
SOCIAL PROFILE OF THE AGED IN AN URBAN POPULATION

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ABSTRACT:

Research Problem: What is the socio-demographic profile of urban aged population in Aligarh city.

Objectives: i) To describe the socio-demographic profile of the aged population in an urban area.
ii) To describe the attitude of these people.

Design: Cross-sectional study.

Setting : Urban areas of Aligarh city.

Participants : 3951 persons aged 60 years and above

Study Variables: Socio-demographic characteristics, attitudes.

Statistical Analysis : By proportions.

Result: 15% of the total estimated elderly population covering all 10 sectors of Aligarh city was studied. The majority of the elderly (72.4%) belonged to 60-70 years age group. Most of them (77.2%) were illiterate, 61.6% belonged to lower socio-economic classes (IV & V), 78.1% lived in joint families. 39.6% of the aged felt that they were not being given due respect by family members. Nearly half of them had an indifferent or unhappy attitude towards life.

Conclusion: The socio-demographic characteristics of the aged are important and must be kept in mind for developing programs to assist them in living as respectful senior citizens.

Key Words: Aged, Social profile, Attitudes.

INTRODUCTION:

The rapid increase in the aged population is a global phenomenon. A majority of today's growth in the number of elderly is occurring in the developing countries. Old people find it difficult to adapt to the

rapid socio-cultural changes in these countries and there is a profound change in their activities and attitudes. India has a large number of elderly in the population and their number is likely to rise in the near future. Reorientation of health services is needed to provide health care to the expanding elderly population. The aged persons in India are faced with a number of socio-economic problems different from those of the general population. However, only a few comprehensive studies have been carried out on this subject. Thus, there is a great need to study the problems of the elderly. Keeping this in view, a base line study of the social profile of aged persons was carried out in Aligarh city.

MATERIAL AND METHOD:

For the purpose of this study, persons aged 60 years and above were regarded as aged. Aligarh city was divided into ten sectors, each comprised of a number of mohallas. The population of Aligarh city was 4,06,709 (census 1991). On an average, the population of elderly persons was 6.6% of the total population (census 1991). Thus, the estimated elderly population in the study area was 26,834. Fifteen per cent of this population i.e. 4,000 persons were included in the study by systematic random sampling covering all the 10 sectors. The study was carried out by door to door visit. The elderly person was interviewed in a friendly informal manner, in the presence of family members, friends or neighbours. Personal details including name, age, sex, address, marital status, religion and caste of each person was noted. Where there was difficulty in assessing the exact age, help was taken of family members, documents or memory of past events. The educational status of the elderly and total family income was noted. Social class was determined in accordance with Prasad's Modified Classification (1970) with price index correction of 1992-93. The type of family and occupation of the elderly persons was also recorded. The attitude of the aged person towards life was also assessed. The data obtained was entered on a pretested cyclostyled proforma and tabulated, analyzed and statistically evaluated.

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RESULT:

The estimated sample size was 4,000 of which 3,951 (98.8%) aged persons (1,872 males and 2,079 females) were actually studied.

Age and sex: The age of the study population ranged from 60 years to 98 years. The distribution of the aged persons by age group and sex is shown in Table - I. As can be seen, the majority of elderly (72.4%) belonged to 60-70 years age group, followed by 22.6% in 71-80 years age group and the least (5%) in 80+ age group. Thus, the majority of elderly population was 'young old' i.e. 60-70 years of age and only a small number belonged to the 'old,old' group, i.e., 80 years and above. There were 2,079 (52.6%) females and 1,872 (47.4%) males in the study population. The number of elderly females was more than males in all the age groups.

Religion: The majority of elderly population was Hindu, who made up 60.7% of the population, followed by Muslims (37.6%), Sikhs (1.1%) and Christians (0.4%).

Source of income: The total income of the elderly was derived from one or more than one source (Table - II). The main source of income was employment for 33.2% of the aged persons; help from family members in 50.7% and pension in 3.9% aged persons. 35.2% persons had other sources of income such as savings, property and help from relatives and friends. The main source of income for males was employment (30.0%) and for females, it was help from family members (37.6%). Majority of males were still earning and therefore, financially independent. Majority of the females were dependent on their family members.

