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Elderly People: Their Problems, Condition and Contributions in the Society

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Abstract : *Old age refers to ages nearing or surpassing the life expectancy of human beings and thus heralding the end of the human life cycle. The organic process of ageing is called senescence, the medical study of the ageing process is called gerontology and the study of diseases that afflict the elderly is called geriatrics. The elderly also face other social issues related to retirement, loneliness and ageism. From the sociological point of view old age is not a definite biological stage, as the chronological age denoted as "old age" varies culturally and historically. Since 'ageing' is a process, it is very difficult to define the term 'aged'. There is no single definition*

which is unanimously accepted worldwide. In this context, chronological age is often a poor criteria for distinguishing between the young and the old. The old people are those, to whom society categorizes as old. It is a social construct rather than a biological-stage. It's a natural process of becoming older and older. It is universal reality. In India elderly people have been facing various socio-economic, psychological, physical and mental health problems. In our old scriptures, respect was given to old people and they were cared in the family. The younger generation are becoming too much careerist and have no time to take care of these old age people rather the old people are being abused in various families. It has been observed that an old man today is a 'tattered coat hanging to a stick'. Age is nothing but a number, according to new research – you are only as old as you let yourself feel. Old age is simply a state of mind – enjoying life to the fullest can keep you young.

Keywords : *Chronological age, Elderly people, Gerontology, Senescence, Social construct.*

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Introduction :

About eight per cent of India's population is over the age of 60, a figure similar to that of Indonesia but lower than China's 12.4 per cent. In absolute numbers, however, there are more than 93 million elderly in India and this number is projected to increase to about 296 million by 2050 (United Nations, 2013). This paper deals with the Elderly people's problems, condition and their contribution to the society. The National Policy on Senior Citizens 2011 categorically states, "All those of 60 years and above are senior citizens." It should, however, be recognized that "there is nothing sacrosanct about the age 60 or using chronological age based on number of years lived. Population ageing could also be measured using number of years remaining or prospective age", (The National Policy on Senior Citizens, 2011).

Demographic transition in India over the last half century has witnessed a steady change in fertility and life expectancy. Fertility began to decline in earnest from the mid-1960s reaching a low of 2.66 by 2011 (Guilmoto and Rajan, 2013:621-640). Life expectancy at birth increased rapidly between 1950 and 1975, mainly due to reductions in child mortality rates, followed by a steady but slower rate of increase post-1975 (Saikia, Singh and Ram, 2010:62-70). Mortality decline in older ages has not been dramatic. While life expectancy at birth increased from 49.7 to 63.5 between 1970-75 and 2002-6, life expectancy at age 60 increased from 13.8 to 17.9 years and at age 70 increased by less than 3 years during the same period (Government of India, 2011). Thus, the most significant demographic changes of our time is the rapidly expanding number of older adults in the world population. In India, as well as in countries across the globe, the ageing population is increasing rapidly. From the above data it is clear that the life expectancy level has also increased dramatically from the time of independence to the present, with further increases, projected over the next two decades. The growing elderly segment of the population will introduce new societal challenges of providing this group with health care, financial assistance and social and emotional support. The ageing population trend, in conjunction with social and economic trend, is also ushering in new concerns about changing family values, living arrangements and lifestyles. Family care giving for older adult relatives is also of vital concern. The traditional Indian extended and joint family system has

undergone changes due to factors such as mobility from rural to urban centers and transnational flow.

Although the large proportion of the population lives in the rural set up, there is a trend of increased mobility of young adults from the rural areas to urban areas for making a living. According to Hermanova (1998) in his book "Sociology of Ageing : A Reader", "Ageing in its demographic sense is not the same as the biological process of ageing which is dynamic and continuous. Chronological age does not measure physiological or psychological age." This trend has certain economic benefits, but also some drawbacks such as contributing to the nuclearisation of families, leaving behind the elderly parents, grandparents back in the rural set up. This has in various ways affected the lives of the elderly. Those who are frail and in need of emotional and social support, receive less care, and those who are more active and physically strong, are less available to provide support for younger family members. Support offered by elderly family members are typically in the form of doing simple household chores, may be just fetching milk from the milk vendor in the neighborhood, buying vegetables from the market, picking up or dropping the grandchild at the school etc. But what has started to emerge and ail the society is that in the urban centers, where even middle class families struggle with the demands of living becoming costlier day by day, daughters-in-law, who are traditional elderly caregivers, are increasingly taking up outdoor jobs for improving the economy of the family.

