

After Age 60 in India

A Glimpse through Census and NSSO

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A clear understanding of the position and condition of elderly will help the planning, policy and programme makers to provide for the needs of the elders, so that they can lead a healthy and dignified life. This paper is an attempt in this direction. The datasets used are Indian decennial Census, and NSSO dataset (60th Round, 2004) which have collected information on the condition and problems of the aged in India.

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INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that at the global level the number of elderly (age 60+) would double from 322 million in 2000 to 705 million in 2025 (UNFPA, 2002). This brisk increase in the elderly population has created enormous economic and social challenges and concerns for many nations. Of recent, ageing concerns are viewed in the developmental and humanitarian contexts. Healthy elders are a resource to their families, communities, countries and economies (WHO, 2002). An ageing society has its economic, social, political, cultural, spiritual and other impacts on all spheres of societal structure and function (Sidorenko, 1999).

The United Nations had initiated the 'society for all ages' and described it as the one that sees older persons as both agents and beneficiaries of development. This concept implies mainstreaming the elderly population, reducing poverty and providing opportunities for consultation and participation for all (UNFPA, 2002). Numerous countries across the world have adopted it as the national theme for the observance of the International Year of Older Persons; India is one amongst them (Sidorenko, 1999). Further, the need to improve the quality of life of the elderly population has been stressed by WHO (Voigtlander, 1999; WHO, 2002).

Elderly in general are expected to face almost the same kind of vulnerability during the later phase of their life irrespective of their sex. But, with respect to the settings they live in their challenges are often different. Where rigid gender role expectations exist and social

custom and family law discriminates against women, the elderly women have had to face different challenges especially due to their illiteracy, economic dependency and restrictions on their mobility (Kinsella and Gist, 1998). Gender discrimination in the earlier phase of life restricts empowerment resources for a girl child. Restricting her mobility often creates a magnitude of illiterate unskilled women who depend fully on their spouses economically (Kinsella and Gist, 1998). Female survival advantage over men in the later part of life, creates more health and socioeconomic problems for elderly women than men, especially among the age group 80+ in most of the nations. Women with their predominant role as care giver consequently suffer a burden of physical and psychological ill-health, lost employment and social opportunities, and pension rights (Harwood, 2003).

Living arrangements have direct as well as indirect impact on one's physical and emotional health (Gupta and Sankar, 2003). In the later phase of life, marital union is often viewed on the care provision aspect. Widowhood often creates a lot of socioeconomic and psychological problems in personal and familial support mechanism, living arrangement, financial dependency and personal relationships. Majority of older women cope with such vulnerability without a negative impact on their health (Bonita, 1996). Cultural practices such as marrying a much younger bride often leave lesser number of widowers and larger number of widows in that society (Rajan, 2006). Globally the number of widows is increasing (Kinsella and Gist, 1998). Women's increasing longevity and lack of physical resources leads to psychological distress and mental illness. It is highlighted that in many regions ageing has to be seen with a focus on women and their needs so that they can lead an active healthy life (WHO, 2002; UNFPA, 2002).

Old age is not a disease but is often treated as a disease. Old age is associated with disease as it makes the body weak, frail and susceptible to disease. Diseases often disrupt one's role and discourage the aged from starting any activity. Disability is strongly associated with age. Increasing age, educational level, affiliation to social group (lower social strata), rural/urban residence and economic status of the household may affect the ability to control illness and the ability to seek treatment and care (Gupta and Sankar, 2003).

Economic vulnerability is compounded by physical and mental vulnerability, making the elderly one of the most important targets for welfare programmes (Gupta and Sankar, 2003). A better understanding of the ageing profile in a setting could enable governmental welfare programmes and health care providers to focus on them. This study is an effort to highlight the profile of elderly in different socioeconomic settings and in different states so that welfare provisions could be directed towards them, which in turn could further enhance the elderly to lead a healthy and dignified life.

