

OLDER ADULTS CARE IN DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE: SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

Abstract

In response to the falling death rates and advancement in the health sector, every country is undergoing a drastic demographic change. In 2022, the World Health Organization revealed that globally, the proportion of the population who are above 60 years will be double from 12 percent in 2015 to 22 percent by 2050. Furthermore, it is also expected that by 2050, 80 percent of elderly people will reside in low and middle-income nations. In such a large proportion of the aging population, the need for a supportive social environment would be a trending demand especially, in low-and middle-income and developing nations like India. The objective of this chapter is to divulge the evolving socio-economic challenges among older adults. By examining the economic implications of changing demographics and technological advancements, this chapter provides insights into the policies needed to ensure the socioeconomic well-being of the elderly population. By reviewing and synthesizing existing information, this chapter offers a comprehensive overview of the socioeconomic trends affecting the elderly population, providing a foundation for policy discussions and further research in social science. Therefore, it opens a vista for researchers to contribute their support in digging out various barriers that are being faced by older adults and their solutions.

Keywords: Older Adults, Demographic change, Socio-economic challenges, Futuristic trends

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I. INTRODUCTION

Older people are invaluable to society. They have a plethora of knowledge and experience in real-world situations. In the context of older adults, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2021 to 2030 as the Decade of Healthy Ageing which presents a special chance to step efforts to combat social isolation and loneliness worldwide. During the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, globally, the loneliness among older adults due to less social connections increased tremendously. As a result, the need for informal care provision came into the picture (personal or instrumental care) which has a direct impact on their loneliness abatement (Rosenberg, 2023). Social connections help people feel less stressed, more confident, and more capable of getting what they need from others, all of which have a good effect on their personal wellness (Rosenberg, 2023). According to the World Health Organization report, 20 to 34 percent of older people in China, Europe, Latin America, and the United States of America are lonely. Loneliness and social isolation are detrimental. They reduce the lifespan of older individuals and lower their quality of life, mental and physical health (World Health Organization, 2021). In addition to this, life transition and disruptive life incidents such as the death of a spouse or friend, migration of children, etc., could be other major reasons for their loneliness and well-being.

In a similar stance, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) was adopted in 2002, to focus on important elderly issues such as their development, health, and well-being and the promotion of a supportive environment. Social and physical settings can have an impact on health directly or indirectly by limiting or rewarding choices, opportunities, and healthy behaviours. A balanced diet, regular exercise, and quitting smoking are all ways to minimize the chance of developing non-communicable illnesses, improve physical and mental health, and put off the need for treatment (World Health Organization, 2022). When people live in situations that are both physically and socially supportive, they can still achieve their goals despite having capacity limitations. Public buildings, accessible public transportation, and places that are easy for wandering about are examples of supportive surroundings. When developing a public health response to aging, it is essential to include both policies that may lessen human and environmental losses related to older age as well as those that may assist recovery, adaptability, and psychological growth (World Health Organization, 2022). In addition to this, the increasing cases of elderly abuse created another major cause of concern for everyone in society. They easily become victims of violence and criminal activities. The research work of Goviland Gupta (2016) revealed that in India, 50 percent of older adults have experienced abuse personally while 83 percent of older adults reported that abuse is prevalent in society. 72 percent of the abused elderly people belong to the age group 60 to 69 years, 25 percent of them belong to the age group 70 to 79 and only 3 percent of them are of 80 years or above. Gender-wise females (53 percent) reported a higher percentage of abuse cases in comparison to male elders (48 percent). Even it has been seen in most cases that they are subjected to abuse at the hands of their offspring. Therefore, a bold effort is needed to tackle this alarming problem. It is also observed nowadays that young generations are dedicating most of their time to building career and job prospects giving less time to their older adults. Because of their academic and professional aspirations, younger generations are becoming more individualistic and materialistic, which causes older people to become less attached to their younger family members. Thus, aging is a major demographic issue and we need to urgently think about their social, financial, and psychological need.

II. POPULATION AGING AND AGING

Biologically, the accumulation of many forms of cellular and molecular damage over time leads to aging (World Health Organization, 2022). As a result, physical and mental capacities gradually deteriorate, sickness risk increases, and eventually fatality occurs. These changes don't occur predictable way and they only loosely connect to a person's age in years. In addition to biological changes, growing older is typically associated with other life transitions, such as retirement, moving to a better house, and losing friends and companions, (World Health Organization, 2022).

