

Old age Issues in Urban Societies: An Indian Scenario

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ABSTRACT

India is undergoing a significant demographic transition in the contemporary age. It is characterised by an increasing proportion of the elderly population due to improvements in healthcare facilities, declining fertility rates, and increased life expectancy. The growth of the old age population shows social and economic progress; however, it also creates significant challenges for individuals, families and policymakers. Elderly people face several difficulties in both rural and urban settings, such as poor health, social isolation, financial insecurity, psychological strain, and depression. The joint family system in society, which has traditionally provided support and care for elderly members, is gradually declining. The tradition of the joint family system is decreasing, and the prevalence of the nuclear family system is increasing in contemporary times. Furthermore, rapid urbanisation and migration have also influenced the living conditions and well-being of older people. Rural-urban disparities also intensify these challenges, more specifically social connections, emotional support, and healthcare accessibility. The Government of India has introduced several policies, programmes and action plans to improve the overall well-being, care and welfare of elderly people in both rural and urban society. This paper explores the major socio-economic, health-related, and psychological problems faced by elderly people. In addition, it also highlights the comprehensive and integrated policy framework that promotes better health, social inclusion and dignity among the elderly people. These measures can help in transforming the old age population from a social challenge to an opportunity for inclusive development.

Keywords: *Elderly, Old Age, Urbanisation, Nuclear Family, Joint Family, Government Initiatives.*

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Introduction:

Ageing is a natural, integrated, biological, and continuous process of human life. After a certain age, people step into the inescapable reality of old age. Nobody wants ageing, but this is a biological phenomenon which is universal and witnessed by all human civilisations throughout history. The growing elderly population presents both opportunities and challenges for families and society as a whole. The extent to which old-age people are perceived either as a liability or a valuable social resource depends on the cultural values and social and institutional support systems of a society.

In the age of urbanisation, globalisation, and a market-led economy, issues of old-age people have emerged as a major social challenge across the world. An ageing population has become a major global phenomenon that affects both developed and developing countries. The challenges faced by older adults are evident in rural and urban communities, economically disadvantaged as well as in affluent families. Elderly individuals face social, economic, psychological, emotional and health-related difficulties, all of which significantly influence their quality of life and overall well-being. Furthermore, the

challenges of ageing people vary not only from rural to urban spaces but also differ in the nature, intensity and severity. In many instances, older adults residing in urban nuclear families experience greater levels of social isolation, neglect, and psychological stress than those living in traditional rural joint families, where stronger family bonds, intergenerational support, and community-based values often provide a more secure and supportive environment.

Understanding the old Age

Old age is an integral phase of human existence and constitutes a universal, cyclical, and biological process of life. With the passage of time, human beings reach this stage of life. The human life cycle can be broadly divided into several distinct stages, including childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. (Saluja, 2011). Old age is considered the final stage of the normal human life cycle. Elderly people are generally those individuals who have reached a specific age based on chronological years. However, there is no universally accepted age criterion for categorising a person as elderly. In most contexts, the age of sixty years and above is commonly considered old age. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), elderly people are those who are aged 60 years or above. However, the definition of elderly varies across different countries. For instance, in the United States of America, individuals aged 65 years and above are generally regarded as elderly, whereas in India, the age criteria may vary depending on social, economic, and policy contexts. (Saluja, 2011). The Census of India classified the age of 60 years as old people. Ageing is also defined in so many perspectives like biological, psychological, sociological and socio-cultural. Many changes start appearing in human beings with growing age, like grey hair, wrinkled skin, difficulties in movement and other health issues.

Situational Analysis

India is the second most populous country in the world after China, with a total population of 1,210,854,977 people, comprising 623,724,248 males

and 586,469,174 females. (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2011). The Age composition of India has been changing with the passage of time. The issue of old-age people is a matter of big concern. The problem of old age has increased significantly in India irrespective of caste, class, religion, race and ethnicity.

