

Socio-Economic Conditions of Elderly Population in the Puducherry Municipality: An Empirical Analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Old age is a universal phenomena and a challenge to everyone who reaches it. Elderly population is increasing in all countries of the world due to decline in fertility rate and increase in life expectancy. During 1990 almost half a billion people were over 60 years and by 2030 the number is forecasted to triple to 1.4 billion. This is mainly because of the growth of population in the developing countries. Population growth in India since Independence has been accompanied by an increase in the number as well as the proportion of elderly population. The proportion of population aged 60 years and more was 5.1 per cent of the total population of India in 1901, which rose to 5.4 per cent in 1951, 6.4 per cent in 1981 and 7.7 per cent in 2001. According to the UN projection for India, the proportion of elderly population aged 60 years and above will be 12.3 per cent of the total population of the country by the year 2025.

In traditional Indian culture, aged people are well respected but the situation is totally different in the present situation because of the disintegration of joint family system, migration, rapid industrialisation, urbanisation and deteriorating social values. Reasons are many and the problem is much aggravated in the present day economic order where only marketable factors can have better existence whether it is a commodity or a factor of production.

Indian society is in a transitional state and aged people face many problems in a transitional society. With a larger proportion of elderly population, health care must be better equipped to deal with the disorders and diseases of the senior citizens and traditional methods for their caring may need to be modified. The present generation in search of employment tend to move away from their parents causing many socio-economic problems for the aged. Therefore, measures should be taken by the society at large to make their senior citizens happy in their later years.

In this context, the present article analyses socio-economic conditions of elderly population in the Puducherry Municipality. The article is divided

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into four sections. Section I is the Introduction. Section II describes about the study area and the data, Section III analyses socio-economic conditions of elderly population in the Puducherry Municipality and Section IV summarises the result.

DATA AND STUDY AREA

Puducherry is one of the union territories of India. The Union Territory of Puducherry comprises of four coastal districts, viz. - Puducherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam. The area of Puducherry is scattered over three different states in the country. The Union Territory of Puducherry encompasses an area of only 480 sq km with Puducherry town and its villages covering 290 sq.km surrounded by the south Arcot District of Tamil Nadu, Karaikal town and its villages covering 161 sq.km surrounded by Tanjavur district of Tamil Nadu, Mahe and its villages covering nine sq km surrounded by Kerala and Yanam covering 20 sq.km within the East Godavari district in Andhra Pradesh.

According to Census 2001, population of Puducherry Union Territory was 973,829 of which 486,705 were males and 487,124 were females. Puducherry district with a total population of 735,004 is the biggest district followed by Karaikal (170,640), Mahe (36,823) and Yanam (31,362). Sex ratio in the Puducherry U.T. is found to be 1001 as against 933 in India in the 2001 Census. Total population of elderly in the Puducherry U.T. has almost tripled from 25318 in 1961 to 81016 in 2001. In terms of percentage of senior citizens in total population, it constituted 6.86 in 1961 and it rose to 8.32 percentages in 2001.

The present study used primary data collected from Puducherry Municipality which is in Puducherry district. Persons with more than 60 years of age have been selected randomly and the sample size is 100. Aged male and aged female have been given equal representation in the sample. The sample has been drawn from different places of Puducherry town and while collecting information much precaution was taken to interview them in privacy with a view to obtain their personal information on the subject matter.

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Selected demographic, economic and health variables have been analysed in the following section to analyse the socio-economic conditions of elderly population

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TABLE 1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Particulars	Male (n = 50)	Female (n = 50)	Total (n = 100)
Age			
60-65	15 (30%)	23 (46%)	38 (38%)
65-70	17 (34%)	13 (26%)	30 (30%)
70-75	9 (18%)	11 (22%)	20 (20%)
75 and above	9 (18%)	3 (6%)	12 (12%)
Marital status			
Currently married	36 (72%)	15 (30%)	51 (51%)
Widowed	14 (28%)	35 (70%)	49 (49%)
Education			
Illiterate	13 (26%)	24 (48%)	37 (37%)
Primary	10 (20%)	11 (22%)	21 (21%)
Secondary	20 (40%)	15 (30%)	35 (35%)
Intermediate & above	7 (14%)	—	7 (7%)
Type of family			
Joint	40 (80%)	41 (82%)	81 (81%)
Nuclear	10 (20%)	9 (18%)	19 (19%)

NOTE: Figures in the parenthesis are respective percentage to the group.