The increasing number of older people in the population is known as population aging (He, Goodkind, & Kowal, 2016). Falling fertility, mortality, and increasing life expectancy at older ages are the contributing factors in the increasing aging population (United Nations Population Fund, 2017). It is estimated that the number of "oldest-old" individuals, or those who are 80 years or older, is increasing more quickly than the entire population of people in their later years worldwide. Statistically, the oldest-old would number 434 million in 2050, more than tripling from 2015, when there were 125 million people over the age of 80 (He, Goodkind, & Kowal, 2016). Further, country wise Asia will be one that will constitute a large proportion of the aging population and it is projected that by 2050 almost two-thirds of the world's older adults will inhabit Asia (Wan, Daniel, & Paul, 2016). Figure 1 reveals the continuous percentage increase in the aging population globally. Overall it is increasing from 8.5 percent to 16.7 percent which is double.

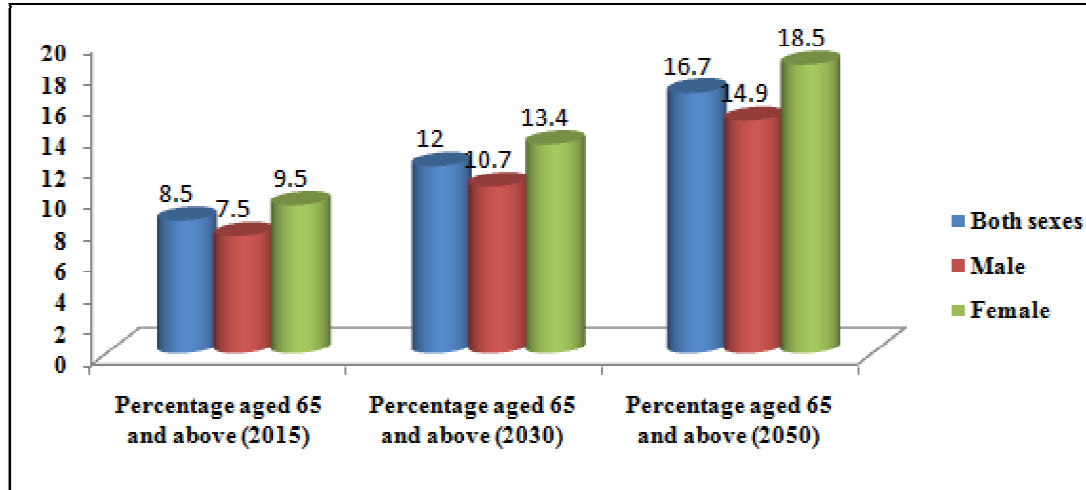


Figure 1:Percentage of Aging Population in Different Timelines

Source: An Aging Population, 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, 2013; International Data Base

Gender-wise female shows a significant rise from 9.5 percent to 18.5 percent which is also double. The same proportion could be seen in older males where it is 7.5 percent in 2015 and predicted to reach 10.5 percent in 2030 and 14.9 percent in 2050. Looking at this tremendous rise in the aging population, their emerging demand could not be ignored. Thus, it opens up research opportunities for researchers and academicians in the elderly care

framework. The next section discusses the challenges that act as barriers in front of older adults.

III. SOCIOECONOMIC CHALLENGES

The remarkable rise in the aging population may have economic and social implications. The burden on health systems caused by population aging, particularly by the rise in the number of people, drives up demand for care, services, and technologies for the prevention and treatment of non-communicable illnesses and chronic disorders of aging. By anticipating future demographic changes and proactive policy implementation to accommodate an aging population, the following challenges are opened up before those countries that are coping with the rise in the aging population.

- 1. Economic Security:** The International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC), 2013, defined economic security as a person's or a household's capacity to sustainably meet their basic needs. Food, shelter, and clothing are all considered necessities, but so are the resources required to support one's way of life as well as the price of healthcare and education. The majority of elderly people in India experience financial trouble as they age since the bulk of them are unable to support themselves. If they have any savings at all, it is not enough to cover their daily needs, especially their medical costs. Because of their weakness, their family members and relatives frequently take advantage of them. In accordance with Agewell's assessment, about 65 percent of elderly people needed daily upkeep from others. The majority of senior males were financially independent, compared to less than 20 percent of elderly women. Further research revealed that among older males who were economically dependent, 6 to 7 percent received financial support from their spouses, followed by about 85 percent from their children, 2 percent from grandchildren, and 6 percent from others. Less than 20 percent of elderly women relied on their spouses, more than 70 percent on their children, 3 percent on their grandchildren, and 6 percent or more on other people, including those who were not related to them. Furthermore, according to the Help Age India (2022) report, out of 2200 samples of older adults nationwide, 70 percent of them are unemployed and rely on their families or pensions for day-to-day expenses. The situation was worse for older ladies, with just approximately 18.4 percent of them being financially independent and the rest being wholly or partially dependent on others. Due to their costs outpacing their income or savings, 57 percent of people report feeling financially uncomfortable. 45 percent of people cited inadequate pensions as the cause of their financial insecurity, while 38 percent cited a lack of employment possibilities.
- 2. Health Security:** The metabolic and cellular processes deteriorate with age. The development of free or affordable healthcare facilities for the elderly is necessary. Out of 2200 older adult samples collected around the country, 87 percent of the elderly said they had access to health services, but only 52 percent could use them whereas 67 percent of seniors lack health insurance. Furthermore, a primary survey reveals that the top two system improvement proposals from senior people and their carers are better health insurance and better neighborhood medical facilities. The majority of carers also recommended creating a free medical center for the elderly. According to the National Health Profile Report (2017), health insurance coverage is available only to 27 percent or 350 million of the Indian population. The elderly place a high value on their health.

