think social work with aging populations was mostly clinical or institutional. Now, I understand it as deeply relational and personal. This realization has helped me begin to rewrite my own story that I tell myself about my family, and that feels like real growth.

## **References**

Ives, N., Denov, M., & Sussman, T. (2020). *Introduction to social work in Canada: Histories, contexts, and practices* (2nd ed., Chapters 9 & 12).  
Oxford University Press.

Students of Aging. (2025, Mar 6). *Aging and the immigrant experience* [Podcast episode].  
*Students of Aging*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbGCEU03wus>