Employment status: The employment status of elderly is shown in Table - III. The females who were not employed but were looking after their homes (i.e. doing house work) were classified separately as housewives. Thus, there were no unemployed women, and if employed persons and housewives are grouped together, it was found that 67.2% of the elderly were engaged in some occupation. As can be seen, 1,310 (33.2%) of the aged persons were employed. More males (63.3%) were employed as compared to females (6.0%) and thus had greater financial independence. This difference in employment status between males and females was statistically significant ($X^2 = 1,459$, d.f. = 1).

Nature of employment: The nature of employment of the aged persons is shown in Table-IV. Males were employed in a greater variety of jobs as compared to females. Largest number of elderly persons, i.e. 417 (31.8%) were employed as unskilled workers, followed by skilled workers (30.6%), businessmen (29.6%), professional (4.3%) and those having office/government jobs (2.8%).

Marital status: Marriage, being a social tradition in India, it was observed that almost all (99.2%) of the aged persons had married (Table - V). Out of these 3,920 elderly persons, the spouses of 2,316 (58.6%) were still alive. The spouses of 1,557 (39.4%) persons were dead and those of 47 (1.2%) were separated. Only 31 (0.8%) of the aged persons had not married. Looking at married males and females separately, it was found that 44.3% of the women were widows as compared to 34% men who were widowers.

Literacy status: Out of the 3,951 elderly persons, 3,052 (77.2%) were illiterate, and only 86 (22%) were graduates or having higher education (Table - VI). Illiteracy was higher in females (86.8%) as compared to males (66.7%) in the present study. This difference was statistically significant ($X^2 - 278.13$, d.f. = 4).

Social classification of aged persons: Using modified Prasad's Classification (1970), the study population was grouped in social classes I-V (Table - VII). Majority of the aged persons belonged to lower socio-economic status. Thus, 61.6% of them belonged to social class IV and V and only 16.2% to social classes I and II.

Type of family: Joint families were more common as compared to the unitary type. Out of the 3,951 elderly persons, 3,086(78.1%) were living in joint families, 802 (20.3%) in unitary families, while 63(1.6%) were living alone (Fig.I).

Attitude of family members towards the elderly: In the present study, 3,888 elderly persons were living in joint or unitary families. Of these, 2,347 (60.4%) felt that they were being given due respect, 961(24.7%) were indifferently treated and 580 (14.9%) were being neglected by the family members. More females (23.3%) were being neglected or indifferently treated than males (16.3%).

Attitude of elderly persons towards life: Out of the 3,951 aged persons, 1,981 (50.1%) felt happy, 1,790 (45.3%) felt indifferent and 180 (4.6%) felt unhappy towards life. Thus, almost half of the aged persons in the present study felt indifferent or unhappy. These conditions were found more in women (51.6%) than men (47.4%).

DISCUSSION:

In developed countries, the social problems of the aged have drawn considerable attention. With increasing life expectancy they are also emerging as problems in developing countries.

The majority of elderly population (72.4%) was 'young old' i.e. from 60-70 years of age and only a small number belonged to the 'old, old' group i.e. 80 years and above. The number of elderly females was more than males in all age groups, as also reported by Singh et al.¹ in Meerut and Chacko et al.² in South India. Chalke et al.³ in a British study also found a higher proportion of elderly females. However, the proportion of 'old, old' people was higher in their studies, compared to the present study. Purohit⁴ found a higher number of males than females in his study of elderly in Jaipur while an almost equal distribution was reported by Mitra et al.⁵ in Lucknow.

67.2% of the elderly were engaged in some occupation or the other as compared to 55.8% reported by Singh et al.¹. As regards the marital status, 44.3% of the women were widows, as compared to 34.0% men who were widowers. Similar findings were also reported by Purohit⁴ and Chacko et al.².

Seventy seven percent of the elderly persons were illiterate as compared to 88.4% in Lucknow⁵, 64.29% in Jaipur⁴, 90.37% in Naila⁶ and 80.2% in Meerut¹. More elderly females (86.8%) were illiterate than elderly men (66.7%) which is similar to the findings of others.^{1,4,5}

Majority of the elderly (78.1%) were living in joint families which is comparable with 81% and 63.8% reported by Singh et al.¹ and Garg et al.⁷ respectively. However, lower percentages of joint families as compared to unitary families have also been reported.^{4,5} 1.6% of them were living alone as compared to 2.67% reported by Purohit and Sharma⁶.