Indian Scenario

India has been in the process of ageing and is moving towards it at a faster pace. The mortality rate started declining since 1920 and the birth rate started decreasing since 1970. The proportion of elderly persons has risen from 5.63 per cent in 1961 to 6.58 in 1991, 7.7 in 2001 (Census, 2001) and is expected to be 9.87 in 2021 (Rajan, Mishra and Sarma, 1999). Further, increasing longevity and the return migration of elderly too contributes to the increasing proportion of elderly (Zachariah, Mathew and Rajan, I., 1999). Even though the proportion of elderly is not very noticeable, they are high in magnitude because of their large population base.

In absolute numbers, India had 24.7 million elderly persons in 1961, which has more than doubled to 56.7 million in 1991 and to 76.6 million in 2001; it is expected to reach 113.5 million by 2016 according to Indian Government's estimate (Government of India, 2005) and 134 million by 2021 (Rajan, Mishra and Sarma, 1999). Currently in India the advancing medical technology and healthcare provision has trickled down to almost everyone's reach. It is therefore expected that the elderly will live longer than what was expected earlier. The life expectancy at age 60 has almost doubled from 1901 to 2001; 9.5 years to 16 years for men and 10.2 to 18.1 years for women respectively (Government of India, 2005).

Bhagat and Unisa (2006) have used census 2001 data set and stated that the adult population contributes more to economic dependency than do old people. Substantially more elderly males were ill compared to elderly women, especially in terms of the chronic diseases (Chanana and Talwar, 1987).

Earlier in Indian society, elders were considered an asset to impart wisdom, knowledge, advice, and care to the family; they received high social recognition and were involved in making most of the family decisions. But this scenario has been changing in recent times mainly due to the declining fertility and mortality rates, and increasing migration, urbanisation, modernisation, and globalisation. Additionally, some of the elders with their own ancient mindset and attitude, and unwillingness to adapt to the modern situations have created hurdles for their own quality of life. The swiftly increasing elderly population has a profound impact on the economy and society (Gulati and Rajan, 1991; Visaria, 2001). Provision of care for the elderly is becoming an important concern for the Government in the near future. Many elders are in a vulnerable condition and have to look for some governmental or societal care which is very limited and not available in many areas.

Study Objectives, Data Sources and Methodology

Keeping the above in mind, the purpose of the paper is to analyse the situation of the elderly (60+) in India. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. Analyse the ageing pattern and trend in India.

2. Study the spatial disparity among these elders in various regions of India.
3. Analyse the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the elderly.
4. Explore the health profile of the elderly in India.

It is not apt to use census and survey to study a trend. But to obtain the first objective, data sets of the decennial Census of India and National Sample Survey Organisations (NSSO) were used. The National Sample Survey (NSS), 60th Round conducted during 2004 is used to explore the remaining objectives. This recent NSSO survey is focused on 'Morbidity and Health Care' with a separate special section focused on the problems of the aged. This data set provides ample information to study the problem of the elderly. This survey covered all the regions of India, with the exception of some interior areas of Nagaland, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Leh (Ladakh) and Kargil districts of Jammu and Kashmir. This survey considered those who were age 60 and above as the elderly and collected information on demographic characteristics, dependency ratio, conditions of the aged in respect of their economic dependency, number of dependents, living arrangements, persons supporting the aged, and physical immobility. This information has provided an excellent opportunity to explore the stated objectives.

