



Social Problems and Expectations of Elderly Citizens: A Cross-Sectional Study in Jorhat District of Assam

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the social problem and expectations of elderly citizens in Jorhat district of Assam. A total of 400 elderly citizens were selected for the present study from five wards of Jorhat Municipality Board under Jorhat sub-division. A multistage random sampling procedure was followed for the present study. It was found that most of the respondents faced problems related to less elderly friendly public places (35.50%) and majority (40.75%) of the respondents expected the society to create separate clubs, association and other social networks catering to the need of the elderly people. It was further found from the results of the Chi square test that three variables i.e., age, family type and previous occupation shows a significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) with the social problems of the respondents. In case of expectations of the elderly from the society, there was a significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) between respondents' educational status, family type and previous occupation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The elderly citizens are an integral part of a population of any country who owe respect and attention equally like any other section. The elderly population consists of 8.58 per cent of the total population of India and 6.7 per cent of the population of Assam [1]. Ageing is a continuous, irreversible, universal process which starts from conception till the death of an individual [2]. The world population is rapidly ageing [3]. The UN defines a country as ageing when the proportion of people above 60 reaches 7%. But currently in India 8.58 per cent of population are elderly and it is expected that this will reach 19 % in 2050 [4]. Because of technological advancement in the field of health, education, medical facilities and due to other national schemes or programs for old aged people, they're much decline in the death rate of the old aged people resulting in continuous incline in population of 60 years and above age people in India [5].

As man is a social animal and cannot live separately in isolation thus interaction with people to exchange their ideas and feelings is a necessity [6]. Along with this, with growing age the need for being taken care of, being asked about their problems, expectations and the urge to respectfully lead this last phase of their life also arises. As ageing in India is exponentially increasing due to the impressive gains that society has made in terms of increased life expectancy. With the rise in elderly population, the demand for holistic care tends to grow [7]. But in the present competitive world, career and professional life has become so important for the members of the society that they are unable to spend time in providing adequate care and facilities for the elderly willingly or unwillingly . These along with the changing family structure and modernization have forced the elderly people to face inevitable challenges to live their life respectfully. In most cases these elderly people are never asked about their problems and expectations and their issues generally remains ignored. It seems as if no one wants to have a look at their likeness and this makes their problem more complicated and may harm the physical, mental and emotional well-being of the elderly.

1.1 Elderly Population of Assam

Assam is an integral part of the North-Eastern region of India. The North Eastern region

comprising of eight states accounts for 3.8 per cent of India's total population and it covers 8.05 per cent of the country's total geographical area. These states differ to a large extent with respect to number and proportion of elderly persons in total population. The elderly population in these states together comprises of 5.6 percent of the total population of the region in 2001. Among these states Assam has the highest number of elderly population. Almost 70 per cent of the total elderly population of this region belonged to Assam in 2001. According 2011 census about 6.7 per cent of the total population were senior citizens (60 years or above) in Assam. Gradually due to improvement in health care and other facilities the elderly population in Assam is also increasing significantly. In 1961 the total elderly population was 5.09 lakhs while it rose to 20.7 lakhs in 2011. This increasing trend in the elderly population shows that this is a high time to assess their problems regarding care and facilities provided so that we can plan a good, healthy and hassle free environment for them.

Moreover, reviewing the studies on elderly it may be mentioned that there is a need for conducting research studies which can fill the information gap about the social problems and expectations of the urban elderly. Furthermore, a baseline survey to assess the problems and expectations of the old aged people is equally important for the family members at familial level, policy makers at governmental level, NGO's and other private organizations at private level as it would be of much value to bring awareness as well as to find out the indicators for action points so that with the help of various media, governmental and non-governmental organizations we can create awareness amongst the mass. Apart from it, the proposed study would also provide a further insight for policy interventions and to provide a better living scenario for the elderly citizens.

