

Trends, Composition and Status of Elderly Women Workers in India

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Abstract

Ageing is a life process which is constituted biologically and socially. The study has assessed the status of aged women workers in India by analysing their demographic and socioeconomic circumstances and working status. The study is based on secondary data collected from the census of India (1971-2011), and data has been represented by percentage analysis. The study's findings reveal that older women (60 and above) are growing faster, and their inclusion in the workforce has also been gradually increased than before. It is noticeable that in the younger elderly age group (60-69), women mostly work as main workers, meaning they are engaged in full-time, regular employment. With increasing age, their participation in work diminishes in the main sector and increases in the marginal sector, which refers to part-time, temporary, or informal employment. Providing proper schemes, their allotment, support, care, and empathy for government and family can ensure the mainstreaming and up-grading of the overall quality of life of elderly women in India.

Keywords: ageing, census data, elderly women, main worker, workforce

Introduction

Grayness is a universal fact. It is inevitable for all living bodies. Thus, humans are also part of this reality. India has the second-largest elderly population in the world (Rajan, 2010). According to WHO (2002), "Population ageing refers to a decline in the proportion of children and young people and an increase in the proportion of people age 60 and

over" (p. 6). Elderly or old age consists of ages nearing or surpassing the average lifespan of human beings (Govt. of India, 2011). The term 'active ageing', introduced by the WHO (2002), refers to "the process of optimising opportunities for health, participation and security to enhance the quality of life as people age" (p. 12). The US Department of Labour (2015) defined older people

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as those 55 years and above. Older women refer to women aged 50 and older (WHO, 2007). The working population can be broadly divided into three age groups, i.e. 05-14, 15-59 and 60 and above (Govt. of India, 2011; Selvaraj et al., 2011). The people in the 60 and above age group are considered elderly in India. The elderly population is defined differently in different countries. Even different organisations/agencies within a country define the elderly differently. For example, Indian Railways considers 60 years of age for giving concession fair to male senior citizens, while Air India considers 65 years of age for the same purpose. In 2010, 530 million persons, 7.7 per cent of the world's population, were recorded as old (Gupta, 2014). This number is estimated to increase to 2.0 billion by 2050 (Dhar, 2014; Gupta, 2014; WHO, 2002).

This article provides an overview of the status of elderly women in India in terms of their nature of work. Most of the elderly women work to cater for their economic needs, and the majority of them work in unorganised sectors with low pay and poor job security because they find no options to select a job according to their choices due to low skills and poor educational qualifications (Alam et al., 2012). Most women forced to enter the labour market work as part-time workers with low wages and no retirement benefits, and its effects are found when they become older (Meyer, 1990). Women are responsible for child care, doing

house chores, take care of other family members, so they have less opportunity to enter into work to earn money as full-time workers. Women are economically more dependent than men because of the low contribution of women to the national income compared to their male counterparts (Bhagat & Unisa, 2006). Low participation of women in the national economy is responsible for gender discrimination in old age (Agewell Research and Advocatory Centre, 2015). Due to gender inequalities, women face some difficulties throughout their lives. i.e. limited access to education, lack of employment opportunities, poor nutritional, healthcare and other welfare services, limited access to resources, lack of social support and legal protection, etc. (Serrao, 2015). Economic position, available support systems, and marital and health status determine the status of older women in their families (Kumari, 2001). Taking care of the elderly is an Indian tradition, but with the capitalist mode of economic development and changing societal norms and nuclear family structure, the tradition is diminishing with time, and older people are not receiving the attention they used to get before (Bharati & Singh, 2013). The nuclear family system and the economic and social transformation negatively affected the minds of the young generations and obstructed them from coming in contact with older generations (Amriti, 2018).