Findings

1. Ageing Trend in India

Studying the proportion of elderly in any population highlights the exact ageing situation of a country. The proportion of elderly is steadily increasing according to the decennial censuses and it is shown in Table 1. The proportion of elderly who were 5.6 per cent of the total population in 1961 has increased to 7.7 per cent in 2001. In comparison to the proportion of elderly in the urban areas, the proportion of elderly in the

TABLE 1: Growth of Elderly Population (60+) in India (Census 1951–2001)

<i>Census Years</i>	<i>Proportion of Elderly to Total Population (in per cent)</i>		
	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Combined</i>
1961	5.8	4.7	5.6
1971	6.2	5.0	6.0
1981	6.5	5.1	6.2
1991	7.0	5.4	6.6
2001	8.3	6.5	7.7
NSS 2004	7.3	6.3	6.9

Source: Indian Census

rural areas to the total population in India has been higher all through these decades. According to 2001 census, the share of elderly in rural areas is 8.3 per cent and in urban areas 6.5 per cent. Though in proportion it is not very obvious, the increasing magnitude of these elders is very alarming.

Table 2 shows the swiftly increasing magnitude of elders in India over the decades since 1951. The magnitude of elders is leaping steadily; more than double from 25 million in 1961 to 57 million in 1991. The recent 2001 census figure shows 76.6 million elders in India. According to the 1951 census the gender gap was favourable to women; 9.9 million elderly women to 9.7 million elderly men. Between 1971 and 1991, census figures revealed a wider gender gap, favouring elderly men; 16.9 million elderly men to 15.8 million elderly women in 1971 and 29.4 million elderly men to 27.3 million elderly women in 1991. The latest 2001 Census points towards what could be emerging as a reversible turn in the earlier observed trend. The share of elderly women is a little higher than their male counterparts; 38.9 million women to 37.8 million men among the elderly. According to NSSO 2004 there are 66.4 million elders and they are almost equally distributed between the genders.

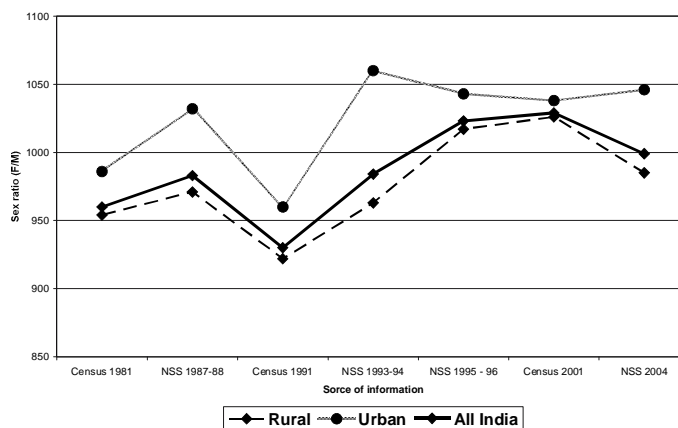
TABLE 2: Growth of Elderly Population (60+) in India (Census 1951 – 2001)

<i>Census Years</i>	<i>Magnitude of Elderly Population (in million)</i>		
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Both (M+F)</i>
1951	9.7	9.9	19.6
1961	12.4	12.4	24.7
1971	16.9	15.8	32.7
1981	22.0	21.1	43.2
1991	29.4	27.3	56.7
2001	37.8	38.9	76.6
NSS 2004	33.2	33.2	66.4

Source: Indian Census

Sex Ratio: The census and NSS data show different trends. According to 1981 the sex ratio (number of females per 1000 males) was 960, and it dropped to 930 during 1991 and increased to 1029 during 2001. Whereas, NSS estimates show an increasing trend between 1988 and 1996, that is, 983 in 1988 to 1023 in 1996. In 2004 the sex ratio dropped again to 999. Figure 1 shows the sex ratio according to decennial Censuses and NSSO surveys among the elderly in India over the period 1981 to 2004. According to both the Census and NSS estimates, the sex ratio has been increasing except during Census 1991 and 2004. The sex ratio in urban areas is much higher than in rural areas.