Out of the aged persons living in joint families,

24.7% were being indifferently treated and 14.9% were being neglected which is comparable to the findings of Mitra et al.⁵ in Lucknow where 31.5% were being indifferently treated or neglected by family members. Almost half of the aged persons (49.9%) felt indifferent or unhappy towards life. Comparable rates (41.4%) were reported by Purohit⁴ in Jaipur.

CONCLUSIONS:

The social problems of elderly are multifaceted and need a comprehensive approach. The policies adopted by the government for the health and welfare of the elderly population should be vigorously implemented at all levels. Future planning should take into account the demographic changes and the special needs of the elderly population. The traditional Asian attitudes of respect and care of the elderly, which are being eroded by the impact of urbanization, need to be preserved and promoted. Care must be taken to promote the concept of 'self-care' and create awareness among the elderly regarding facilities available to them.

Further research activities are also important. The main objective of the research should be maintenance of effective functioning and development of the elderly as a useful resource of the community. Journey to this goal should be low cost and based on preventive approach applied throughout lifetime. However, currently the need is to create a database of the problems faced by the elderly in India and then plan the preventive strategies.

TABLE - I

DISTRIBUTION OF STUDY POPULATION BY AGE AND SEX

| Age | Male | | Female | | Total | |
|----------------|------|------|--------|------|-------|-------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| 60-70 | 1348 | 34.1 | 1514 | 38.3 | 2862 | 72.4 |
| 71-80 | 436 | 11.0 | 457 | 2.8 | 893 | 22.6 |
| >80 | 88 | 2.2 | 108 | 2.8 | 196 | 5.0 |
| All age groups | 1872 | 47.4 | 2079 | 52.6 | 3951 | 100.0 |

TABLE - II

DISTRIBUTION OF STUDY POPULATION BY SOURCE OF INCOME

| Source of income | Male | | Female | | Total | |
|-------------------------|------|------|--------|------|-------|------|
| | No. | %. | No. | %. | No. | % |
| From present employment | 1185 | 30.0 | 125 | 3.2 | 1310 | 33.2 |
| From family members | 518 | 13.1 | 1486 | 37.6 | 2004 | 50.7 |
| Pension | 141 | 3.6 | 13 | 0.3 | 154 | 3.9 |
| Others | 712 | 18.0 | 679 | 17.2 | 1391 | 35.2 |

TABLE - III

DISTRIBUTION OF STUDY POPULATION BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS.

| Employment status | Male | | Female | | Total | |
|-------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| | No. | %. | No. | %. | No. | % |
| Employed | 1185 | 63.3 | 125 | 6.0 | 1310 | 33.2 |
| Unemployed | 687 | 36.7 | -- | -- | 1298 | 32.8 |
| Housewife | -- | -- | 1954 | 94.0 | 1343 | 34.0 |
| Total | 1872 | 100.0 | 2079 | 100.0 | 3951 | 100.0 |

($X^2 = 1459$, $d.f = 1$, $p < 0.001$)

TABLE - IV

DISTRIBUTION OF STUDY POPULATION BY NATURE OF EMPLOYMENT

| Nature of employment | Male | | Female | | Total | |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|------------|-------------|--------------|
| | No. | %. | No. | %. | No. | % |
| Professional | 42 | 3.2 | 14 | 1.1 | 56 | 4.3 |
| Office worker | 37 | 2.8 | -- | -- | 37 | 2.8 |
| Skilled worker | 354 | 27.0 | 47 | 3.6 | 401 | 30.6 |
| Unskilled worker | 371 | 28.3 | 46 | 3.5 | 417 | 31.8 |
| Business | 370 | 28.2 | 18 | 1.4 | 388 | 29.6 |
| Others | 11 | 0.9 | -- | -- | 11 | 0.9 |
| Total | 1185 | 90.4 | 125 | 9.6 | 1310 | 100.0 |