The study of the elderly population is a major concern today

in developing countries due to the impetuous growth of their population compared to developed countries (Gupta, 2013). The elderly population in India is rapidly increasing due to the declining fertility rate and increasing longevity (Reddy, 2016; WHO, 2002) because of the development of medical facilities. In India, the share of the aged population was only 6.0 per cent in 1971, which increased to 8.6 per cent in 2011, and the share of the elderly population is predicted to rise further to 19.5 per cent (319 million) by 2050. The share of elderly females in the female population is higher than the male population. The term “Feminization of Aging” means that with increasing age, the proportion of elderly women has increased compared to elderly men (Gupta, 2013). The share of elderly males was 8.2 per cent, and 9.0 per cent was for elderly females. In the working age group (15-59), the male population (51.43 per cent) is greater than the female population (48.57 per cent). In contrast, the elderly (60 and above) age group shows a higher percentage of the female population (50.82 per cent) than the male (49.18 per cent) in the same year. Among the elderly (60 and above) female population, 23.38 per cent were working, and 76.62 per cent were non-working in 2011. According to 2011 census data, the adult elderly age group (60-69) has constituted nearly 29.83 per cent of female workers, and the next age groups (70-79 and 80 and above) have respectively constituted nearly 24.89 per cent and 26.21 per cent of female

workers to total workers. Including the pre-retirement phase, the older adult population (age 45 and above) will rise to over 40.0 per cent of the total population of India or 655 million people by 2050. The proportion of people aged 75 and above is expected to increase by more than thrice between 2011 and 2050. The dramatic and widespread nature of these current and ongoing demographic shifts indicates that the population ageing challenges that India is encountering are both inevitable and exist on an enormous scale. These demographic changes present complex health, social, and economic challenges to which this heterogeneous country must rapidly adapt, address these issues effectively, and formulate plans for the future.

Objectives

1. To identify the demographic structure and trend of the elderly in India
2. To find out the working status of elderly women
3. To assess the status of elderly women in India in terms of their nature of work

Research questions

Some research questions have been framed to analyse the data properly, which are mentioned below.

1. What is the trend of older female workers over time?
2. How does the working status of elderly women change from the younger elderly age group (60-69) to the later elderly age group (80 and above)?

3. Why is the involvement of elderly women in the non-agricultural sector showing a growing trend after the census year 1991?
4. Why is the status of elderly women influenced by their working and non-working conditions?

Materials and Methods

This paper is mainly analytical. The present study is designed to analyse the workforce structure of elderly women (above 60) in India using the census data solely. The Census of India is an important and authentic demographic and socio-economic data source in different sequential decades. In this study, data from four decades (1971-2011) have been considered for analysis. This article may also help to understand the status of elderly women in or out of the workforce. To minimise the data complexity, rural-urban dimensions in the Indian context are combined.

Results

After the age of 60, it is expected that people will live 18 to 20 years more (Rajan, 2010), and it is also a fact that women live five years longer than men. As the life expectancy of women is higher than men (Gupta, 2013; Reddy, 2016; WHO, 2007), women in old age generally outnumber men. The population of older women is increasing remarkably in India and will continue to increase in the near future (Gupta, 2013). So, there is a need to give special attention to elderly women in India. In the last 15 years, the population of the age group 15-59 has grown by nearly 42.34 per cent, while

the elderly population has increased by about 55 per cent (Chaudhury & Kumar, 2017).

Census data show that the elderly (60 and above) female population recorded more than elderly males in the 2001 and 2011 censuses. However, their presence in the workforce was very low throughout the decade. However, the number of older female workers shows a rising trend over time (Table 1).

It is ascertained that females represented 48 to more than 50 per cent of the population of 60 and above age groups during 1971-2011, and the growth rate of elderly females (35.83 per cent) is more than that of females of all ages (18.36 per cent) in 2001-2011. The decadal growth rate of the elderly female population rose (33.61 per cent) during 1971-81, but during 1981-91 it fell (29.20 per cent) and again in the next two decades, it registered an increasing trend, i.e. 42.23 per cent in 1991-2001 and 35.83 per cent in 2001-2011.

