

# Creating Age Friendly Environment for Elderly People in India

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## ABSTRACT

*With fast changing socio-economic conditions, fast growing industrialization, globalization and urbanization, traditional joint family system has been changing very fast. Consequently, the older people are suffering from isolation and loneliness due to lack of support of their families. In a country like India where elderly people are deprived of suitable work opportunities and gainful engagement opportunities, most of the elderly find themselves inactive, lethargic and less energetic in old age. The demand for care increases with age and the aged person needs constant help in activities of daily life such as toileting, bathing, dressing, feeding and walking. But the question arises how many elderly people are getting help in old age? Are the policies and schemes of government sufficient enough to meet the needs of elderly people in India? The selection of the village, urban and semi-urban areas is guided by the purpose of the study and its feasibility in terms of time, energy and sources. The selection of sample was done through random sampling. The study will cover a selected sample representing different socio-economic, age and sex. As we know Indian population lives in villages, urban and semi-urban areas. Naturally people living in differently situations and geographical conditions have different life styles in different parts of the country. Consequently aged people in India face incidents of age discrimination, ageism, elder abuse, economic & health problems psycho-social problems, social insecurity and elder abuse. Main objective of the present study is to know about the problems faced by elderly Indians to know the reasons of those problems and find solutions to make friendly and receptive environment for the elderly people in India.*

**Keywords:** Age friendly environment, socio-economic condition, Government Policy

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## INTRODUCTION

The elderly population in Indian has doubled in the last twenty years. The elderly Indians are the fastest growing section because of better medical facilities and care. With fast changing socio-economic conditions, fast growing industrialization, globalization and urbanization, traditional joint family system has been changing very fast. Consequently, the older people are suffering from isolation and loneliness due to lack of support of their families.

In a country like Indian where elderly people are deprived of suitable work opportunities and gainful engagement opportunities, most of the elderly find themselves inactive, lethargic and less energetic in old age. The demand for care increases with age and the aged person needs constant help in activities of daily life such as toileting, bathing, dressing, feeding and walking. Article 41 of the constitution of India states that the State shall make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public help in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement. But the question arises how many elderly people are getting help in old age? Are the policies and schemes of government sufficient enough to meet the needs of elderly people in India? What type of problems the elderly people in Indian has to face and what are the reasons. Main objective of the present study is to know about the problems faced by elderly Indians to know the reasons of those problems and find solutions to make friendly and receptive environment for the elderly people in India.

### Objectives of the Study:

- The present paper is an attempt to identify and brings out various problems faced by elderly people in India.
- To study the causes of emerging problems faced by elderly people.
- To address the problems and find measures that may be helpful in creating awareness in society and creating respective and age friendly environment for the elderly Indians.

**Methodology and Sample Design:**

Our objectives of the study call for data pertaining to socio-economic variables which might be expected to have some bearing on the formulation of expectation and the way the effect of different variables is aggregated to arrive at. The selection of the village, urban and semi-urban areas is guided by the purpose of the study and its feasibility in terms of time, energy and sources. Random sampling procedure was adopted. The selection of sample was done by adopting random sample procedure. It was decided that the study will cover a selected sample representing different socio-economic, age and sex. Questionnaire and comprehensive interviews were undertaken to collect information and views from randomly selected elderly people from Panchkula (Urban), Ghraunda (Semi-Urban in Karnal district) and Ugrakheri (village in Panipat district). A representative sample of sixty older people (20 from each urban, semi-urban and village) was interviewed.

**Table – 1:**

Sr. No.	District/Village	Urban/Rural	No. of Sample City/Village	No. of respondents
1.	Panchkula	Urban	One	20
2.	Ugrakheri	Rural	One	20
3.	Ghraunda	Semi-urban	One	20
<b>Total</b>				<b>60</b>

As we know Indian population lives in villages, urban and semi-urban areas. Naturally people living in differently situations and geographical conditions have different life styles in different parts of the country.

**Age-group & gender wise classification of respondents**

Older people randomly selected for survey were divided into three age-groups to achieve more realistic findings. They were also categorized gender wise to study changing trends of old age in both elderly men and women.

**Table – 2: Age wise & gender-wise categorization of respondents :**

Gender	60-70 years	71-80 years	81 + years	Total
older men	10	10	10	30
Older women	10	10	10	30
<b>Total</b>				<b>60</b>

**Problems faced by elderly people :**

Aged people in India face incidents of age discrimination, ageism, elder abuse, economic & health problems, psycho-social problems, social insecurity and elder abuse.

**Economic problems** - elderly people face economic problems due to loss of employment and inability to work because of disability or non-availability of decent and gainful job opportunities.