Keeping all these points in view the present study is entitled as "Social Problems of Elderly Citizens: A Cross-Sectional Study In Jorhat District of Assam" with the following objectives:

1.2 Objectives

- To assess the social problems of the elderly citizens.
- To find out the expectations of the elderly citizens associated with the society.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Jorhat sub-division of Jorhat district of Assam. A multistage random sampling method was followed for the present study. Five wards with dominance of elderly population was selected from Jorhat Municipality Board under Jorhat sub-division. From these five wards 10 per cent of the population was selected using simple random sampling technique. Thus total numbers of respondent were 400. Data was collected using structured interview schedule and analysed using appropriate statistical techniques viz., frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and chi-square.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Problems Associated with the Society

The distribution of elderly citizens presented in the Table 1 is according to their problems regarding facilities, status and care provided by the society. Here, nine sub-areas were included to study the problems of the respondents associated with the society.

Under the social problems, it was seen that mainly the respondents faced problems related to less elderly friendly public places (35.50%). Followed by lack of secured environment (33.50%). Similar study was reported by Lena et al. [8]. Next to it were the contributions of the elderly to the society are not appreciated. (26.00%) and lack of goodwill of the society members regarding care provided to elderly citizens (24.00%).

Generally with declining mobility and vigour in comparison to the young aged people, the elderly people find it difficult to avail the facilities in the public places. Hence they need a creation of elderly-friendly and barrier free environment in buildings, public toilets, buses, bus-stands, airports and other public places. Along with this, in the present context the crimes against elderly people are gradually increasing with breaking down of the protective layer of the conventional joint family system along with the declining social circle of friends and relatives which leaves them more prone to feel socially insecure. Similar study was reported by Kapur [9] where she stated that when the elderly people have their family members around, relatives and a good circle of friends, then it is likely that they may feel secure and supportive. The elderly accompanied

by their declining health are mostly seen to left all by alone to face the brutal outside world. Along with this, due to the ever growing present competitive world where people have become so indulged in career and professional life that they have almost no time left to give importance to meagre things in their view, like giving importance to showing respect to elderly or giving due regards to the elderly's contributions. In a large number of cases their presence is just "tolerated" [10]. This might be also due to the mentality of the society members who thinks that the elderly contributions are too outdated to fit to the modern hi tech world. As a result of these it becomes really difficult for the elderly people when the members of the society stop giving them due regards for the contribution to the society on the pretext of growing age. This also shows the insensibility of the society members to this greying population. Furthermore the care of elderly is of paramount importance as it is crucial in maintaining quality of life and optimum health status. With growing age the elderly generally becomes dependent on their family members or other care takers as they gradually become unable to take care of themselves. Hence they expect the society members including their family members and neighbours to take care of them as it also fetches the emotional needs of the elderly making them feel valued. But these days, due to a change in family structure, the elderly are not given adequate care and attention by their family members [11]. It is generally seen that with modernization, the people had become so busy and involved in their day-to-day tasks and daily living that they hardly could take out much time for taking care of the greying population. Apart from these, other social factors also adds to the difficulty in providing elderly care like fewer children in each family, increased employment opportunities for women, who were traditionally taking care of the old [12]. Hence, it is important to give proper training to the members of the society including the family members so that they can readily address the problems of the elderly and provide adequate care to the elderly at home and at societal places when required.

To study the relationship between the expectations of respondents associated with the society and the selected independent variables, Chi-square (χ^2) was computed and the results are presented in the Table 2. The independent variables selected were age, educational status, family type, previous occupation and

organizational membership. Results of the chi square test indicated that out of five variables, three variables i.e., age, family type and previous occupation shows a significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) with the social problems of the respondents. On the other hand, two variables i.e., educational qualification and organizational membership have no significant relationship ($p > 0.05$) with the social problems of the respondents. The results indicated that with age the social problems of the respondents increases and it had been observed that respondents staying in joint family type and having good previous occupation tend to have less problems compared to their other counterparts.

3.2 Expectations from the Society

Under expectations from society five sub-areas were included to study the expectations of the respondents.

The findings in the Table 3 shows that most (40.75%) of the respondents expected the

society to create separate clubs, association and other social networks catering to the need of the elderly people followed by should create a secured environment for the elderly (33.50%) and should not discriminate with them on the basis of age (21.00%).