From a religious perspective (Table 2), male and female Hindu populations have recorded a higher percentage than other religious communities in the elderly age cohorts (i.e. 60-69, 70-79 and 80 and over). Among all the religious communities of elderly groups, the higher percentage of older females is noticed in the 60-69 age groups (61.51 per cent for Hindu, 62.77 per cent for Muslim, 58.13 per cent for Christian and 61.14 per cent for others), the share is decreased with increasing age. For the age group 80 and above, the values were 11.26 per

cent for Hindu, 11.53 per cent for Muslim, 13.01 per cent for Christian and 12.12 per cent for others in 2011.

Table 1

Elderly Population and Workers in India

Census year	Population (60 and above age group)		Workers (60 and above age group)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1971	16874325 (51.60)	15825406 (48.40)	12450628 (88.23)	1661542 (11.77)
1981	22022866 (51.02)	21144523 (48.98)	14331577 (82.84)	2967836 (17.16)
*1991	29363725 (51.80)	27317915 (48.20)	17772586 (80.12)	4409629 (19.88)
2001	37768327 (49.29)	38853994 (50.71)	22755919 (73.68)	8130234 (26.32)
2011	51071872 (49.18)	52777168 (50.82)	30855552 (71.44)	12337790 (28.56)

Source: Census of India (1971-2011)

* Data excluding Jammu and Kashmir, when the 1991 Census was not conducted due to disturbed conditions.

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.

Table 2

India: Religious Composition of Elderly Female Population, 2011

Age group	Elderly female population (%)							
	Hindu		Muslim		Christian		Others	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
60-69	82.19	82.43	11.16	10.66	2.49	2.58	4.16	4.33
70-79	82.83	82.86	10.21	9.91	2.57	2.91	4.39	4.32
80 and above	81.61	81.60	10.73	10.58	2.70	3.13	4.96	4.69

Source: Census of India (2011), Population Enumeration Data (Final Population)

With the working age group (15-59), both the males and females of the non-schedule group (non-SC and ST) have recorded a higher percentage than schedule groups [Schedule Caste (SC) and Schedule Tribe (ST)] in the elderly (60 and above) age group also. In the 2011 census data, the percentages of elderly males are 78.28, 15.07 and 6.65 per cent, and elderly females are 77.59, 15.21, and 7.20 per cent for

non-SC/ST, SC and ST, respectively. So, the striking fact is that elderly females in the scheduled group are higher than males, and for ST, the share of the female population is higher than males in the working age group (15-59), i.e. 8.02 per cent male and 8.44 per cent female.

According to the last census (2011), in India, the overall sex ratio is 943, favouring males. However, the

sex ratio of the 60 and above age group is 1033, favouring women. The elderly older age group (80 and above) has recorded an 1137 sex ratio, which is highly auspicious towards women. The sex ratio of the older age groups 60-69, 70-79 and 80 and above have increased by more than 90, 80 and 200 points from 1991-2011, but the age group 60-69 shows a decline of 26 points during 2001-2011.

In 2011, the literacy rate among elderly females (28.47 per cent) was less than half that among elderly males (59.10 per cent). So, males are more literate than females in the old age groups. Among the elderly, the 60-69 age group has recorded the highest percentage of female literate (30.25 per cent) and the lowest percentage of female illiterate (69.75 per cent), while the opposite substance was viewed in the 70-79 age group (25.39 per cent for female literate and 74.61 per cent for female illiterate) in 2011. In the case of elderly males, the highest percentage of literate (61.54 per cent) is found in the 60-69 age groups, and the lowest (53.51 per cent) is found in the 80 and above age groups in the same year.