**Psycho-Social Problems:**

The elderly people have to face some psycho-social problems caused out of psychological and social maladjustment. Some family members behave against civilized society and restrict their elderly persons in one room. Interaction with these relatives, friends or other social group is not allowed. As a result, the older person suffer from isolation and loneliness. Majority of elderly people are emotionally abused through yelling, threats, humiliation, ridicule age discrimination etc.

**Mistreatment & Harassment of older people:**

Indian elderly people suffer from neglect as well as financial exploitation. They are mistreated and deprived of proper respect & care, food & medication by their family members. Transition of joint family system to nuclear family has made the situation worse for elderly people.

**Insecurity:**

Besides being economically insecure both the elderly men & women feel socially insecure and unsafe even within the four walls of their houses. They remain tense & insecure because some anti-social bad elements should attack them finding them soft target.

**Age Discrimination:**

Despite getting respect in Society, the older person is not given proper respect by his family members. There are frequent incidences of arguments and tension between the elderly person and care taker or family members. An

elderly person is behaved in his own family as if he has outstayed and he has lost his role & importance in the family. These things hurt the older person the most.

**Health Problems:**

With the growing age, ageism brings with it many physical and psychological health problems. Where finances are controlled by family members the older person has to depend on them for medication and health care. Most of the time their health problems are neglected by family members. An elderly suffering from health problems is taken as a by the family members.

**Table – 3: Economic Problems faced by respondents:**

Sr. No.	Reason of Economic Problems	Men	Women	Total
1.	Loss of employment	10	5	15
2.	Inability to work	19	25	44
3.	Drug Addiction	01	Nil	01
<b>Total</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>60</b>

Three main reasons causing financial problems to the elderly people were given by the respondents. 33.3 percent men and 20 % women suffered from economic problems due to loss of employment. 63.3 % elderly men and 83.3 % elderly women were unable to work because of weakness, health problems & other disabilities. Only 3 % male respondents were found drug addicted and waste money on drugs.

**Table – 4:**

Sr. No.	Financial Dependence	Men	Women	Total
1.	Depend on others	05	10	15
2.	Depend on family members	20	18	38
3.	Independent	5	2	7
<b>Total</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>60</b>

16.6 % elderly men and 33.3 % women depended on others for financial help. 66.6 % men and 60 % women were not allowed to control financial matters and they depended on family members. Only 16.6 % men & 66% women respondents were independent in financial matters. Out of 88.4 % respondents including men and women 30 % have left managing their financial matters voluntarily while 58.4 % elderly men & women fell hurt as their family members don,t allow them control their own financial matters.

**Table – 5: Psycho-Social Problems faced by respondents :**

Sr. No.	Problem	Men	Women	Total
1.	Emotionally abused	10	8	18
2.	Elder abuse	7	10	17
3.	Isolation	5	6	11
4.	Lack of Recognition	8	6	14
<b>Total</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>60</b>

30.3 % elderly men and 26.6 % elderly women admitted that they are emotionally abused. 23.3 % men and 30.3 % women are victim of elder abuse. 16.6 % men and 20 % women have to lead life of isolation. 26.6 % men and 20 % women have to face problem of lack of recognition on public places and social gathering especially by their near & dear ones.

**Table – 6: Mistreatment and Harassment of older People**

Sr. No.	Type of Harassment	Men	Women	Total
1.	Deprived of proper care	8	10	18
2.	Deprived of medication	10	12	22
3.	Deprived of nutritious food choices/decision	06	08	14
4.	Financial exploitation	06	Nil	06
<b>Total</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>60</b>

Percentage of elderly men who are deprived of proper care is 26.6% while this percentage of women respondents increased to 30.03%. Older persons who are mistreated and harassed are 30.3% that increased to 40% in the case of women respondents. When the men respondents were asked about their satisfaction regarding food/choices/decision

etc., 20% told that they were deprived of nutritious food and are not allowed any and choice or decision on their own. 26.6% elderly women were also in the same category. Same is the percentage of elderly men (26.6%) who are financially exploited while the number of such women was nil as they had no property or money in their name.

**Table – 7: Problem of Insecurity faced by the respondents.**

Sr. No.	Insecurity	Men	Women	Total
1.	Socially Insecure	12	10	22
2.	Economically Insecure	25	30	55
3.	Totally secure	05	03	08
<b>Total</b>		<b>37</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>85</b>

One the basis of interview & questionnaire filled by the respondents it was found that only 16.6 % elderly men and 10 % elderly women respondents felt themselves secured completely. 40 % men and 33.3 % women respondents told that they felt insecure even in their own houses. They felt scared walking along streets, roads or even in parks. The incidents of snatching robbery, injuring and murders by bad elements, robbers and so called relatives make the elders’ tense and they feel insecure. Some of the women respondents told that they felt dire need of women police in their locality for their security from incidents of sexual harassment as they feel all the time insecure lest some anti-social element should make them soft target finding alone.

