

Problems of Elderly Women



Social Science

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ABSTRACT

Of the elderly population of more than 60 years, more than half of the population constitutes women. As the elderly women do not have economic security, lack of ownership to properties, lack of respect by younger, etc, the elderly women are suffering from many of the problems in society. Further, elderly women in slum areas and rural areas are more sufferers from many problems as they are illiterates and neglected. These problems should be intervened by NGOs and Government.

Introduction:

In the modern period, the elderly population is considered as the problem. The elderly people are both physically and mentally weak to work. As a result, they have no or very limited to maintain their living expenses. Further, the old age have many health problems such as arthritis, rheumatics, Diabetes, Morbidity, Cardio-Vascular Problems, mental problems such as depression, etc. Elders are in need of dependency that is they have to depend on other younger relatives for their living. Hence, the elderly population is a social problem, as during this phase, many of the young relatives such as sons and daughters neglect the elders due to their helplessness.

Raja (1996) emphasized that old age is a shift in an individual's position from active social participation to significant decline in role performance and from economic self-sufficiency to economic dependence. To most of the people, ageing implies physiological and psychological changes. Ageing has become a social problem because socio-economic shifts were affecting the ability of the family to continue with traditional care-giving role towards elders. While it is natural for a man to love his children love for parents is determined by the culture of the society and when the society is changing and becoming materialistic the needs of the parents tend to be ignored. Fast technological changes are creating doubts in the minds of the younger generation about the utility of knowledge and experience of the elderly. Old men are unemployed and usually have frail body and no income and for this reason none in the house may care for them. Although in comparison with developed countries the problem of older population is relatively small in India, seriousness is much more due to inadequacy of social security measures. Considering the socio-economic aspects, ageing is said to be an inevitable withdrawal or disengagement which results in decreased interaction between the ageing person and others. Considering the medical and health aspects it is true that old age itself is not a disease but a normal and natural condition. Of course, the aged lose resilience and fall victims of attacks of various diseases, immunity slowly goes down and viral attacks easily overpower the body. As for the socio-psychological aspects, the aged are beset with problems of isolation, neglect, loss of recognition, dependency and a feeling of boredom. Migration of the children in search of employment or tension in the family due to women working outside and thus unable to attend the elderly at home, make the elders feel neglected.

In India life expectancy has gone up from 20 years in the beginning of the 20th century to 62 years today. Better medical care and low fertility have made the elderly the fastest growing section of society, whereas in France, it took 120 years for the grey population to double from 7 % to 14 %. But in India, the grey population has doubled in 25 years.

❖ 77 Million elderly population (projected to 177 Million by

2025)

- ❖ 90 % with no Social Security
- ❖ 30% of older persons live below the poverty line
- ❖ 33% of older persons live just marginally over the poverty online
- ❖ 80% of older persons live in rural areas.
- ❖ 73% are illiterate, and can only be engaged in physical labor.
- ❖ 55% of elderly women are widows
- ❖ There are nearly 200,000 centenarians in India (Age Care Forum, 2007).

Solution to this ever-growing chasm lies with the society and the support groups. The support groups define the gaps, the needs and views for future responses to abuse, care and prevention.

From 1901 to 2025: 12 million to 177 million

- ❖ 1901 - 12 Million elderly
- ❖ 1951 - 19 Million elderly
- ❖ 2001 - 77 Million elderly
- ❖ 2025 - Projected 177 Million elderly

On the basis of Census of India 1991, Chaubey and Aarti (1999) provided the following characteristics of the Elderly population in India:

1. 78.1% of the elderly population lives in rural areas of India.
2. Percent decadal growth rate has increased from 5.75 in year 1901 to 31.31 in the year 1991.
3. There are 930 females per thousand elderly males in India.
4. 63.09% of elderly population (aged 60+) is married.
5. Percentage of widowed males is 15.47% and widowed females are 54.04% in India (population aged 60+).
6. Literacy rate for persons aged 60+ is 27.15. (Males Literacy rate is 40.62% and females 12.68%)
7. Work Participation rate for the elderly population aged 60+ is 39.1% (work participation rate is defined on the number of workers as percentage of population).
8. Expectation of life at birth is 60.3 years, at the age 60 year = 16.2, 65 = 13.2 and at 70 = 10.6.
9. Total old age dependency ratio in India is 12.19. (Old age dependency ratio is defined as the number of persons aged 60+ as a percentage of persons aged 15-59).