The sample consists of 50 male and 50 female aged people, out of it 38 per cent of them are in the 60 - 65 age group and 12 per cent of them have attained 75 years or more. Among the male sample 72 per cent and female sample 30 per cent have spouse. Illiterates constitute 37 per cent of the sample.

TABLE 2. ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF THE ELDERLY

Particulars	Male (n = 50)	Female (n = 50)	Total (n = 100)
Past Occupation			
Salaried	25 (50%)	8 (16%)	33 (33%)
Business	13 (26%)	7 (14%)	20 (20%)
Cultivators	6 (12%)	1 (2%)	7 (7%)
Labourers	5 (10%)	2 (4%)	7 (7%)
Not working	1 (2%)	32 (64%)	33 (33%)
Present Occupation			
Salaried	2 (4%)	2 (4%)	4 (4%)
Business	7 (14%)	4 (8%)	11 (11%)
Cultivators	5 (10%)	1 (2%)	6 (6%)
Labourers	3 (6%)	1 (2%)	4 (4%)
Not working	33 (66%)	42 (84%)	75 (75%)
Monthly Income			
No income	7 (14%)	14 (28%)	21 (21%)
Less than 1000	9 (18%)	19 (38%)	28 (28%)
1000-4999	13 (26%)	12 (24%)	25 (25%)
5000-9999	11 (22%)	5 (10%)	16 (16%)
10000 and more	10 (20%)	—	10 (10%)

NOTE: Figures in the parenthesis are respective percentage to the group.

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Majority of the sample (81%) is living with their children and grand children.

Among the sample 33 per cent did not work in their early years and another 33 per cent worked as salaried employees. Only 25 per cent of the sample is presently working. Percentage of working male (34%) is more than the percentage of working female (12%). Among the working people, majority of the male and female are involved in business. Among the sample, 21 per cent is reported that they don't have any income and they are financially fully dependent on others and the remaining 79 per cent are getting money from different sources like work and social security measures. The senior citizens who have only less than Rs.1000 per month as income constitute 28 per cent of the sample.

TABLE 3. HEALTH CONDITION OF THE ELDERLY

Particulars	Male (n = 50)	Female (n = 50)	Total (n = 100)
Health			
Poor	7 (14%)	8 (16%)	15 (15%)
Fair	20 (40%)	22 (44%)	42 (42%)
Good	23 (46%)	20 (40%)	43 (43%)
Cost bearer			
Self	33 (66%)	11 (22%)	44 (44%)
Spouse	1 (2%)	8 (16%)	9 (9%)
Children	16 (32%)	30 (60%)	46 (46%)
relatives	—	1 (2%)	1 (1%)
Visiting Doctor			
Monthly once	14 (28%)	12 (24%)	26 (26%)
When it deserve	36 (72%)	38 (76%)	74 (74%)
Hospital			
Private	30 (60%)	23 (46%)	53 (53%)
government	20 (40%)	27 (54%)	47 (47%)

NOTE: Figures in the parenthesis are respective percentage to the group.

Among the sample, 43 per cent assume that their health is good and another 42 per cent assume that their health is fair. For 46 per cent of the sample hospital expenditures are met by their children and for 44 per cent expenditure is met by themselves. Around one fourth of the sample visit doctor once in a month and others visit doctors whenever it is necessary or utmost urgent. Majority (53%) prefer to go for private hospital.

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TABLE 4. LIVING ARRANGEMENTS AND ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION

Particulars	Male (n = 50)	Female (n = 50)	Total (n = 100)
Have a separate room			
Yes	37 (74%)	29 (58%)	66 (66%)
No	13 (26%)	21 (42%)	34 (34%)
Living arrangements			
Living alone	—	6 (12%)	6 (6%)
With spouse	10 (20%)	4 (8%)	14 (14%)
Unmarried children	11 (22%)	11 (22%)	22 (22%)
Married children	29 (58%)	28 (56%)	57 (57%)
relatives	—	1 (2%)	1 (1%)
Activity participation			
Kitchen	12 (24%)	46 (92%)	58 (58%)
Household maintenance	46 (46%)	12 (24%)	34 (68%)
Child Care	18 (36%)	35 (70%)	53 (53%)
Social	25 (50%)	16 (32%)	41 (41%)
Shopping	25 (50%)	17 (34%)	42 (42%)
Others	33 (66%)	16 (32%)	49 (49%)

NOTE: Figures in the parenthesis are respective percentage to the group

Among the sample, 66 per cent have separate room in their house. More of a male elderly (74%) have this facility than female elderly (58%). Majority of the sample (57%) are living with their married children and only six per cent of the sample are living alone, surprisingly all are women.