In the age-wise distribution of elderly women, most females are married. Widows and a very insignificant percentage of divorced/separated are found in all three elderly age groups, namely young elderly (60-69), middle elderly (70-79), and later elderly (80 and above)

through the decades (1991-2011). Though the values fluctuate, the general but striking fact is that later elderly (80 and above) widow females have risen trend (Table 3). This might be due to the age difference between spouses during the marriage.

According to the Indian census, there are two major categories of work, i.e. main and marginal categories. In India, the number of older female workers is higher in the main sector than the marginal. Still, their involvement in the marginal sector is more than that of males, and it is also explicit for the overall population and all caste groups and religious groups. Among all elderly age groups, i.e. 60-69, 70-79 and 80 and above, the main female worker has a declining trend, whereas a marginal female worker recorded an increasing trend from 1991 to 2011 (Table 4).

In religious groups of elderly female workers, Christians in the main worker (67.70 and 67.40 per cent in 2001 and 2011, respectively) and Muslims in the marginal worker category (45.80 per cent and 44.29 per cent in 2001 and 2011, respectively) possess the maximum percentage. Though higher involvement of Christian females is found, Hindu and Muslim females' involvement as the main workers increased during 2001-11 (for Hindu 57.06 and 59.80 per cent and Muslims 54.20 and 55.71 per cent in 2001 and 2011 respectively).

Table 3
Marital Status of Elderly Females in India

Year	Age groups	Marital status (%)			
		Never married	Married	Widow	Divorced/ separated
*1991	60-69	0.72	52.54	46.30	0.43
	70-79	0.86	32.69	66.09	0.36
	80 and above	6.40	23.42	69.78	0.33
2001	60-69	1.13	56.21	42.12	0.54
	70-79	1.58	35.54	62.45	0.43
	80 and above	3.51	25.09	71.01	0.39
2011	60-69	43.62	50.46	5.36	0.56
	70-79	1.58	37.12	60.82	0.48
	80 and above	4.50	26.10	69.01	0.39

Data Source: Based on Census of India (1991-2011) * Data excluding Jammu and Kashmir

Table 4
Major Categories of Elderly Female Workers in India

Categories	Year	Age groups		
		60-69	70-79	80 & above
Main female worker (%)	*1991	69.93	68.19	68.63
	2001	57.37	56.59	58.83
	2011	59.90	59.15	59.12
Marginal female worker (%)	*1991	30.07	31.81	31.37
	2001	42.63	43.41	41.17
	2011	40.10	40.85	40.88

Data Source: Based on Census of India (1991-2011) * Data excluding Jammu and Kashmir

Table 5
Work Participation Rate of Elderly Males and Females in India

Year	Age group					
	60-69		70-79		80 and above	
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
*1991	71.37	20.82	46.97	9.24	31.68	5.71
2001	69.73	26.30	49.30	13.32	34.63	8.57
2011	69.80	28.91	48.96	16.05	34.90	10.91

Data Source: Based on Census of India (1991- 2011) * Data excluding Jammu and Kashmir

Among caste groups of older female workers, the highest percentage of main workers (58.47 per cent) is observed for non-SC/ST and the marginal category. ST females achieved the maximum percentage (46.11 per cent) in 2001. In 2011, non-SC/ST and ST females also registered the maximum percentage (i.e. 61.39 per cent SC and 46.16 per cent ST) for main and marginal sectors, respectively, in the elderly age group.

Hill (2002) has mentioned that "although a larger proportion of men than women are employed at old ages, the labour force participation among older men has fallen while that of older women has risen" (p. 39). Despite the low work participation rate (WPR) of elderly women compared to elderly men in India from 1991 to 2011 (Table 5), women in all the older age groups marked an accelerating work participation rate at that time, reflecting Hill's views. The maximum WPR of older women is noticed in the age group 60-69 over the decades (1991-2011) and decreased with increasing age, and it may occur because of poor physical capabilities. The work participation gap between males and females is 37.04 per cent for the elderly and 40.99 per cent for the working age group.