83 % elderly men and 100 % elderly women were not secure economically and they had go depend on their relatives, family members and others. Some of the old men and women are not provided even old age pension because of their sons’ better economic conditions. They told that their sons didn’t visit them & help them frequently. Sometimes they have not money enough for their own medication.

**Table – 8: Loss of Social status & Age Discrimination.**

Sr.No.		Men	Women	Total
1.	Age Discrimination	15	20	35
2.	Loss of Social Status	10	8	18
3.	Maintained Social Status	5	2	7
<b>Total</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>60</b>

Out of 60 elderly respondents contacted during the survey 50 % men and 6.6 % women admitted that they had go face age discrimination at social gatherings. Only 30.3 % men and 26.6 % women told that they faced loss of social status due go old age while 16.6 % elderly men and 6.6 % elderly women were found active, energetic and maintained their social status by involving themselves in social service and other activities.

**Table – 9: Disability in old Age**

Sr. No.	Disability	Men	Women	Total
1.	Mental	10	15	25
2.	Physical	20	15	35
<b>Total</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>60</b>

It was found that 30.3 % elderly men and 50 % elderly women suffered from mental or psychological disability 66.6 % elderly men and 50 % women faced the problem of physical disability.

**Table – 10: Common problems faced by the respondents.**

Sr. No.		Men	Women	Total
1.	Confined to bed	08	6	14
2.	Meeting with friends/ relatives not allowed	05	7	12
3.	Restriction on social interaction	06	05	11
4.	Not easy access to	7	06	13
5.	No respect in family matters	04	06	10
<b>Total</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>60</b>

26.6% elderly men and 20% women were confined to bed. 16.6% men and 11.6% women were not allowed to meet or interact their friends or relatives. 23.3% elderly respondent and 20% elderly women did not have an easy access

to health care facilities. 13.3% men and 20% women were not given any respect by family members in family matters.

#### **Observations:-**

- Indian government and state government have introduced several laws, policies and schemes for the welfare of elderly people, yet Indian elderly persons are facing many problems.
- Deterioration in traditional, cultural moral value system is one of the main factors responsible for miserable condition of Indian elderly people.
- Fast changing joint family system converting into nuclear family system, less social interaction of old people, age discrimination, lack of social & economic security, loss of social status recognition declining health and negligence of family members are some of the important reasons of pitiable condition of elderly Indians.
- Most of the rural women respondents in rural areas depend financially on their family members. They have no financial freedom.
- A limited number of aged men in urban areas have control on their finances.
- Most of the older women in rural areas are not visible in social gatherings and public places. Some of them face harassment in the hands of their own daughters-in-law.
- It has been found that elderly people in the age group 80 plus are restricted to their own rooms and are not allowed to interact with their friends and relatives. Such people suffer from loneliness within the four walls of their own rooms. 'Old Age' has become for such older persons a curse and bitter part of life.
- Older people don't want to go to Old Age Homes because they feel that it is against Indian culture and social stigma to live in Old Age Home.
- Most of elderly persons suffer from psychological problems and exaggerate their trivial problems to be center of attraction and prove their own existence in the family.
- Majority of elder people including men and women are satisfied with their life and living arrangements in rural areas & semi-urban areas. People at small places still follow traditional values and give due respect and age friendly environment to their elderly people in their Ole Age. They have social pressure to serve and look after the aged person of the family.
- Most of the people in the age group 60 to 70 years are healthy & active. They keep themselves busy in doing this or that job and co-operate & help their family members and get in return due respect in their family as well as society.

#### **SUGGESTIONS**

- On the basis of the present study, it is suggested that government should enact new laws and introduce more schemes for the welfare of the elderly people.
- Elderly people whose families are below poverty line must be given pension enough to make both ends meet.
- Gainful job opportunities and age friendly environment should be easily available to the elderly Indians so that they can get decent jobs and keep themselves active.
- Increase in awareness on ageing issues is the need of the hour.
- N.G.O.s and government should join hands to provide social & financial help to the older people.
- Medical facilities should be made available at concessional rates or free of cost at the door steps of elderly people. Skilled nursing care facilities should be increased for older people.
- Greater attention should be paid to develop programmes for creating respective environment for older people.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Despite all the problems faced by elderly people and attempt to solve them, there is need to impress upon the elderly also about the need to adjust to the changing circumstances in life and try to live harmoniously with the younger generation as far as possible.

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