

Living Arrangement and Morbidity Pattern among Elderly in Rural India

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ABSTRACT

The present paper aims to study the situation of elderly persons related to their socio-economic profile, living arrangement and morbidity pattern in the three major states of India namely Orissa, West-Bengal and Bihar. Data for the study has been taken from the 52nd round of the National Sample Survey Organization (1995-96) having sample size of 20,995 in rural India. Among the three states it was found that Orissa showed highest percentage of elderly persons having visual problem (33 %) followed by West Bengal (29%) and Bihar (24%). Also highest percentage of aged with hearing problem was found living in Orissa (17.8%), followed by West Bengal (17.5%) and Bihar (13.7%). The majority of the aged suffering from senility was found in the state of Bihar (14%) while lowest in case of Orissa (9%). Logistic regression analysis shows that joint problems have significant effect on locomotor disability and urinary problems showed significant effect on diabetes. The odds ratio's are in expected direction.

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Statement of the Problem

As per the latest Census of India undertaken in the year 2001 the aged population 60 years and above constitutes 7.45 percent to the total population of country comprising nearly 7.10 percent for males and 7.83 percent females. Demographic ageing, a global phenomenon has hit Indian shores as people are living longer. The expectation of life at birth for males has shown a remarkable increase from 42 years in 1951-60 to 58 years in 1986-90 and it is projected to be 67 years in 2011-16, an increase of about 9 years in 25 years period (1986-90 to 2011-16). Where as incase of females, the increase in expectation of life has been higher nearly 11 years during the same period, from 58 years in 1986 to 69 years in 2011-16. At age 60 too, the expectation of life shows a steady rise and it is a slightly higher for women. Improved life expectancy has contributed to an increase in the number of persons 60 and above. From only 12 million persons 60+ in India in 1901, the number crossed 20 million in 1951, 57 million in 1991 which subsequently increased to 76.62 million in 2001. Population projection for 1996-2016 made by the Technical Group of Population Projections (1996) indicate that the 100 million mark is expected to be reached in 2013 (National Policy on Older Persons, August, 1998).

Demographically India is the second largest country in the world with the largest number of aged persons (60+ years). As per the 2001 Census of India there were 7.45 percent of the population of the elderly was rural based. Despite the fast growing elderly population in India it appears that barring few studies not much has been done in this area. Some of the studies undertaken in India by Dandekar (1993), D'souza (1990), Irudya Rajan (1998), Kumar (1996) etc, merit citation but none amongst them have given due emphasis on rural elderly persons. In the context of widespread poverty and social security, there is a need to assess the various livelihood options, economic dependency, living arrangements, type of disability, pattern of morbidity etc., for the aged.

In ancient India aged persons had a vital role to play in the family and society. They also enjoyed social security against infirmities, losses and had the privilege of being cared for by the younger generations. They were accorded a high status as decision makers in the joint family system. Over the years changes have been taking place in the socio-economic and demographic dimensions. Gradually the age-old joint family system for which the traditional Indian society is known is breaking up into nuclear families and this has profound implication for the support and care of the elderly. The old people are in increasing proportion losing the status and security they once enjoyed in traditional Indian society.

The National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) in its 52nd round (July, 1995-June, 1996) carried out a nationwide survey on social consumption to assess, among other things, the nature and the dimension of the socio-economic problems faced by the aged persons (60 years and above). The survey covered 20,995 aged persons in the entire rural India, and the three major states included for the present study constitute 7,570 aged persons (36 percent of the total elderly surveyed in rural India). Besides various aspects the information was also collected for the aged on their number of living children, living arrangement, state of health, type of disability and their familial environment.

The present research aims to study the following objective for the sampled population drawn from the three major states of India namely Orissa, West-Bengal and Bihar;

The present paper aims to study the following;

1. To assess the economic status of the elderly in view of widespread poverty.
2. To examine the living arrangements among the elderly.
3. To assess the familial support system of the elderly,
4. To examine the morbidity pattern (chronic) and type of disability prevailing among the elderly.