The work participation rate of elderly females was recorded as the highest for ST in 2001 (37.27 per cent) and 2011 (41.58 per cent),

though all the caste groups have shown an accelerating work participation rate of older women from 2001 to 2011. Among religious groups, FWPR of the old age group has recorded the highest percentage for Hindus; these were 21.92 per cent in 2001 and 24.59 per cent in 2011. All the religious groups have shown an increasing rate of work participation of aged women over the decade (2001-2011).

Both main and marginal categories are classified into four subcategories (table 6), i.e. cultivators (C), agricultural labourers (AL), household industry (HHI) workers and other workers (OW). In the main categories, elderly women mainly worked as agricultural labourers and cultivators, but their participation increased in another worker category from 1991-2011. In the marginal sector, representations of elderly women as agricultural labourers, household industry workers and other workers have gradually increased from 1991 to 2011.

Elderly people are involved more in the agricultural sector than the non-agricultural sectors because this sector does not require a higher level of skilled workers (Bakshi & Pathak, 2016). Census data from 2011 shows that 73.63 per cent of elderly women work in the agricultural sector, which is greater than that of elderly men (66.84 per cent).

Table 6
Categories of Female Workers Among Elderly Age Groups in India

Year	Age group	Categories of main female worker (%)				Categories of marginal female worker (%)			
		C	AL	HHI	OW	C	AL	HHI	OW
*1991	60-69	39.89	44.94	3.13	12.04	54.36	38.91	2.06	4.67
	70-79	42.77	40.92	3.24	13.07	55.39	38.02	1.99	4.60
	80 & above	41.51	38.32	3.41	16.76	53.13	39.52	2.05	5.30
2001	60-69	42.84	31.43	5.09	20.64	33.97	48.61	5.28	12.14
	70-79	42.88	28.19	5.68	23.25	34.27	46.43	5.72	13.58
	80 & above	39.36	26.40	6.54	27.70	29.74	47.31	7.22	15.73
2011	60-69	32.79	39.67	4.61	22.93	24.51	52.55	5.42	17.52
	70-79	35.25	36.48	4.75	23.52	26.30	48.47	5.76	19.47
	80 & above	33.05	31.45	5.42	30.08	23.74	44.74	6.73	24.79

Data Source: Based on Census of India (1991– 2011) * Data excluding Jammu and Kashmir

On the contrary, the involvement of elderly women in the non-agricultural sector is less (26.37 per cent) than that of elderly men (33.16 per cent). This is because the non-agricultural sector, particularly the service sector, requires skilled and educated workers, but in India, older women are low-skilled and less educated than older men. However, from 1991 to 2011, it was noticed that women workers in all elderly age cohorts had found a declining trend for the agricultural sector and a growing trend for the non-agricultural sectors. This is because more physical strength is needed to work as an agricultural worker than another worker. After 80, the health condition of both men and women starts deteriorating, so they want to choose those types of work where less physical effort is demanded.

Discussion

Various factors determine the working and non-working status of elderly women. At the same time, the status of women in family and society is influenced by their working and non-working conditions. Work participation of elderly females is very low (23.38 per cent). Both economic and non-economic factors, such as scarcity of economic resources, earnings, health, education, and marital status, substantially impact older women's work participation (Herz, 1988; Hill, 2002). Hill (2002) has opined that "personal characteristics, family situation and previous labour force attachment, as well as the need for income, may affect the labour force participation of older women" (p. 40). The low participation in work might be attributed to different