FIGURE 1: The Changing Pattern of Sex-ratio among Elderly



2. Spatial Distribution of Elderly in India

According to this NSSO 60th Round, it is estimated that there are 66.4 million elderly persons in India. Table 3 shows the percentage distribution of elderly by their place of residence, gender and age group. Majority of the elderly (75.7%) reside in the rural areas. The gender gap is observed differently in rural and urban types of residence. The proportion of elderly men is high in rural India whereas the proportion of elderly women is high in urban areas. The proportion of elders in different age groups is decreasing as the age increases. For example, there are sixty-seven per cent of the elders in the age group 60–70. Thereafter steep differences are observed. Elders in the age group 70–74 are 18.6 per cent and age group 75–80 is 7.5 per cent. Longevity in the urban areas is much higher than rural areas. The proportion of elderly in the age group 75+ is higher in urban areas than rural areas; 18.7 per cent and 15.3 per cent respectively.

TABLE 3: Percentage Distribution of the Elderly by their Sex and Type of Residence

Age Group	Rural			Urban			All India
	Male	Female	Both (M+F)	Male	Female	Both (M+F)	
60–64	36.6	36.8	36.7	34.8	34.8	34.8	36.2
65–69	28.3	30.0	29.2	27.8	29.2	28.5	29.0
70–74	18.8	18.8	18.8	18.6	17.6	18.1	18.6
75–79	7.4	6.8	7.1	9.3	8.4	8.9	7.5
80+	8.8	7.6	8.2	9.5	10.1	9.8	8.6
All 60+	50.4	49.6	75.7	48.9	51.1	24.3	100

Source: NSS, 2004

There are lesser women than men among the elderly in India according to decennial censuses and surveys. This survey highlights that ageing among women is increasing and is seen in the increasing proportion of women than men in the 70–79 years age group. The proportion of women in this age group is higher, that is, by 1.9 per cent points in urban areas and 1.4 per cent points in rural areas. Whereas in the 80+ age group, men are higher than women; 1.8 per cent points more men in rural areas and 1.3 per cent points more men in urban areas.

Not only have these differences been observed in rural and urban type of settings but also a wide spatial disparity has been observed in the estimated figures between states. As every state is of a different size and population, the proportion of the elderly population would be a good measure to compare the ageing situation. The proportion of elders in every state is explained in Table 4.

The proportion of elders to its total population is 11.2 per cent in Kerala and it is the highest in the country. The states where proportion is higher than 8 per cent are Goa, Pondicherry, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Orissa. The states (and union territories) where ageing is slow are Chandigarh, Nagaland, Assam, Meghalaya, Daman and Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Andaman and Nicobar, and Delhi. In the urban areas of all south, central, west and north states (except Jammu and Kashmir), the proportion of women elders to the total women population is higher. Ageing is very high among women in rural Kerala (12.3 per cent) and very low among women in Daman and Diu and Nagaland (1.9 per cent in rural areas and 0.7 per cent in urban areas). Among the men in rural Daman and Diu, less than one per cent (0.6%) is estimated to be elderly men.

TABLE 4: Proportion of the Elderly to the Total Population in Different Regions of India

State	Rural			Urban			All India	Estimated Sex Ratio
	Male	Female	Both (M+F)	Male	Female	Both (M+F)		
North								
Delhi	3.7	3.5	3.6	4.0	4.9	4.4	4.3	961
Haryana	7.2	8.4	7.8	5.1	7.7	6.3	7.4	1045
Himachal Pradesh	9.2	9.5	9.4	5.0	5.2	5.1	9.0	1064
Jammu & Kashmir	7.3	5.4	6.4	6.0	5.0	5.5	6.2	713
Punjab	8.5	8.8	8.6	6.2	6.7	6.4	7.9	942
Rajasthan	5.9	6.7	6.3	5.6	6.1	5.8	6.2	1057

