

## **Family Support and Care for the Elderly: Evidences from India**

### **Introduction**

Ageing is a universal process and it affects each human being in the world. It is a by-product of demographic transition, i.e.; the change from high fertility and mortality rates to low fertility and mortality rates. This phenomenon is more evident in developed countries but recently it seen to be increasing more rapidly in developing countries.

Marked differences exist between regions in the number and proportion of older persons. In the more developed regions, almost one fifth of the population was aged 60 or older in the year 2000; by 2050, this proportion is expected to reach one third. In the less developed regions, only 8 per cent of the population is currently over the age of 60; however, by 2050 older persons will make up nearly 20 per cent of the population (United Nations, 2002).

Although the proportion of India's elderly is small compared with that of developed countries, still it is very large in terms of the absolute numbers. The Indian aged population is currently the second largest in the world, the first being China with more than 150 million. The 1901 census showed there were only 12 million population above the age of 60 years in India. In the next fifty years the population of aged increased to 20 million. But in the next fifty years it increased almost three times and reached around 77 million in 2001. The life expectancy at the age of 60 in 1901 was 9 years for men and 9.3 years for women. The sex ratio is moving in favor of females and it was 1028 ( females per 1000 males) among the sixty plus and 1051 for the oldest old( 80 years and above) as per 2001 census. The most significant change in the ageing scenario of India is the increasing "feminization" of elderly.

**Table: 1 Number and Proportion of Elderly by Different Age groups, India, 1961-2001**

Age	Number(in millions)					% of elderly to the total population				
	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
60+	25	33	43	57	77	5.6	6.0	6.49	6.76	7.5
70+	9	11	15	21	29	2.0	2.1	2.33	2.51	2.9
80+	2	3	4	6	8	0.6	0.6	0.62	0.76	0.8
90+	0.5	0.7	0.7	1	1.8	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2
100+	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.1	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.01

*Source: Census of India (various years)*

**Table: 2 Sex ratio and Growth Rate among the Indian Elderly, 1971-2001**

Age	Sex ratio of Elderly (males per 1000 females)				Growth of Elderly (in Percent)		
	1971	1981	1991	2001	1971-81	1981-91	1991-2001
60+	1066	1042	1075	1028	2.78	2.72	3.04
70+	1030	1026	1084	991	3.013	3.08	3.32
80+	950	990	1090	1051	2.54	4.35	2.35
90+	897	892	1019	1131	0.66	5.08	5.80
100+	798	844	869	1782	0.19	0.44	na

*Source: Census of India (various years)*

The population ageing is accompanied by changes in the family structure in India. Historically, the joint family system has been considered as a characteristic of Indian life. Under this system, as many as three generations live together at any time in the same dwelling. In earlier period, the eldest male member controlled all economic and social affairs, and the eldest female member manages household matters. The migration, urbanization and westernization have severely affected the value systems in Indian Society. Previously, the care of elderly persons was never been considered as problem in the Indian families. Mostly, elderly parents are taken care by their adult sons and their families. In most of these families, the primary caregiver is daughter- in -law. Women,

the traditional caregivers in the family, are unable to extent the elderly care due to increased educational and vocational opportunities and need to work and earn outside. In this context, the paper attempts to analyze the changing family support and care of elderly persons in India by using the nationally representative sample survey which was carried out in 2004 covering 38,432 elderly (NSSO, 2006).

Living arrangement of the elderly has great importance to understand their status due to the lack of public institutions and social security schemes. Living arrangements are determined by various factors such as marital status, health status, financial dependency, as well as cultural traditions like kinship patterns and the social supports available to the aged (Van Solinge, 1994). It becomes an important factor of the overall well-being of the elderly and gives an indication of the extent of support of the elderly available from the family and kin.

The analysis from National Sample Survey Data shows that around 5 percent of the elderly in India are living alone and 12 percent are living with their spouse. 44.7 percent were living with spouse and others and around 32 percent of the elderly were living with children (Table 3). It is interesting to see that comparatively a higher proportion of elderly persons in rural areas are staying alone or staying with spouse only. A higher number of females were living alone in both rural and urban areas compared to their male counterparts. It is clear from the analysis that the young old group (60-69 years) prefer to live alone or only with spouse than the old- old and oldest-old. The analysis shows that around 19 percent of the young old were either living alone or with spouse only. Marital status of the elderly has great influence on their living arrangement. Around 11.3 percent of the widowed persons were living alone.