It is surprising to note from the above statistics that about the widows population that is female elderly population consists of 54.04% of the elderly population. Elderly Women, if widow faces several problems such as lack of status in the family as well as in society, loneliness, poor economic status, lack of social recognition, depression, severe health problems, lack of care from the family members, etc. Even though the widows' population is major in the elderly population, till now no considerable study was made to know about the socio-economic, health and psy-

chological problems of the elderly women. Of course, there are vast number of surveys and studies that have been already done on general ageing. It is also noted that during the old age the women rather men to a major extent faces the different problems. Such specific problems of the aged women are not being considered till now in the sociological studies.

Elderly Women:

According to the National Human Development Report (2001), an aspect of the aging problem, on which some data is available relates to the widows among the elderly females. The number of widows among the elderly is about three and a half times more than the number of widowers. While the percentage of widowers among the elderly males was about 15 percent, the widows

among the elderly females were as high as 54 per cent as per the 1991 Census. More importantly at present, on an average, women of age 60 years are expected to live 1.8 years longer than males. This, coupled with the average age difference between men and women at the time of marriage, results in a situation where women surviving their spouses are likely to live about 6.5 years as widows. This is about one-tenth of the prevalent female life expectancy at birth and, more importantly, about 40 per cent of life expectancy of an elderly woman in the country. Thus, the time spent by the elderly women as a widow is considerable. The women in the States of Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra and West Bengal are likely to spend more years as widows than in other States, as differences in the male-female marriage age in these States are much larger.

Table No. 1. Population of Elderly by Age Groups by Residence and Sex 2001 in Karnataka

Age Group	Total			Rural			Urban		
	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females
60-64	1498909	728997	769912	1059747	510997	548750	439162	218000	221162
65-69	953187	441373	511814	669806	307599	362207	283381	133774	149607
70-74	799497	382616	416881	579970	276687	303283	219527	105929	113598
75-79	353230	168279	184951	247996	117686	130310	105234	50593	54641
80+	457199	202465	254734	332075	147877	184198	125124	54588	70536

Aged women are called as 'wet leaves' in Japan, 'kankeri' (second childhood) in China and 'Shastipurthi' in Sanskrit (Gowry, 2003). In India older women are seldom part of the development agenda. Their contributions are slighted and discussions of their situations are usually afterthoughts. Their work is not considered as economically productive and their contribution throughout their lifespan is not quantified or valued (Ramachandran and Radhika, 2006).

In case of women, it is a double burden that older women have to bear. In addition to having to face the travails of being a senior citizen, there is an in-built disadvantage of being a woman in India. According to the latest statistics, around 18 million of the 70 million senior citizens in the country are widows. The widows have different psychological problems such as feeling of insecurity, loneliness, lack of adequate care from the family members, non-recognition in society, etc. The lack of adequate financial resources, the power to make decisions and a lifetime of living under the control of other members of the family have rendered many of them incapable of running their lives after 60 years. While the aged remain a largely neglected group, special care services for aged women are yet to occupy the attention of policymakers and voluntary organizations (Meena Gopal, 2006).

The elderly women, who generally do not have the ownership right to family housing or property, and ill, now tend to continue the household duties in order to prove useful to their family. Increasing number of elderly women experience neglect and indifference from their children. High level of illiteracy, a lack of remunerative occupation as well as negligible awareness about

legal and economic rights among elderly women, in comparison with their male counterparts, make elderly women more vulnerable than elderly men, to neglect and abuse by their sons and daughters-in-law (Shah, et al, 1995). Hence, it is generalized that the elderly women have pathetic situation in their family as well as in society. Further, majority of the elderly women in rural and slum areas are illiterate and depends on others for their basic needs as they have no economic security.

From the above discussion it is clear that elderly women are suffering from different problems such as economic insecurity, lack of care from younger, psychological problems such as anxiety, mention tensions, etc and physical health problems such as gynecological problems, arthritis, asthma, etc. Hence, there is need to intervene the problems of elderly women.

Conclusion:

To conclude, many of the welfare schemes are formulated by Government for the welfare of the weaker sections such as elderly, children and women. But, elderly women have more problems and are not aware about welfare schemes. Hence, there is an urgent need to increase awareness of the elderly women on social welfare schemes formulated for elderly women. Further, solving diverse problems of elderly women is essentially needed by counseling and guidance and such tasks should be attended by NGOs in rural areas and slum areas, where elderly women are illiterates and neglected.

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