$n = 1310$

TABLE - V

DISTRIBUTION OF STUDY POPULATION BY MARITAL STATUS

| Marital status | Male | | Female | | Total | |
|---------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| | No. | %. | No. | %. | No. | % |
| i) Married | 1853 | 99.0 | 2067 | 99.4 | 3920 | 99.2 |
| a) Spouse living | 1195 | 63.8 | 1121 | 53.9 | 2316 | 58.6 |
| b) Spouse dead | 636 | 34.0 | 921 | 44.3 | 1557 | 39.4 |
| c) Spouse separated | 22 | 1.2 | 25 | 1.2 | 47 | 1.2 |
| ii) Not married | 19 | 1.0 | 12 | 0.6 | 31 | 0.8 |
| Total | 1872 | 100.0 | 2079 | 100.0 | 3951 | 100.0 |

TABLE - VI

DISTRIBUTION OF STUDY POPULATION BY LITERACY STATUS

| Literacy status | Male | | Female | | Total | |
|--------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| | No. | %. | No. | %. | No. | % |
| Illiterate | 1248 | 66.7 | 1804 | 86.8 | 3052 | 77.2 |
| Prim. School | 368 | 19.6 | 235 | 11.3 | 603 | 15.3 |
| High School | 97 | 5.2 | 21 | 1.0 | 118 | 3.0 |
| Intermediate | 79 | 4.2 | 13 | 0.6 | 92 | 2.3 |
| Graduate and above | 80 | 4.3 | 6 | 0.3 | 86 | 2.2 |
| Total | 1872 | 100.0 | 2079 | 100.0 | 3951 | 100.0 |

($X^2 = 278.13$, $d.f = 4$, $p < 0.001$)

TABLE - VII

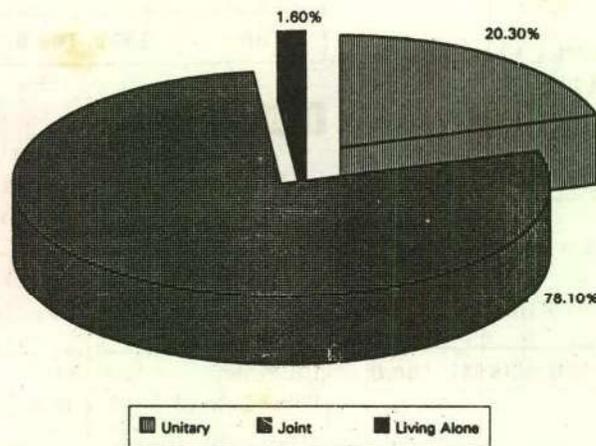
DISTRIBUTION OF STUDY POPULATION BY SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

| Social Class | Male | | Female | | Total | |
|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| | No. | %. | No. | %. | No. | % |
| I | 95 | 5.1 | 87 | 4.2 | 182 | 4.6 |
| II | 253 | 13.5 | 205 | 9.8 | 458 | 11.6 |
| III | 412 | 22.0 | 465 | 22.4 | 877 | 22.2 |
| IV | 325 | 17.4 | 449 | 21.6 | 774 | 19.6 |
| V | 787 | 42.0 | 873 | 42.0 | 1660 | 42.0 |
| Total | 1872 | 100.0 | 2079 | 100.0 | 3951 | 100.0 |

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Fig - I Distribution of Study Population by Type of Family



A POEM BY SIR RONALD ROSS ON THE HISTORIC OCCASION OF THE DISCOVERY OF LIFE CYCLE OF MALARIAL PARASITE

THIS DAY DESIGNING GOD
 HATH PUT INTO MY HAND
 A WONDERFUL THING, AND GOD
 BE PRAISED. AT HIS COMMAND
 I HAVE FOUND THY SECRET DEEDS
 OH- MILLION MURDERING DEATHS
 I KNOW THIS LITTLE THING
 A MILLION MEN WILL SAVE
 OH DEATH WHERE IS THY STING?
 THE VICTORY OF GRAVE.

SIR RONALD ROSS
 (1857 - 1932)
 20TH AUGUST, 1897

THIS DAY RELENTING GOD
 HATH PLACED WITHIN MY HAND
 A WONDEROUS THING, AND GOD
 BE PRAISED, AT HIS COMMAND
 SEEKING HIS SECRET DEEDS
 WITH TEARS AND TOILING BREATH
 I FIND THY CUNNING SEEDS
 O MILLION - MURDERING DEATH
 I KNOW THAT THIS LITTLE THING
 A MYRIAD MEN WILL SAVE
 OH DEATH WHERE IS THY STING?
 THY VICTORY OH GRAVE?

SIR RONALD ROSS
 22ND AUGUST, 1897