State	Rural			Urban			All India	Estimated Sex Ratio
	Male	Female	Both (M+F)	Male	Female	Both (M+F)		
Central								
Madhya Pradesh	6.3	6.8	6.5	5.4	6.4	5.9	6.4	1020
Uttar Pradesh	6.4	6.7	6.6	5.1	6.0	5.6	6.3	981
Uttaranchal	8.0	7.3	7.7	6.1	8.8	7.4	7.6	892
Chhattisgarh	5.3	7.7	6.5	4.3	5.7	5.0	6.3	1417
East								
Bihar	5.9	5.2	5.5	6.2	5.5	5.9	5.6	802
Orissa	9.0	8.0	8.5	7.3	6.1	6.8	8.3	894
West Bengal	6.2	6.4	6.3	9.0	9.5	9.2	7.0	997
Jharkhand	6.3	4.8	5.6	6.8	6.9	6.8	5.8	738
Northeast								
Arunachal Pradesh	5.9	5.4	5.7	1.9	1.5	1.7	5.2	851
Assam	5.3	4.3	4.8	5.4	5.0	5.2	4.9	712
Manipur	5.4	3.9	4.7	6.9	6.3	6.6	5.2	777
Meghalaya	4.8	4.7	4.8	3.3	3.2	3.2	4.6	939
Mizoram	6.0	4.1	5.1	6.0	4.2	5.1	5.1	672
Nagaland	5.2	1.9	3.6	5.3	0.7	3.2	3.4	264
Sikkim	5.9	5.7	5.8	3.5	2.6	3.1	5.5	921
Tripura	6.7	5.5	6.1	6.1	6.5	6.3	6.2	768
West								
Goa	9.1	10.9	10.0	8.1	9.4	8.7	9.6	1185
Gujarat	6.7	6.8	6.8	5.4	6.9	6.1	6.6	1030
Maharashtra	8.3	8.8	8.6	6.5	7.6	7.0	7.9	1050
South								
Andhra Pradesh	7.3	7.7	7.5	5.3	6.4	5.8	7.0	1090
Karnataka	7.1	6.6	6.9	5.8	6.1	5.9	6.6	954
Kerala	10.6	12.3	11.5	10.3	10.9	10.6	11.2	1258
Tamil Nadu	8.7	8.5	8.6	7.3	8.5	7.9	8.4	1049

State	Rural			Urban			All India	Estimated Sex Ratio
	Male	Female	Both (M+F)	Male	Female	Both (M+F)		
All Other UTs*								
Chandigarh	1.4	2.2	1.7	5.6	5.1	5.4	4.9	756
Daman & Diu	0.6	4.0	1.8	4.8	8.9	6.7	3.1	2071
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	6.7	3.5	5.1	2.3	3.3	2.7	4.9	512
Lakshdweep	6.1	7.3	6.7	5.8	7.3	6.6	6.6	1267
Pondicherry	9.0	9.8	9.4	6.8	12.0	9.3	9.3	1361
Andaman & Nicobar	6.2	4.3	5.3	3.3	3.1	3.2	4.7	617

Source: NSS, 2004.

3. Socioeconomic Profile

Religious/Caste/Tribe Affiliation

The proportion of elders to the total population in their respective sex and type of residence is given in Table 5. A person's religious affiliation and ageing will not be considered for any possible end product, but involvement in faith based organisations often provides curative and psychosocial advocacy among elders.

TABLE 5: Distribution of the Religious/Caste/Tribe Affiliation of the Elderly by their Sex and Type of Residence

Type of Residence	Rural			Urban			All India
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Religious Affiliation							
Hinduism	85.8	85.6	85.7	80	79.9	80	84.3
Islam	8.3	8.4	8.3	12.2	12.1	12.1	9.3
Christianity	2.3	2.6	2.5	3.2	3.8	3.5	2.7
Sikhism	2.4	2.2	2.3	2.4	1.9	2.2	2.3
Others	1.1	1.3	1.2	2.1	2.3	2.2	1.5
Caste/Tribe							
Scheduled Tribe	8.2	8.0	8.1	2.0	1.6	1.8	6.6
Scheduled Caste	19.5	18.8	19.2	11.6	12.5	12.1	17.4
Other Backward Class (OBC)	42	42.3	42.1	31.8	33.4	32.6	39.8
Others	30.3	30.9	30.6	54.6	52.4	53.5	36.2
Total per cent	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: NSS, 2004.

