

Challenges of Elderlies in Growing India: 1.6 Years Reflective Study from Elderline 14567

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Abstract: This article explores the unprecedented growth of the elderly population in India and the multifaceted challenges they face in various aspects of their lives. Drawing upon data from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, it highlights the rapid increase in the elderly population compared to the general population, attributing it to improved healthcare, economic well-being, and lower fertility rates. The article also delves into the regional disparities in elderly population distribution across Indian states. It sheds light on the critical role of Elderline-14567, a helpline for senior citizens initiated by the Government of India in partnership with Tata Trusts, in providing essential support, information, and intervention for elderly individuals. Furthermore, the article examines the diverse challenges faced by the elderly, including financial insecurity, loneliness, elder abuse, and health issues. It discusses the inadequacies in accessing government schemes and programs, emphasizing the need for streamlined application processes and greater awareness among the elderly. Additionally, the article underscores the importance of addressing caregiving challenges, improving physical infrastructure, and enhancing emergency services tailored to the elderly's unique needs. It also highlights the risks associated with limited technological awareness among the elderly. In conclusion, the article calls for comprehensive policy initiatives to address the growing elderly populations well-being, encompassing financial support, employment opportunities, and protection against abuse and abandonment, while also stressing the significance of raising awareness and outreach efforts among the general population to fully realize the potential of existing legislation. The aging population in India represents a valuable resource that, with the right policies and support, can contribute significantly to the nation's enrichment.

Keywords: Aging, Elderly Population, India, Challenges, Elderline-14567, Elder abuse, Elder Care

1. Introduction

Aging is a natural process and every individual go through the same phase of life with their own opportunities and challenges. The challenges vary based on the economic conditions of the elderlies as well as geographical locations of the elderlies i.e., urban, or rural.

India's elderly population (aged 60 and above) is projected to touch 194 million in 2031 from 138 million in 2021, a 41 per cent increase over a decade, according to the National Statistical Office (NSO)'s Elderly in India 2021. With the longevity and decline fertility rates increases the older population.

Following are the few facts about the elderly spaces in the current scenario.

- The 2020 National Commission on Population report mentioned that India has almost 138 million elderlies, which comprising of 67 million males and 71 million females.
- The growth rate of the elderly population is higher than that of the general population. That result, the proportion of the elderly in the general population has been increasing. While the general population has grown by 18% in 2001-11 and 12.4 % in 2011-21, the elderly population has grown by 36 % each in the two decades.
- 'Old age dependency ratio' is defined as the number of elderly people per 100 persons between the ages of 15-59. This number grew from 10.9 per cent in 1961 to 14.2 per cent in 2011 and is projected to increase further as well: according to the National Commission on Population data.
- NSO's Sample Survey (NSS) data from 2017-2018 notes 70% of the elderly in India were dependent on others for

their daily living. The situation was worse for females, where only 10 to 11 % of females were economically independent in rural and urban areas respectively, compared the males in rural and urban areas i.e., 48%, 57%.

As the elder population is increasing, the challenges and the struggles among the elder group also increasing. Most common challenges are related to health, economic condition, social and emotional conditions such as isolation, loneliness, and crime against elder persons such as abandonment, and elder abuse etc. Though govt has added schemes and acts for the protection of senior citizens there are too false also in the process and standards. To protect the elder persons and support them, as per their need, the program Elderline-14567, a helpline for senior citizens was inaugurated by Government of India with the partnership with Tata Trusts in October 2021.

Elderly population growth in India:

There are multiple significant studies which reflects that, the elderly population is growing. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) has produced the report called "Elderly in India 2021." It has shown the Population Projections for India and States for 2011-2036. As per the report following are the important statement which has been reflected.

Population growth:

- Between 2011 and 2021, the overall population increased by 12.4%, compared to about 18% in the previous decade.
- The old population, on the other hand, has increased by 36% in each of the last two decades (2001-2011 and 2011-2021).