factors. Firstly, it is difficult for women to get work in old age due to illness and disability, less productivity, more absent tendencies and lack of training experiences (Ellis & Goldberg, 1995). Secondly, it is stated that 'older workers are less productive than younger workers' (Hollenshead, 1982, p. 143; TUC women's conference report, 2013). Thirdly, in the digital India arena, technological knowledge is very important to get better jobs because modern technologies are applied in most work. Due to a lack of modern technological knowledge, older women mostly work as part-time workers with low wages. Fourthly, old women employed in government sectors benefited from the pension facilities. So, they can quit their jobs after retirement (55 to 65 age group) but are employed in the informal sector and have no pension facilities to continue their work after 60. Fifthly, even women from low-income families continue to work after 60 but have higher family incomes recess from work. Sixthly, the mobility of older women with their children from rural to urban or from one place to another is one of the causes of their little involvement in the workforce or more dependence on others. Seventhly, they must waive work for household responsibilities, i.e. caring for husbands, children, and grandchildren at home. Sometimes, older women cannot participate in the workforce because of disability. Some chronic diseases like heart

disease and stroke, breast cancer, cervical cancer, osteoporosis and osteoarthritis affect many women later in life (WHO, 2007).

On the other hand, women's engagement in work at an older age is due to financial insecurity, negligence of the family, and very limited knowledge and awareness of their legal rights (Choudhuri, 2018). Older women are considered an 'economic burden' (Asharaf, 2005) on a family when she has no spouse and cannot engage in economically productive activities. Aged women's rights and security are disregarded in those families where they are financially dependent on their children. They bear the negligence of the family members only because they have no assets or income source. Sometimes, older people, particularly older women, cannot utilise their ancestral property due to a lack of knowledge, and ultimately, they lose their property. Older women alone are highly vulnerable to poverty and social isolation (WHO, 2002) has to participate in work.

Ellis and Goldberg (1995) also mentioned that many elderly people working in the informal sector are low-skilled or unskilled workers due to their poor socioeconomic condition. With increasing age, the proportion of women full-time workers has diminished while the proportion of women part-time and self-employed workers has increased (Hill, 2002; Selvaraj et al., 2011).

Similarly, the nature of the work of older women in India reveals a very alarming feature. Though the workers of young and old age (60–69) are the main workers with increasing age, the marginalisation of elderly females is increasing.

The other important thing is that educated elderly workers tend to work in the service sector more than in the agricultural and manufacturing sectors (Alam & Mitra, 2012). “People with limited education have low employment rates in old age, but people with college and advanced degrees tend to remain in the workforce longer”. (Burtless, 2013, p. 21).

From the result, it is found that elderly women's work participation is increasing. Among three groups of elderly women, the 80 and above age group showed more workers than the 70-79 age group in 2011. As India is a patriarchal society, here, the male is the bread earner, and women are mostly dependent on their spouse; so many women are spouseless after 80, and there are so many families in our country where children do not want to take care of their older mother. Thus, women have to work in their old age unwillingly to overcome the negligence of their family members. In high elderly age (80 and above), women mostly work as marginal workers because, in this stage, women cannot give their full effort in work, so they are employed as part-time workers. In contrast, in the

younger elderly age group (60-69), there are more women workers than in other age groups. It also indicates the work-shifting tendency of older women from one age group to another. Another fact is that older women employed in the primary sector are abandoned from any social security benefits (Asharaf, 2005). After 60, women face age discrimination and wage discrimination in the labour market due to poor skill levels than their male fellows (Scottish Commission's report, 2015).

Conclusion

In India, the dependency ratio of elderly males was 13.60 and elderly females were 14.88 per cent in 2011, but in 2001, it was 12.45 and 13.78 per cent, respectively. So, the dependency ratio is increasing in India. In this situation, formulating policies toward older people in general and older women, in particular, is necessary to improve their way of living. Policies regarding financial support, social security, and health improvement in old age might be revived to provide a better quality of life for older people both at home and outside the home. They should be aware of the government schemes and programs and the proper allotment of the schemes. At present, economic independence and education are necessary for increasing the status of older women in their families and society. Furthermore, family support and

empathy can improve women's living and working statuses. Future research must focus on the perception of older women workers in different parts of the country, which will be more effective for understanding their structure and status and, thereby, policy formulation and implementation.

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