Ageing is very high among the Zoroastrian and Jain population. Among the Islamic population the proportion of elders is only 5.2 per cent which is less than the national estimate (not shown separately in the table). A higher proportion of elders of Islamic, Christian and other religious faiths are found in urban areas than in rural areas. Among Christians, the proportion of elders is high among women than men in both rural and urban areas. Elders among the Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes are higher in rural areas than urban areas.

Marital Status

Table 6 shows the marital status of the elders. Nearly 60 per cent of the elders were married and nearly 39 per cent of them were widowed at the time of this survey. Unmarried elders are relatively higher in urban areas. Between genders, the proportion of married men is almost double than women among the elderly. Nearly 60 per cent of the elderly women are widows in both rural and urban areas. The proportion of divorced/separated men are high in rural than in urban areas.

TABLE 6: Marital Status of the Elderly in India

<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Rural</i>			<i>Urban</i>			<i>All India</i>
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Both (M+F)</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Both (M+F)</i>	
Unmarried	1.6	0.6	1.1	1.7	1.2	1.5	1.2
Currently Married	78.6	39.1	59.0	82.3	38.6	60.0	59.2
Widow/Widower	19.4	59.8	39.5	15.8	59.7	38.3	39.2
Divorced/Separated	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.1	0.5	0.3	0.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: NSS, 2004.

Educational Status

The per cent distribution of elderly is given in Table 7. More than half of the elderly (65.8%) in India are illiterates. Nearly three-quarters of the rural elderly are illiterates whereas 41.2 per cent of the urban elderly are illiterate. The gender gap in education is very high. It can be attributed to the gender discrimination which has existed in Indian society since the earlier days. Nearly 89 per cent of the rural elderly women are illiterate. Literacy without formal schooling is high among urban elderly woman.

TABLE 7: Percentage Distribution of the Educational Level of the Elderly by their Sex and Type of Residence

Educational Level	Rural			Urban			All India
	Male	Female	Both (M+F)	Male	Female	Both (M+F)	
Illiterate	58.8	88.8	73.7	23.2	58.5	41.2	65.8
Literate Without Formal Schooling	2.3	0.9	1.6	2.2	2.1	2.2	1.7
Below Primary	12.4	4.2	8.4	10.5	9.7	10.1	8.8
Primary	12.2	3.9	8.1	13.8	10.4	12.1	9.1
Middle	7.4	1.3	4.4	12.7	8.1	10.3	5.8
Secondary	4.4	0.5	2.5	16.0	5.5	10.7	4.4
Higher Secondary	1.1	0.1	0.6	5.0	1.9	3.4	1.3
Graduate and Above	1.1	0.1	0.6	14.5	3.5	8.8	0.4
Diploma/Certificate	0.2	0.1	0.2	2.2	0.3	1.2	2.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: NSS, 2004.

Living Arrangements

Table 8 shows the family structure of the elderly. According to this survey 0.5 per cent of the elderly are living in a private or public old age home, and 4.7 per cent of them live alone. The proportion of elders who

TABLE 8: The Living Pattern of the Elderly by their Sex and Place of Residence

	Rural			Urban			All India
	Male	Female	Both (M+F)	Male	Female	Both (M+F)	
Living in an Old Age Home	0.3	0.7	0.5	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.5
Living Alone	2.5	7.4	4.9	1.9	6.2	4.1	4.7
Living with Spouse	16.5	8.9	12.7	13.5	7.7	10.5	12.2
Living with Spouse and Children	60.8	28.9	45.0	65.8	29.9	47.5	45.6
Living without Spouse but with Children	17.1	48.3	32.6	15.6	49.0	32.7	32.6
Living with Relatives	2.5	5.1	3.8	2.5	6.3	4.4	3.6
Living with Non-relatives	0.3	0.7	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: NSS, 2004.

live with their spouse and children is 45.6 per cent and those who live with children but without spouse is 12.2 per cent. Gender differentials highlight discrimination against elderly women. Nearly one-third of the elderly women live with their spouse, or spouse and children. The proportion of elderly women who live in any old age home or live alone is much higher than their male counterparts in both rural and urban areas. This could be attributed to the high proportion of widows among the elderly people or the cultural stigma attached to remarriage in the Indian context.