Under such compelling circumstances, it has become stressful for these traditional elderly caregivers to devote adequate time and effort both at work, and back at home while taking care of the elderly along with other household activities. This has, in turn, led to the weakening of the traditional elderly caregiver support system and an increase in elderly problems in this changing scenario. So leaving aside the traditional value system, these changes have forced the contemporary planners, researchers and policy makers to think over these issues. This is even reflected in the national policy for elderly, which has suggested the idea and made available provisions for extension of support for the institutionalized elderly care apart from the larger participation of the voluntary and community sector." Old age refers to ages nearing or surpassing the life expectancy of human beings and is thus the end of the

human life cycle” (Dewey Richard, Humber W.J, 1966). The organic process of ageing is called senescence, the medical study of the ageing process is called gerontology and the study of diseases that afflict the elderly is called geriatrics. The elderly also face other social issues related to retirement, loneliness and ageism. Old age is not a definite biological stage, as the chronological age denoted as “old age” varies culturally and historically. There is currently good deal of discussion, debate and public interest directed towards finding ways to ensure support and involvement of the family in elder care giving endeavours. Lamb (2011: 509) has observed, living alone is not something the elderly in India find unambiguously easy or natural” but approach it with critical self-reflection, self-consciousness effort”. (Croll 2006:473-491) mentions, this shift might lead the older generations to reassess their expectations of the nature of support that their children can provide them.

Problems, Condition and Contribution of Elderly People

(a) Problems of Elderly People: Old age is viewed as an unavoidable, undesirable and problem ridden phase of life. Problems of ageing usually appear after the age of 65 years.

- Physiological problems: The physical condition depends partly upon hereditary constitution, the manner of living and environmental factors. The skin becomes rough and loses its elasticity. Wrinkles are formed and the veins show out prominently on the skin. The hair becomes thin and grey, nails become thick and tough. Tremors of the hands, forearms, head and lower jaw are common. Bones harden in old age, become brittle and are subject to fractures and breaks.
- Psychological problems of Elderly People: Mental disorders are very much associated with old age. Older people are susceptible to psychotic depressions.
- Emotional problems of Elderly People: Due to the generational gap, the youngsters do not pay attention to their suggestions and advice. Instead of developing a sympathetic attitude towards the old they start asserting their rights

and power. This may create a feeling of deprivation of their dignity and importance.

- Social problems of Elderly People: Due to loss of most of the social roles the elderly once performed, they are likely to be lonely and isolated. Severe chronic health problems enable them to become socially isolated which results in loneliness and depression.
- Financial problems of Elderly People: In old age physical strength deteriorates, mental stability diminishes, financial power becomes bleak and eyesight suffers a setback. It is a period of disappointment, dejection, disease, repentance and loneliness. Dependence on others some times causes financial problems.

(b) Condition of Elderly People: A more comprehensive approach to explain the problems is as under:

- Economic Insecurity: When elderly are unable to sustain themselves economically, they lose their independence. They either lack the capacity to be productive or lack the opportunity as they used to get earlier.
- Housing Related Problems: The sizeable populations of elderly widows and elderly males have been facing problem of shortage of peaceful place to live in. Changing lifestyles and values, job culture, various means of distractions like internet, television, societal shift such as nuclear family structures and redefined priorities have led to increased neglect of the elderly by families or communities, and with this isolation comes in.
- Health problems: During the course of old age, the elderly are more prone to sickness, diseases, old age syndromes, etc. The immunity of a person is lowered.
- Problems of Elder Abuse: An elderly person is usually harmed by a person who is the part of family or close to the person. Around 81 percent of the elders face verbal abuse, 53 percent of them face neglect, 37 percent face material abuse and 23 percent face physical abuse.

(c) Contributions of Elderly People to the Society: The senior citizens can be an asset to the society if they have the right attitude to live life. Most senior citizens can tremendously contribute to the welfare of the society as they are highly experienced. Firstly, the elderly contribute to the society by teaching the youth their cultural values, convention and traditions. For example, Filial piety, a traditional virtue espoused by religion and culture in India, places the responsibility of support and care for the elderly on children (Bhat and Dhruvarajan, 2001; Croll, 2006). Secondly, the wisdom of an experienced elderly person can be a strong guiding force for the untrained, fresh minds. Thirdly, they contribute more donations than any other age group in the country. Fourthly, they babysit and look after children and contribute to the family by inculcating moral values in the upcoming generations. Thus, we see that despite suffering from problems and diseases, elderly people contribute to the society. In modern context till the age of 80 years, they can contribute physically, mentally and financially to their family and society.