As time progresses, India's population is undergoing a significant demographic transition, with an increasing proportion of elderly people. The challenges faced by the ageing population are becoming a major social concern in the country. Elderly individuals across the globe encounter a wide range of challenges related to social, economic, psychological, and health-related aspects of life. The only thing that changes from place to place is the nature and the intensity of ageing people. The common form of problems is seen in the form of disrespect, neglect and sometimes verbal abuse. These kinds of problems are continuously increasing almost in every society, from village societies to urban areas. The most common problems faced by the ageing people at present time are the issues of health, shelter and finance (HelpAge India, 2018). In this century, the age-old problems are visible and are touching various aspects of elderly people's lives. With the changing pattern of life and growing age, health has become a serious fundamental issue. In the course of growing age, elderly people come under the trap of many diseases. Health issues are more serious and cause concern in the rural and remote areas where hospital facilities are not easily available. People have to travel long distances to consult doctors and undergo health checkups. Health issues are less common in urban areas as compared to villages because facilities of hospitals, pharmacies and diagnostic centres are easily available.

Housing is another major concern for elderly people in urban centres due to demographic transition and rapid urbanisation. The number of family members increases, but the space of the house remains limited, where adjustment becomes a big

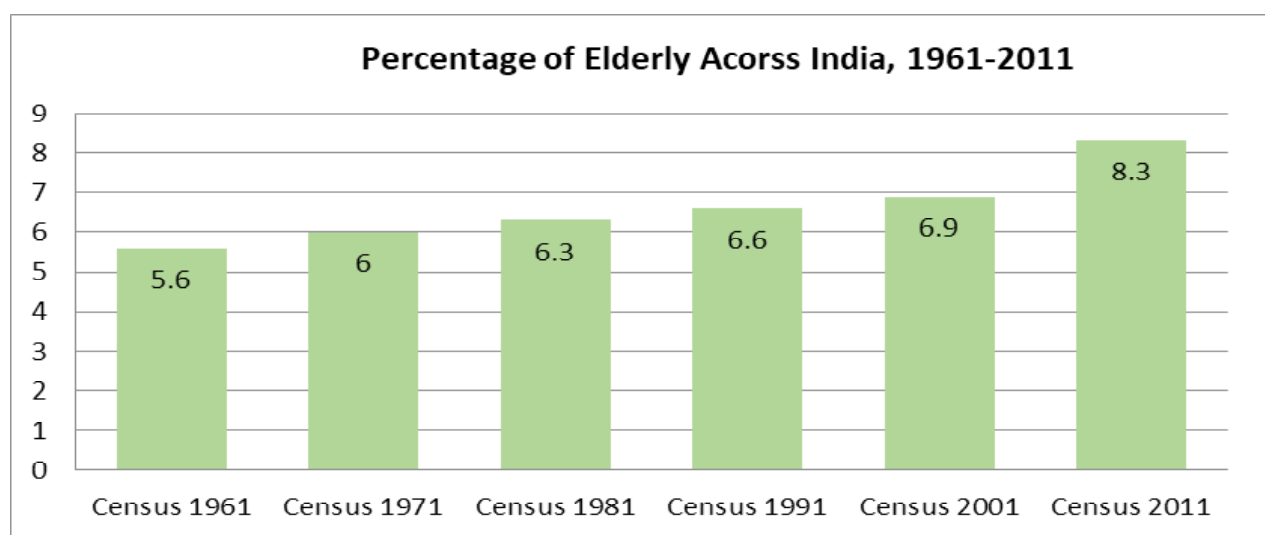
issue. Financial problems are another major issue that affects elderly people more. The income earned by old-age people is not enough to even fulfil their own needs. Due to paucity of income, they rely on the family's earnings. Some of the elderly people are living with their family, residing with their spouse or living alone. Among these categories, the maximum number of ageing people are residing with the family.

Demographic Profile of Elderly People

The population of old age people has become a matter of concern for both the general public and policymakers during the time of demographic transition. In contemporary times, the elderly population is increasing globally at a faster rate than the overall population growth. The reason behind the substantial longevity may be a decline in fertility, a better health care system, reduction in mortality, and the rate of survival of the old age person (United Nation Population Fund, 2017). 11.5 percent of the total population is more than 60 years of age, and it is projected to reach 22 percent by the year 2050. In India, people aged 60 years and above it constitutes the 8 percent of the total population in 2015, and it is projected to reach 19 percent by 2050 and 34 percent by the end of the twenty-first century. These projections underline that India, which is currently

known for its young population, is likely to become an ageing society in the coming decades (United Nation Population Fund, 2017).