According to the first Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI) released by the Union Ministry of Family and Health Welfare on January 6, 2020, by 2030, the elderly will bear nearly half of the total disease burden in India, necessitating multiple visits to medical facilities and hospitalization. The elderly are more exposed to non-communicable diseases and chronic diseases. Due to inadequate pension and health insurance coverage, as well as aging medical facilities, this would have major consequences (Help Age, 2022).

- 3. Housing Security:** Providing affordable and safe housing is another major demand in the milieu of an increasingly aging population. The severe living conditions are continuously lowering living standards and harming everyone's health. Therefore, a place where someone may be cared for is needed. One such location that offers elderly people all the pleasures is community living or retired homes. People can take pleasure in the last moments of their lives in this cozy setting. Community living offers a wide range of facilities and assisted living. For independent living, community living offers all of their demands at all times as well as provides company of the same age group. Older adults can live comfortably and with the knowledge that they will always be taken care of, which includes medical care, assisted services, recreation spaces, emergency services, walking space, etc. In this respect, Seth et al., (2022), revealed from their research that nowadays older adults are looking for affordable and secure community living which may promote safe and secure living. The findings also revealed that older adults give preference to those communities living that are located in small towns and surrounded by greenery. This shows that affordable community living is the need of the hour and its demand will spike tremendously. Due to the disintegration of the traditional joint family system, older adults are getting less time from their informal caregivers. Many women caregivers are stepping out in pursuance of their academic and professional careers. Hence, older adults are left with no one who can provide them with personal and instrumental care. Therefore, there is a need for living arrangements where older adults can live happily with the assisting facilities.
- 4. Caregiving and Social Environment:** Caregiving is one of the important aspects for older adults in the setting of drastic demographic change. Care for older adults is provided by informal (unpaid) and formal (paid) caregivers. Family caregivers or informal caregivers often juggle other family and work responsibilities and live remotely from the care recipient. Therefore, to assist them in taking care of their elderly family members and themselves, informal carers also require more assistance, training, resources, and equipment. Professionally, personnel shortages and quality issues seem to be widespread, necessitating the development of fresh approaches to assist recruit, train, and develop. Supportive social environments play a crucial role in distancing early aging (World Health Organization, 2022). The older person may be assisted by such kind of infrastructure that promotes convenience in walking, accessible public transportation, and safe public buildings in which lift facilities, and indoor and outdoor pathways may be created for them. With the degeneration of the traditional joint family system, older adults are often left alone at home and they are often considered burdensome for family members. Therefore, there is a need to foster bonding between generations in which media could play a positive role in removing the tag of burdensome for older persons. In addition to this, safety and security are other important aspects in enhancing the quality of life of all older persons.

IV. CONCLUSION

In India, it is projected that the percentage of the population who are above 60 years old will double from 9 percent in 2015 to 19 percent by 2050. After reviewing, the challenges, there is a need to give serious consideration to the well-being of older adults with special consideration to their socio-economic status like financial and health security, shelter, and emotional needs. Population aging is a global issue and their emerging needs should be addressed as soon as possible for the well-being and welfare of the aging population. This further becomes the potential scope in social sciences where researchers can reveal many hidden opportunities in the field of gerontology. They can provide solutions on the qualitative aspects of elderly care like their dignity, independence, social participation, and empowerment. Human beings are social animals, prefer to stay in groups, and desire to create social connections. Many research findings reveal a positive relationship between social isolation and psychological degeneration. It is revealed through the study that community living is the best solution for abating their social isolation and loneliness. However, there could be many probable solutions in which such problems could be resolved. Thus, with the tremendous growth of the aging population, the issue of elderly care could be a prospective research opportunity in social sciences.

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