Methods and Materials

To accomplish the objectives of the study the analysis has been carried out by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 12.5. Bivariate tables depicting percentage distribution and cross tabulation have been generated. Besides in order to trace significant predictors of morbidity among the elderly. Logistic regression technique has been applied. All the above coefficients are found in expected direction.

Salient findings

With regards distribution of the elderly (60+) persons by their usual activity status is concerned, the majority in each among the three states was found in the category of 'self employed in agriculture' their respective percentages for Orissa, Bihar and West-Bengal are 19.25, 25.5 and 21.03. Further males were found much more than females in this category. Next preferred category for the activity status of the aged was 'engaged in domestic duties' and on the contrary for this category proportion of females in all the three states was found much higher for females in each of the three states as percentage values varies from 17 for Orissa to around 28 for West-Bengal.

Data analyzed to examine economic dependence of the elderly, revealed that in each of the three states, the elderly were 'fully dependent on others' and percentage values ranged between nearly 42 (for Orissa) to 49 (for Bihar). Also, females were found much more 'fully dependent on others' as compared with males in all the three states (nearly 71 percent in Orissa, 65 percent in Bihar and 88 percent in West-Bengal). On the contrary higher percentage values were found for males as compared with females who reported that they are 'not dependent on others'.

The analysis of the data on living arrangement among the elderly revealed that the majority of the elderly were found 'living with their spouse' and other members. This phenomenon holds true for all the three states under study. Another preferred category for the living arrangement among the elderly was 'with children' but 'without spouse'. This phenomenon is very much in line with the traditional family practice prevailing in the

country. Interestingly it was observed that the elderly, who were alone preferred to 'stay independently' in their respective houses such percentage varies from around 2(for Bihar) to around 4(for Orissa) instead of staying in the old age homes.

Analysis of the data on disability among the elderly in the three states under study reveals that the majority amongst them was suffering from 'visual disability' followed by hearing impairments. For example visual disability varies from 30 percent in West-Bengal to 22 percent in Bihar. Whereas incase of those having hearing impairments the percentage value varies from 19 for West-Bengal to 12 in Bihar. Another interesting feature emerged out is that by and large females out numbered males in all types of disability. Probably it may be attributed to the low status of females prevailing in the country, particularly in the rural areas. Further, the study showed that as far as the support system of the elderly was concerned the majority was 'depending on their spouse' (82 percent for Orissa, 68 percent for Bihar and 77 percent for west-Bengal). Another phenomena emerged from the analysis is that relatively more husbands depend on their wives as compared with wives depending on their husbands. Also, it was interesting to note that mothers in their old age were getting economically more support from their children as compared to old fathers. This phenomenon was found relatively more pronounced for the states of Orissa and Bihar.

Data analyzed on the chronic disease shows that the majority of the elderly were suffering from 'joint problems' followed by 'blood pressure' and 'cough'. The elderly suffering from any of the disease was found higher in West-Bengal (70 percent) followed by Orissa (59 percent) and Bihar (43 percent). By and large females outnumber males barring Bihar in this regard.

Logistic regression analysis has been used in order to trace out the significant predictors of the above morbidity among the elderly. It was found that joint problem has significant effect on locomotor disability. Likewise urinary problem was found having significant effect on diabetes problem. The odds ratio of the above coefficients are in expected direction.

Table: Percentage of 60+ populations by sex and place of residence in India and Selected States

Country/State	Total			Rural			Urban		
	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
Orissa	8.26	8.05	8.47	8.58	8.40	8.77	6.43	6.20	6.68
West-Bengal	7.11	6.72	7.53	6.59	6.13	7.08	8.44	8.18	8.73
Bihar	6.63	6.76	6.49	6.68	6.84	6.51	6.17	6.06	6.29
India	7.45	7.10	7.83	7.74	7.43	8.06	6.70	6.25	7.21

Source: Age and Sex Distribution, Census of India, 2001