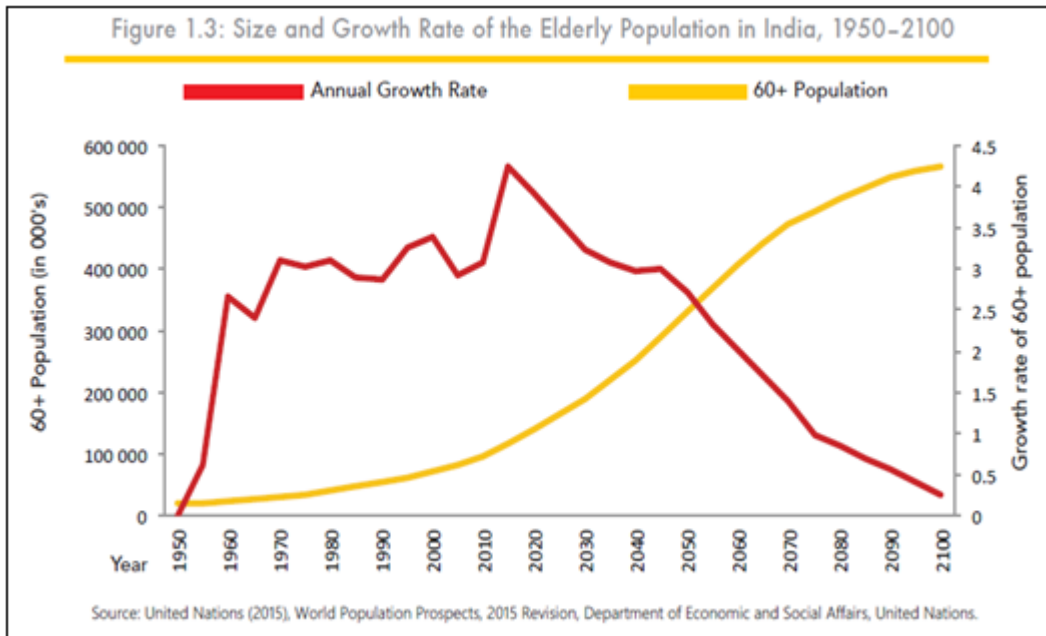
- In the two decades between 1961 and 1981, a high increase rate in the old population compared to the general population was also seen.
- Economic well-being, improved healthcare and medical facilities, and lower fertility rates have all contributed to the increase in the older population.

State Wise Elderly Population:

- Kerala has the highest proportion of senior persons (16.5 percent) in its population, according to data from 2021.

- It was followed by Tamil Nadu (13.6%), Himachal Pradesh (13.1%), Punjab (12.6%), and Andhra Pradesh (12.6%). (12.4 percent).
- Bihar has the lowest proportion of elderly people (7.7%), followed by Uttar Pradesh (8.1%), and Assam (8.2%).

Following Graph from world population prospects 2015, shows the growth trend of elder population between 1950 – 2100.



Elderline: The Helpline for Senior Citizens 14567

Elder Line is a National Helpline for Senior Citizens (NHSC) set up by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in collaboration with National Institute of Social Defence (NISD) and State governments and an agency at each State/Union Territory to implement it in 2021. Elder Line - 14567 is a toll-free number open 12 Hours a day (8:00 AM to 8:00 PM), that would provide free information, guidance, emotional support, and field intervention in cases of abuse & rescues to improve the quality of life of senior citizens. It works with a decentralized approach by setting up connect centres in each State / Union Territory through selected Implementing agencies while working in close coordination with State Governments and Ministry.

Presently Elderline is operational in 31 States/ UTs. Following are the major services provided through the helpline. It proves support related to Information, Guidance, Emotional Support, Field Intervention and Other. Between October 2020 to May 2023, the program has served more than 288728 unique elderlies. Total 1987134 calls have been received for supporting elderlies and 1698406 elderlies were served multiple times by the program.

Challenges faced by elderlies:

Issues related to senior citizens vary from person to person and are based on family, economic and social conditions. Some of them are mentioned below.

- Lack of financial support

- Lack of companionship / loneliness
- Elder abuse and abandonment
- Health issues
- Lack of awareness related to technology.
- Lack of awareness about the government schemes and programs
- Other

Lack of Financial support:

The elderly face a lack of financial inclusion. One hand, they are assumed by themselves and the society to be less productive and in other side, they retire from work as per the work policy. After retirement from a job, getting smooth transition for pension is also an important challenge, where elderly suffer a lot. The government has also introduced senior citizens pensions, where the amount varies from state to state. But many elderly people do not receive it because of structural issues in the system as well as due to unawareness of how to apply and process behind. Elderline has handled more than 1lakh cases to support elderly people to solve their elderly pension issues.

Lack of Companionship/ Loneliness:

Many senior citizens nowadays are suffering through loneliness and lack of companionship. It's a major concern right now after the age of 60. Isolation and loneliness can lead to depression and other mental health issues. Due to the migration of the younger generation, a lot of elderly stay alone and if they stay with their kids, they don't get proper attention due to multiple reasons leading to isolation and

emotional imbalance. Mental health is still a taboo in the Indian culture, which leads elderly not talking openly about their mental health. Between October 2020 to May 2023, Elderline received around 5000 calls related to emotional support for elderly. Some of the main reason behind these calls are loneliness, depression, strain relationship between the senior citizens and children, medical health, and fear to death.