Activities of daily living are important indicators of the functional status and well-being of older persons. The household activities are divided into six categories namely kitchen, household maintenance, child care, social, shopping and other activities. Majority of the sample reveals that they are actively involved in kitchen (58 %) activities and child care (53 %) activities. There is a gender difference in activity involvement. Female samples actively participate in kitchen (92 %) activities, childcare activities (70 %) and household maintenance (68 %) whereas male samples involve more in social (50 %) activities, shopping (50 %) and other activities (66 %) such as ironing and gardening.

Only 20 per cent of the sample involved in any kind of association

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TABLE 5. SOCIAL SUPPORT AND INTERACTIONS

Particulars	Male (n = 50)	Female (n = 50)	Total (n = 100)
Association Membership			
Yes	16 (32%)	4 (8%)	20 (20%)
No	34 (68%)	46 (92%)	80 (80%)
Help at Crisis			
Spouse	14 (28%)	3 (6%)	17 (17%)
Children	36 (72%)	44 (88%)	80 (80%)
Relatives	—	2 (4%)	2 (2%)
Others	—	1 (2%)	1 (1%)
Govt. Assistance			
Yes	10 (20%)	17 (34%)	27 (27%)
No	40 (80%)	33 (66%)	73 (73%)
Spent time with			
Spouse	9 (18%)	3 (6%)	12 (12%)
Children	5 (10%)	10 (20%)	15 (15%)
Grand children	16 (32%)	24 (48%)	40 (40%)
Relatives	1 (2%)	3 (6%)	4 (4%)
Others	19 (38%)	10 (20%)	29 (29%)

NOTE: Figures in the parenthesis are respective percentage to the group.

activities. Among the sample, 73 per cent respond that they are not getting any financial assistance from the government. Male samples (66%) have strong feeling than female samples (66%) in this regard. Majority (80%) of the sample responds that at the time of crisis they can depend on children. This response is more among female sample (88%) than male sample (72%). Among the sample, 40 per cent spend much of their time with grandchildren and 29 per cent of the sample spends time with friends. Most of the female sample (48%) prefer to spend time with grandchildren than any other group, whereas major portion of the male sample (38%) spend time with friends.

CONCLUSION

This study has used survey data to examine the socio-economic conditions of the elderly population in the Puducherry Municipality. Gender wise analysis has been made for most of the variables.

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One fourth of the sample is presently working and work participation rate among elderly male is almost three times higher than work participation rate among elderly female. Most popular category of work among aged is doing business. Around one fifth of the sample reported that they don't have any income and they are financially fully dependent on others. And elderly who don't have any income or have less than Rs.1000 per month as income comes around half of the sample.

Except 15 per cent of the sample, all others responded that their health condition is either fair or good. For 46 per cent of the sample, hospital expenditures are met by their children and for 44 per cent expenditure is met by themselves. One fifth of the sample visit doctor monthly and others visit doctor when it requires. Majority of them prefer to go for private hospitals for treatment. More of elderly males have separate room facility in their house than elderly female. Majority of the sample are living with their married children and only a few of them are living alone, surprisingly all of them are women.

Majority of the sample reveals that they are actively involved in kitchen activities and child care activities. There is a gender difference in activity involvement. Female samples actively participate in kitchen activities, childcare activities and household maintenance whereas male samples involve more in social activities, shopping and other activities such as ironing and gardening. Only one fifth of the elderly is involved in any kind of association activities.

Around one fourth of the sample is not getting any financial assistance from government. Majority (80%) of the sample responds that at the time of crisis they can depend on children. Elderly spend much of their time with grandchildren and friends.

Increasing longevity and declining fertility made elderly population in India to increase in terms of numbers as well as in proportion. This will pose a serious problem in the future in meeting the needs of the older citizens by the government social security system. Hence more income generating opportunities should be created for the old in an organised manner. It is recommended to provide various schemes to the present day adults in labour force so that they could save for their old age. Integrated programme with proper health education and nutrition should be created for the aged for prevention and treatment of diseases.

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