This shows that the elderly members mostly expected a supporting platform for socialising to curb loneliness and social isolation which is ever increasing with the growing age. This is supported by Krishnaswamy et al. [13] where he found that social isolation and loneliness has increased amidst the elderly population. The elderly also expected a secured environment as the crimes and discrimination against elderly people are generally increasing with breaking down of the social norms and joint families. Along with these, they also expected the younger generation to give them their due respect and value and not to discriminate or refrain them from participating and contributing in any familial, social or any other events on the pretext of their growing age.

Table 1. Distribution of problems of respondents associated with the society

Sl. No.	Problems	Total N=400	
		F	%
1	Barred by family members to participate in social activities	12	3.00
2	The Government needs to work more on social security schemes	84	21.00
3	The public places are not elderly-friendly	142	35.50
4	The medical facilities are not easily accessible	80	20.00
5	The housing/furniture of the public places are not according to the need and requirement of the respondent	60	15.00
6	Specially trained people are not appointed in Public places to assist the elderly.	56	14.00
7	The society is not able to create a secured environment for the elderly.	134	33.50
8	The contributions of the elderly to the society are not appreciated.	104	26.00
9	Lack of goodwill of the society members regarding care provided to elderly citizens.	96	24.00

Multiple response

Table 2. Relationship between problems with selected independent variables

Sl. No.	Variable	χ^2 value	p value
1	Age	66.986**	0.012
2	Educational Status	1.547 NS	0.818
3	Family Type	24.87**	0.014
4	Previous Occupation	11.570**	0.002
5	Organizational Membership	45.789NS	1.752

* = Significant at 0.05 level,

** = Significant at 0.01 level, NS = Non-significant

Table 3. Distribution of respondents according to expectations from the society

Sl. No.	Expectations	Total N=400	
		F	%
1	There should be separate clubs, association and other social networks catering to the need of the elderly people	163	40.75
2	Should not discriminate with them on the basis of age	84	21.00
3	Should involve the elderly in the decision-making process on issues that concern them	61	15.25
4	Should recognise the contribution of the elderly.	64	16.00
5	Should create a secured environment for the elderly	134	33.50

Multiple response

Table 4. Relationship between expectations of the respondents with selected independent variables

Sl. No.	Variable	χ^2 value	p value
1	Age	5.268 NS	1.281
2	Educational Status	6.267 *	0.035
3	Family Type	141.565**	0.000
4	Previous Occupation	6.268**	0.017
5	Organizational Membership	16.897 NS	0.889

* = Significant at 0.05 level, ** = Significant at 0.01 level, NS = Non-significant

To study the relationship between the expectations of respondents associated with the society and the selected independent variables, chi-square (χ^2) was computed and the results are, presented in the Table 4. The independent variables selected were age, educational status family type, previous occupation and organizational membership. Results of the Chi square test indicated that there was significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) between respondent's educational status, family type and previous occupation which is associated with the expectations of respondents from the society. On the other hand, age and organizational membership have no significant relationship ($p > 0.05$) with expectations of the respondents. Thus, out of five variables three shows significant variance for the problems of elderly citizens and two variables remain insignificant. Hence, all the three variables *i.e.*, educational status, family type and previous occupation of the respondent influences the expectations of the respondents from the society. Thus, the results may be interpreted as the better the educational status and previous occupation of the respondent the more is their ability to realize their expectations. It was also seen that the people staying in joint family had lesser expectations and more satisfaction in their life compared to the ones staying away from families.

4. CONCLUSION

Ageing is actually a biological reality which has its own definite characteristics, largely beyond

human control. The old age is not without problems. In old age physical strength diminishes, mental stability deteriorates coupled with negligence from the younger generation. Previously as per the tradition of India, old age people had occupied the position of power and prestige in the society. But nowadays with the breaking down of the cultural norms they are becoming inactive, dependent, sick and weak economically, physically and psychologically. These phenomena has led to several problems including problems related to the society.

The findings of the present study help us to draw the conclusion that the problems faced by the elderly citizens can be mainly solved through training and sensitizing the members of the society regarding elderly needs, security and care Moreover in case of expectations related to the society, the members of the society should be made more aware of the elderly's expectations from them through various means of print and mass media along with awareness campaigns by Govt. and NGOs.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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