Economic Profile

Table 9 explains the economic dependency of elders (partially or fully) and on whom. Nationally, 65 per cent of the elderly people have an economic dependence on others. The proportion is almost the same in rural and urban areas. The economic dependency among elderly women is quite high; about 85 per cent are fully or partially dependent on others. Economically independent elderly men and women are found in urban areas of India. Most of the supporters of elderly are their own children (78%). Among the elderly who depend on others for economic support, more than 90 per cent of them depend on their own children and spouses.

TABLE 9: Economic Dependency of the Elderly in India

	<i>Rural</i>			<i>Urban</i>			<i>All India</i>
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Both (M+F)</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Both (M+F)</i>	
Economic Dependency*							
Economically Independent	52.0	14.1	33.2	56.1	17.3	36.3	33.5
Partially Depend on Others	15.5	12.6	14.1	13.5	9.7	11.5	13.3
Fully Depend on Others	32.5	73.2	52.7	30.4	73.1	52.2	51.8
Support Provided to Economically Dependent							
Spouse	7.0	15.9	12.7	6.0	19.2	14.8	13.2
Own Children	85.0	74.6	78.4	86.5	71.0	76.2	77.9
Grand Children	2.2	3.1	2.8	1.8	3.0	2.6	2.7
Others	5.7	6.3	6.1	5.7	6.8	6.4	6.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: NSS, 2004.

Note: 1.4 per cent are with missing information.

Work Status

In India the retirement age for formal or organised jobs is age 60, but it varies in different states, from 55 to 62 years. Table 10 explains the work participation rate among the elders by their respective age group.

The work participation among elders is as high as 38 per cent in rural areas whereas in urban areas it is 20 per cent. As expected the work participation and age are negatively related; as the age increases, the work participation decreases. Almost every second elder in the age group 60–69 years, in rural areas, is involved in some kind of economic activity. More than three-quarters (76.1%) of the male elders in rural India have reported themselves as workers. The work participation rate decreases as the age increases and nearly 40 per cent of the male elders in the age group 75–79 are workers in rural areas. Elderly women's work participation is considerably lesser than their male counterparts in both rural and urban areas. The gender gap between the elder's work participation in rural areas is nearly double than in urban areas, i.e., 42.6 per cent points in rural areas to 25.0 per cent points in urban areas.

TABLE 10: Percentage of Elderly Reported as Workers to Total Elderly Population by their Sex and Type of Residence

Age Group	Rural			Urban			All India
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
60–64	76.2	26.1	51.3	42.3	13.2	27.4	45.7
65–69	64.6	17.0	40.3	37.4	7.6	21.8	35.9
70–74	45.8	7.4	26.8	27.4	5.0	16.2	24.3
75–79	40.8	6.4	24.5	18.8	1.6	10.4	20.5
80+	16.7	2.8	10.3	11.1	1.6	6.11	9.1
All 60+	59.3	16.7	38.2	33.0	8.0	20.2	33.8

Source: NSS, 2004.