Elder Abuse and Abandonment:

Elder abuse and abandonment are something elderly don't talk about. According to WHO, around 1 in 6 people, 60 years and older experienced some form of abuse in community settings during the past year. Also, WHO mentioned that elder abuse can happen in homes. 90% of all abusers are family members. Older people with dementia are at special risk. As many as 2 out of 3 people with dementia have been abused.

Elderline received many abuse and abandonment cases. Between October 2020 to May 2023, Elderline receive around 20000 calls on same. More than 3000 requests were raised to support the abandoned homeless elderly, in which around 1500 abandoned homeless elderly were rescued and given shelter to stay in the various old age homes. Among them 20% of the rescued elderly were reunited with their families.

Elder abuse and abandonment are a crucial issue which is trending in numbers now days. Following are the major reasons which has been found from the cases received at the Elderline are:

- Property issues in the families
- Financial issues
- Poor health condition of the elderly
- Poor relationship bonding with the family members

Health issues

Health is one of the important components of the aging. Besides physical illness elderly face more issues related to poor mental health which is linked to the loneliness, separation from the children, financial crises and fear related to the death. Between October 2020 to May 2023 the helpline has received more than 10000 calls related to the health, in which around 4000 calls are related to mental health and other 7000 calls are related to physical health. Some of the reasons includes:

- To take support for visiting to hospital
- Connecting to a doctor
- Understanding more about the diagnostic centre
- Taking suggestions towards depression and
- Taking support towards applying for a health card

Lack of awareness about the government schemes and programs:

Currently, both the central and state governments have implemented several schemes aimed at providing financial support to senior citizens for their sustenance, primarily in the form of pension programs. These initiatives include:

- Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojna
- Varishtha Pension Bima Yojana
- Varishtha Mediclaim Policy

- Atal Vayo Yojna
- National Policies for Elder Persons

However, a significant challenge exists in ensuring that many elderly individuals receive their old-age pensions in a timely manner. This challenge can be attributed to various factors, including:

- Cumbersome and time-consuming application processes
- A lack of support for pension application submissions and follow-up procedures
- Discrepancies in the pension application processes across different states, with some embracing digitalization while others maintain offline methods.
- Budget limitations that prevent new elderly individuals from enrolling in these schemes
- A lack of awareness among the elderly about how to access these pension programs.

India has enacted the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, which aims to provide elderly individuals with rights-based solutions. Nevertheless, a notable challenge persists, as elderly individuals are often required to travel to district officials for hearings under this act. Additionally, many seniors opt not to file complaints against their own children and grandchildren, fearing that doing so might lead to further complications within the family in the future.

Over the course of a 1.6-year study period, Elderline has fielded more than 100,000 calls from individuals seeking assistance and support in navigating these challenges and 5000 calls related to the maintenance filling support.

Other:

In contrast to the issues, a substantial number of elderly individuals also grapple with caregiving challenges within their households and in old-age homes due to their precarious financial and health conditions.

Another critical concern is the insufficient physical infrastructure. Most residences in India are not designed to be inclusive and accessible for the elderly, resulting in a heightened risk of accidents both indoors and outdoors for senior citizens.

Furthermore, there is a dearth of emergency services that are truly tailored to the needs of the elderly. Despite the government's introduction of emergency services, many of these are not elder-friendly. Moreover, when compared to the size of the Indian population, the ratio of facilities catering to the elderly is markedly inadequate, resulting in neglect of their needs.

A lack of awareness regarding technology and banking, particularly within middle-class and underprivileged families, places them at risk of cyberattacks and financial loss, further hindering their access to various government programs.

Over the course of 1.6 years, Elderline has received over 50,000 calls related to these pressing concerns. Also, elder line has received a more than 15000 calls to seek support

towards legal segment related to property, cheating, filling legal hairs etc.

2. Conclusion

India's elderly population is predicted to double by 2050. As this demographic shift unfolds, it is becoming increasingly imperative to address the larger challenges faced by the elderly in the country. To effectively support this segment of the population, India requires comprehensive policy initiatives that encompass various facets of their well-being. Elderly citizens require substantial and qualitative actions from the government, involving policy reforms, financial support, employment opportunities, and safeguards against abuse and abandonment. The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act of 2007 represents a step in the right direction, as it offers senior citizens monthly allowances and serves as a legal framework for their protection. However, the act's true potential can only be realized through increased awareness and outreach among the general population.

In anticipation of the impending demographic shift, India must work diligently to create policies that not only provide financial assistance but also address the broader needs and rights of its aging citizens. This includes measures to ensure their physical and emotional well-being, social inclusion, healthcare access, and protection against any form of exploitation or neglect. The elderly population represents a valuable resource of wisdom and experience and supporting them is not just a matter of compassion but also a means to enrich the nation.

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