The data indicates a steady upward trend in population ageing. The elderly constituted 5.6% of the total population in 1961, 6.0% in 1971, 6.3% in 1981, 6.6% in 1991, 6.9% in 2001 and reached 8.3% in 2011. The increase in ageing appears gradual, but the pace of ageing gained momentum in the period from 2001 to 2011, showing an important demographic transition in the country. The increasing share of the elderly population demonstrates improvements in life expectancy, public health and medical care. The rising proportion of older people within the total population reflects a shift from a young population towards an ageing society. These trends have important policy implications and thus require improved health care services, social security, pension schemes and easily accessible old age-friendly infrastructure. To address the old age issues, the government has taken several measures; one of the initiatives is the National Policy for Older Persons, 1999 which helps old people in getting better healthcare, shelter, education, and other welfare services (Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, 2014).



Source: India Ageing Report -2017, p.14.

Urban and Rural Dynamics

Although urbanisation is rapidly increasing in India, a significant majority of the population still resides in rural areas. According to the Census of India 2011, the country had approximately 104 million elderly people, of whom 53 million were females and 51 million were males. Of the total elderly population, more than 73 million or 71 percent lives in rural areas and approximately 31 million or 29 percent lives in urban areas (Central Statistics Office, 2016). The literacy rate among elderly persons increased to 44 percent in 2011. However, the literacy rate among elderly women is still below and is nearly half that of elderly men. The involvement of old persons is higher in rural areas than in urban areas. In rural India, around 66 percent of old-age men and 28 percent of old-age women are working, while in urban areas nearly 46 percent of old-age men and 11 percent of old-age women are engaged in work (Central Statistics Office, 2016).

The process of Urbanization gained significant momentum after the Industrial Revolution (Urbanization - Industrial Revolution, Population, Infrastructure | Britannica, 2026). Urbanisation has created new opportunities of employment for young and skilled workers. The urban areas also offer better access to educational institutions, healthcare facilities, markets and other essential services. As a result, a large number of youths are migrating from rural areas to urban areas in search of employment, education and a better future. The migration of youth from rural to urban areas brings both positive and negative effects on elderly family members. Although the migration may improve the economic conditions of the family, it often leaves older parents living alone. People in old age need physical assistance, emotional care and companionship from family members. However, economic and financial support is necessary, but emotional and physical support provided by young members of the family is also very significant for them. The young people working in urban areas bear the cost of daily living expenses,

healthcare costs and other needs of their elderly parents. Although the financial assistance is not sufficient, elderly people also require physical support during illness. Regular medical check-ups, personal care, hospital visits and taking medicine on time become important in old age. The elderly people experience loneliness during health check-ups and other medical emergencies. At the same time, the working young members of the family do not get enough leave from their organisation to take care of their ageing parents. It creates a very difficult situation for both parents and their children. The old-age parents feel neglected and helpless while younger family members undergo stress, guilt and pressure because they are unable to provide the necessary care and companionship.

Old Age Problems in Urban Society

The problems faced by elderly people in urban society have become a major concern across the world. Urbanisation and the fast-moving lifestyle of the people have created several difficulties and challenges for the elderly. In urban society, the traditional joint family system is gradually declining, and nuclear families are becoming more common. The lives of people are becoming more mechanical and busier, and social support systems are also weakening day by day. In this kind of situation, elderly people face multiple social, emotional, physical and economic challenges. The care of elderly family members is considered a shared responsibility and is not viewed as a serious problem in the traditional joint family system (Prasad, 2017). Apart from these problems, most of the cities are not designed ageing friendly to meet their needs. Walking spaces are inadequate or poorly maintained, stairs and streets have poor lighting, and inaccessible buildings create difficulties for elderly people (Jha, 2019). Public transport is overcrowded and not easily accessible in cities. The continuous migration of people towards urban areas increases pressure on housing facilities. Urban housing is very limited and also unaffordable, which makes elderly people more

vulnerable, especially when they live alone or depend on family members. These problems are mostly found in urban areas where elderly people experience dependence, loneliness, insecurity and isolation.