The usual activities of the elders who have stated themselves as workers are given in Table 11. More than half of the elderly workers are self employed and their proportion is higher in urban areas. Most of the

TABLE 11: Percentage Distribution of Working Elders by the Type of Usual Activity, Residence, and Sex

Usual Activity*	Rural			Urban			All India
	Male	Female	Both (M+F)	Male	Female	Both (M+F)	
Self Employment	67.7	21.4	57.6	65.7	32.8	59.1	57.8
Own Account Worker	2.6	2.9	2.6	3.7	0.2	3.0	2.7
Unpaid Family Worker (helper in HH enterprise)	5.7	36.2	12.4	5.3	23.6	9.0	11.9
Regular Salaried-wage/Employee	2.1	1.4	1.9	15.3	15.6	15.4	3.9
Casual Wage Labourers	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1
Other Type of Work	21.8	38.1	25.3	9.8	27.7	13.4	23.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: NSS, 2004.

*Applicable for those who stated that they are working.

elderly men have stated that they are self employed whereas most of the elderly women are employed as unpaid family workers or helpers in household enterprises. Self employment is stated by more than 66 per cent of the elderly women wherein the proportion of rural women is 21.4 per cent and of urban women is 32.8 per cent. In rural areas, 36.2 per cent of the elder women and in urban areas 23.6 per cent of the elderly women are employed as unpaid family workers.

4. Health Profile of the Elderly

The elderly people are more vulnerable to disease than the general population due to their weakened immunity and declining physiological condition. The physical mobility of the individuals and their self-perceived current health status, is presented by gender in Table 12. More than 90 per cent of the elderly are physically mobile, 6.6 per cent are confined to home and 1.5 per cent are confined to bed (the ailing person is required or compelled to mostly stay in bed at his/her residence/home). Physical mobility is high among elderly men than elderly women in both urban and rural areas. The health condition and physical mobility is poorer for urban elderly women than rural elderly women. A little more than three-quarters of the elderly have stated that their health is in excellent or good condition. Urban elderly perceive their health as being better than rural elderly. Rural elderly women perceive that they are in poor health condition than their urban counterparts.

TABLE 12 : The Health Condition of the Elderly in India

Health Condition	Rural			Urban			All India
	Male	Female	Both (M+F)	Male	Female	Both (M+F)	
Physical Mobility of the Elderly							
Physically Mobile	93.1	91.0	92.1	93.1	89.9	91.4	91.9
Confined to Home	5.6	7.6	6.6	5.2	8.4	6.8	6.6
Confined to Bed	1.3	1.5	1.4	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.5
Current State of Health (Own perception)*							
Excellent	6.3	3.5	4.9	8.4	5.1	6.7	5.3
Good	71.4	69.9	70.7	72.6	71.7	72.2	71.0
Poor	22.3	26.6	24.5	19.9	23.2	21.2	23.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: NSS, 2004.

*4% of the elderly did not provide information for this question.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Nearly 60 per cent of the elderly women are widows in both rural and urban areas. According to this survey 0.5 per cent of the elderly are living in some old age home, either private or public and 4.7 per cent of them

live alone. More than three-fourths (76.1%) of the elderly male in rural India have reported themselves as workers. The gender gap between the elders' work participation in rural areas is nearly double than in urban areas, that is 42.6 per cent point in rural areas and 25.0 per cent point in urban areas. Among elderly who depend on others for economic support, more than 90 per cent depend on their own children and spouses for it. The health condition of elderly women is worse than elderly men in both urban and rural areas. More of the urban elderly women are confined to home or bed than their counterparts in rural areas.

The situation of elders in India could be enhanced in the coming future. Educated elders are economically productive. The current global economy where skill is valued has opened up many employment opportunities for the elders in India. More and more retired people are employed. The retirement age limit in the country too has increased in many governmental organisations. To attract the elderly consumers many companies are involving elderly models in their advertisements. With the increasing effort to empower women, the government has developed many schemes. More and more women are entering the labour force. Many working women prefer that their own parent/relative look after their children.

In the future, the role of elders could be changed from 'care receivers' to 'care givers'. For example, in many of the African countries with a high magnitude of HIV/AIDS deaths, the children who have lost their parents to the disease are looked after by their grandparents.

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