Significance of the Study :

We have selected this topic for the improvement of the conditions of the old people and knowing about the problems they face in the society and to motivate them to work for the society. Next is to know the condition of the elderly people and the variation in their ages and status. Third significance is to show that elderly people are of much importance than what society thinks about them.

Objectives :

1. To find out the changing age group of elderly people.
2. To find out the problems, the elderly people face in their family and society.
3. To know the socio-economic conditions of the elderly people and to provide possible solutions to the problems.
4. To find out the role of elderly people both as an asset or liability to the society.
5. To find out the various spheres of society where the elderly people may contribute.

Hypotheses :

1. There are significant differences in the socio-economic and psychological conditions of the elderly male in comparison to elderly female.
2. The contributions of elderly people may differ significantly according to their class background.

3. There is a problem of adjustment of the elderly people both in the family and society.

Methodology :

Area of this study was Boring Road, Patliputra and Gandhi Maidan area. Sample size was 50 elderly respondents (Both male and female) Sampling Method was Non- probability sampling. Tool used to collect data in this study was Interview schedule. Interview schedule is a set of structured questions in which answers are recorded by the interviewer himself.

The process of data collection was done over a period of 5 days from various areas to know about the problems, condition and contributions in the society. A structured schedule comprising 50 questions prepared by the research workers were put to the respondents who answered those questions face to face with the researchers. The respondents were free to give the answers in their own mother tongue, which were later, recorded in the blank spaces by the interviewer.

Data Collection and Analysis :

The research work entitled, “ELDERLY PEOPLE: THEIR PROBLEMS, CONDITION AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SOCIETY” has been carried out on the basis of empirical method. Data collected from the respondents have been carefully analyzed. Keeping in mind the views of 50 respondents, certain type of data analysis has been done by the research workers. The results also explain the validity of the hypotheses formulated at the outset of the research. The data analysis has been represented with the help of pie charts, column, conical and tabular presentation.

Table 1. There are significant differences in the socio-economic and psychological condition of the elderly male in comparison to elderly female.

Condition	No. of Males	No. of Females
Economic	05 (10%)	10 (20%)
Social	16 (32%)	06 (12%)
Psychological	11 (22%)	02 (04%)

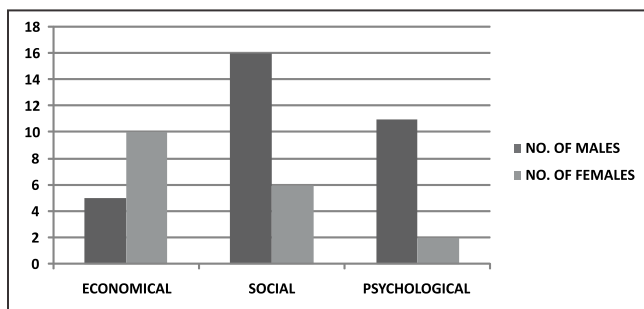


Fig. 1. Significant differences in the socio-economic and psychological conditions of the elderly male in comparison to elderly female

According to the table 1 and fig. 1 showed above, 10% of elderly male considered their economic status to be lowered with their old age while 20% elderly female considered their economic conditions to be low. 32% male considered socially dethroned or devalued while only 12% female replied about lower social status. 22% elderly male suffered psychological problems such as frustration, hallucination, neuroticism and so on whereas 4% aged women suffered from such psychological problems. Thus significant differences had been found in both the conditions of elderly male and female, on the basis of above discussion; one of the hypotheses has been proved.

Table 2. The contributions of elderly people may differ significantly according to their class and background

Contributions	Higher Class	Middle Class	Lower Class
Donation of Money	19 (38%)	09 (18%)	02 (4%)
Social Service	05 (10%)	07 (14%)	01 (2%)
Blood Donations	00 (0%)	02 (04%)	05 (10%)

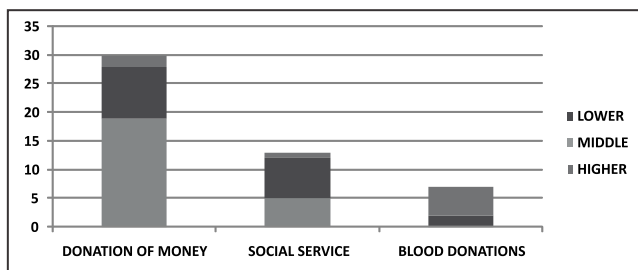


Fig. 2. Contributions of elderly people may differ significantly according to their class and background