Government Initiatives

The growing demographic transition and the multidimensional challenges faced by older people in both rural and urban settings have necessitated a comprehensive policy response from the Government of India. The government has recognised the increasing demand for healthcare, financial security, shelter, social support, and age-friendly infrastructure. As a result of this, the government has introduced legislative measures, initiatives, action plans, and welfare programmes to improve the quality of life of senior citizens. This necessary support seeks to address the social, economic and health-related vulnerabilities of the elderly population.

The Government of India has taken several policies and initiatives aimed at promoting care, well-being and improving the overall quality of senior citizens' lives. One of the most important legislative measures is the *Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007*, which was amended later in 2019. It legally obligates children and heirs to provide maintenance and care to their parents. The Amendment has widened the definition of "children" and "parents" and also removed the ceiling on maintenance to maintain the standard, dignity and quality of an elder's life (*Elderly in India*, 2025). These provisions reinforce family responsibility while ensuring greater protection of the rights and welfare of old-age persons.

In order to strengthen the financial security of elders the government has implemented various pension schemes. The Atal Pension Yojana (APY) provides social security to Indians by giving them a monthly pension from 1000 to 5000 after the beneficiary turns 60 (Research Unit, Press Information Bureau, 2025). Similarly, the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme also

provides financial support to citizens who are above 60 years of age and living below the poverty line. These initiatives are aimed at reducing old-age poverty and providing minimum basic economic assistance to economically vulnerable senior citizens.

Recognising the growing healthcare needs of elderly people, the government has introduced range of targeted policy measures. The National Programme for the Health Care of Elderly (NPHCE) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme launched in 2011, which provides comprehensive healthcare services to persons above 60 years at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Furthermore, the widening of Ayushman Bharat- Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) offers health insurance coverage of up to 5 lakh rupees per year to all senior citizens aged 70 years and above, irrespective of their socio-economic background. These facilities reduce the financial burden of treatment and hospitalisation. The government has brought Atal Vayo Abhyuday Yojana (AVYAY) to empower senior citizens across India. Its component consists of the Integrated Programme for Senior Citizens (IPSrC) Scheme, which helps in the operation and maintenance of old-age homes, care centres, physiotherapy, Mobile Medical Units and regional training centres (NITI AAYOG, 2024). The Rashtriya Vayoshari Yojana provides free assistive devices such as walking sticks, wheelchairs, walkers, dentures, etc. to senior citizens suffering from age-related disabilities. These initiatives improve the well-being of elderly persons. Recognising the importance of technological inclusion and social participation, the government has launched initiatives such as the National Helpline for Senior Citizens, the Senior Care Ageing Growth Engine (SAGE) Portal, and the Senior Able Citizens for Re-Employment in Dignity (SACRED) Portal. These platforms give counselling, promote entrepreneurship in elderly care, opportunities for employment and access to welfare services. Additionally, the training programmes for professional geriatric caregivers and the Senior Citizens Welfare Portals have also strengthened institutional support and improved service delivery.

India's Policy framework for senior citizens has evolved from a welfare-oriented approach to more comprehensive support, including legal protection, healthcare, financial security, technological empowerment, social participation and age-friendly infrastructure. Although substantial progress has been made, effective implementation, more awareness, greater accessibility, and stronger coordination among government agencies, local bodies, and civil society are necessary for ensuring dignified and healthy ageing in an increasingly urban society.

Conclusion:

In a nutshell, old age is an inevitable stage of the human life cycle. The challenges associated with elderly people have become significant in the context of demographic transition in India. The old age problem cannot be ignored, and the intensity and nature of challenges related to it may differ across rural and urban settings. Most old-age adults in urban societies experience loneliness, social isolation, weakening family support, and lack of emotional care and support due to the gradual disintegration of the traditional joint family system, modernisation, and urbanisation. A greater proportion of elderly people in rural areas are vulnerable to poverty, inadequate healthcare and financial dependency. To address these challenges, the government has initiated several programmes and policies to improve the living conditions of the old age population. Moreover, a comprehensive and integrated policy approach would be required that goes beyond financial aspects and also encompasses good, accessible healthcare, affordable housing, social security, age-friendly urban infrastructure and community-based support and care. Since India is moving towards an ageing society, promotion of healthy and active ageing needs special attention for achieving sustainable and inclusive development.



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