From Table 4 it is found that 56 percent of the males and 55 percent of the females continue to work beyond 60 years of age. As they grow older, the work participation rate declines; however, even after 80 years, 20 percent of the males and 13 percent of the females in India continue to work. The high work participation rate among the elderly may be due to the lack of social security and high level of poverty. They not only have to support themselves but they are compelled to support their children even at this stage !

**Table: 3 Living Arrangements of the Elderly in India-2004**

	Living Arrangement				
	Alone	With Spouse only	With Spouse and Others	Without spouse but with children	Others
Total	5.1	11.9	44.7	32.1	6.1
Place of residence					
Rural	5.4	12.5	44.0	32.1	6.0
Urban	4.4	10.4	46.9	32.0	6.3
Sex					
Males	2.6	15.5	60.0	17.2	4.7
Females	7.6	8.4	29.4	47.0	7.5
Age group					
Young - old	5.4	12.9	49.1	27.4	5.1
Old-old	5.2	11.3	38.3	38.6	6.6
Oldest-old	3.0	6.3	30.7	48.1	11.9
Marital Status					
Currently Married	0.6	19.9	73.3	3.7	2.5
Widows	11.6	-	-	78.0	10.3

Source: NSSO (2006)

**Table: 4 Work participation rates among Different groups of the Elderly:  
Comparison of NSS 50<sup>th</sup> and 55<sup>th</sup> Rounds, India**

Age	Rural			Urban			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
	NSSO 50 <sup>th</sup> Round								
60+	70.8	59.4	65.6	45.9	55.3	51.1	62.6	57.9	60.3
70+	48.8	33.4	41.9	30.8	31.3	31.7	42.7	32.6	37.7
80+	24.7	17.5	22.4	15.8	15.6	17.1	21.8	16.8	19.2
	NSSO 55 <sup>th</sup> Round								
60+	64.4	56.0	60.3	40.9	52.7	47.0	56.2	54.7	55.5
70+	43.0	29.3	36.5	26.8	30.3	28.6	37.3	29.7	33.6
80+	23.7	12.5	18.2	13.4	12.9	13.1	20.1	12.7	16.3

Source: Rajan and Mathew (2007).

It is clear from the analysis that, still the majority of the economically dependent elderly are supported by their children in India; around 78 percent of the economically dependent elderly were supported by their own children and 3 percent by grand children. In the case of widows, 87 percent of the elderly received financial assistance from their children and 5 percent from their grand children. In many respects, elderly widows are the most vulnerable segment among India's population.

**Table: 5 Financial Supports for Dependent Elderly in India-2004**

<i>Person providing financial assistance to the economically dependent elderly</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Widows</i>
Spouse	13.3	16.9	10.8	
Own children	77.7	75.2	79.4	86.9
Grand children	2.7	2.0	3.2	4.7
Others	6.3	5.9	6.6	8.4

*Source: NSSO (2006)*

The support from the family at the time of old age is not only restricted with financial assistance. It includes the physical care also. Around 84 percent of the physically immobile persons were cared by their own family members, mostly by daughters-in-law. However, around 8 percent of the elderly reported that nobody is there to help them. The proportion of males (11 percent) reported the unavailability of any one to give physical help was comparatively higher than the females (7.5 percent).

**Table: 6 Persons Helping Physically Immobile Elderly-2004**

<i>Person helping the physically immobile elderly</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Widows</i>
Family member	84.0	83.8	84.5	84.6
Other than family member	7.2	5.6	8.3	7.9
No one	8.6	10.7	7.2	7.5

*Source: NSSO (2006)*

## **Summary and Discussions**

Though by percentage it is only 7.5, however the number of elderly is alarmingly high, which stand at 77 million in 2001. With increasing proportion of elderly the issues of economic dependency, security and negligence amongst the elderly is becoming an increasing area of concern. The analysis shows that around 78 percent of the economically dependent elderly were supported by their own children and 3 percent by the third generation (grand children). With regard to living arrangement around 5 percent of the elderly were living alone at the time of survey, and 12 percent were living with their spouse. Recently the Indian parliament passed a bill- "Maintenance and welfare of parents and senior citizens Act"- which indicates the necessity to evolve appropriate measures for protecting the elderly left behind to mend themselves.

Further analysis provides valuable insights about the working and living conditions of elderly in India. In the absence of any social security mechanism, the plight of elderly poor is really miserable. In the context of the increasing elderly population this is going to be a major challenge for the governments and other agencies in India.

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