On the basis of above table 2 and fig. 2, it has been found that 38% elderly belonging to higher class contributed financially by donating money to social organizations, educational institutions and so on while 18% of the elderly belonging to middle class donated money mainly for in religious ceremonies i.e. puja and festivals etc. and only 4% of the elderly belonging to lower economic class could donate money. The table also clarified that 10% of the higher economic class, 14% of the middle class and 2% of the lower class elderly engaged in social service as donation for cancer patients, donation for soldiers family, flood relief etc. On the basis of the tables and figures it has been found that 0% of elderly people faced the problems of adjustment both in the family and society. Thus the table proves that the contributions of elderly people differed significantly according to their class and background. Therefore, 2nd hypothesis also has been proved.

Table 3. Problem of the Adjustment

Opinion	No. of Respondents	% of Respondents
Always	25	50%
Often	10	20%
Sometimes	10	20%
No Problem	05	10%

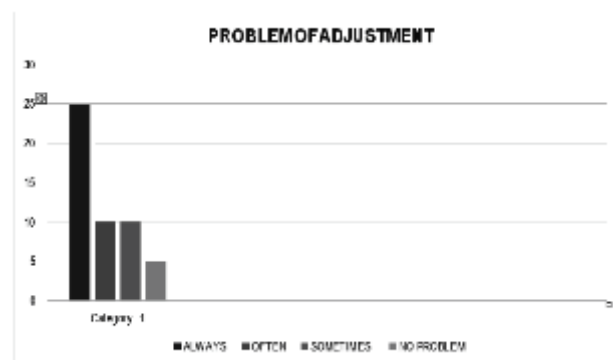


Fig. 3.

This table shows that 50% of the elderly people were not satisfied with their families with whom they lived, whereas 20% were dethroned or devalued in family and society. 20% often suffered from the psychological problem of non-acceptance in their family and society. Only 10% respondents were such who had adjustment with their family members who either belonged to high income group or living separately with

their spouses. The older people generally felt that their family members could not give enough time to the old people. They need love and care which they did not receive from their family members. Thus, the third hypothesis has been proved.

Findings :

- (a) Lack of awareness: Some senior citizens are not aware of their rights in old age and so they face abuses in one form or the other and are forced to live in poor conditions.
- (b) Income level and status in the family: There is a loss in the status of elderly due to the change in traditional supportive social structure, also with the advancement in the modern technology; they feel more distanced from their family. The more distance of elderly people from their family, the greater is the feeling of insecurity and loneliness.
- (c) Majority of the elderly people do not benefit from governmental measures: It is found out that the government schemes for the elderly fail to reach and benefit the senior citizens of the country.
- (d) There is need to motivate the elderly people to make them an asset for society: Though the old people are physically weak but they have the experience which can be used to make the younger generation more skilled, more disciplined etc. The elderly people can help the society to make it better by putting to use their experience and exposure.
- (e) Recreation and health care: Most of the elderly people take good care of their health both mental and physical through morning walk in the park or by visiting gymnasium or laughing club; they keep themselves busy as well as healthy.
- (f) Educational level : Education has been and continues to be one of the major concerns of the modern as well as the traditional society. It enables one to understand the way in which one is related to the social world in which one is living.

Conclusion :

The evolutionary process is an inevitable process where a young person reaches old age. In old age, there are some who stop living their life, with ageing their life become dull and miserable. Some who want to do things and aren't able to, and there are few who have the zeal to work more and more till the end of their life. Some old people have positive attitude and keep themselves physically and mentally fit and continue taking part in various activities. Senior citizens are treasure to our society. They have vast experience in different walks of life. The younger generation can gain from their experiences and lead the nation to a greater heights. At this age many are working for society but they need to be taken care of and made to feel special. Indian government and NGO provide several benefits through various schemes in various sector of development.

We would like to conclude this article with an ageing poem called

I STILL MATTER by **PATRICIA A. FLEMING.**

***My looks are nothing special, my face reveals
my age,***

***My body shows some wear and tear, and my
energy's not the same.***

***Too often my memory fails me, and I lose things
all the time.....***

..... I am still here and want so much to live,

***And I know there's no one in this world quite
like me,***

And no one who has more to give.

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