

The Indian Elderly: Challenges and Implications for their well being

The emerging changes in the age and sex structure of India's population, particularly at old and older ages will have a profound impact on the demographic landscape and are expected to pose multifaceted developmental challenges. The knowledge base with regard to the elderly in terms of their demographic, social and economic conditions, health needs and their living arrangements are woefully inadequate in India. Hence, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), India in collaboration with the Population Research Centre (PRC), Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC), Bangalore, the Institute of Economic Growth (IEG), Delhi and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai launched a research project, *Building a Knowledge Base on Population Ageing in India (BKPAI)*. As part of this initiative, several papers using both secondary and primary data were brought out. A large primary survey was carried out in seven states – Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal – having a higher percentage of population in the age group 60 years and above compared to the national average. The two papers in this session utilize the primary data to understand the living arrangement and support system for elderly as well as their health and well being.

It is generally understood that children are the primary source of support for elderly in India. This is expected in a country where work related pension is nearly non-existent for a majority and social support for elderly by the government is rather negligible. With the institutional care system remains underdeveloped, family in general and children in particular are bound to be sole sources of economic, emotional and social support for the elderly in the country. However, there has not been any systematic study to validate such commonly believed notion. The first paper on support system for elderly brings out the myths of many commonly believed notions on the economic support system of elderly. It specifically investigates the economic exchange taking place between elderly and children within the context of family. The paper concludes that the exchange system within family is complex and the contribution of elderly towards family is an important factor for the survival of many families in India.

The second paper on health and well being examines the linkages between economic progress and well-being/happiness. This relationship often contested in the case of elderly. It is often argued that well-being and happiness has no direct connection with economic living standard. But this has not been systematically examined particularly in the context of India. Undoubtedly, the health status of the elderly has strong bearing on their economic well being. This is true not only with regard to the physical health measured in terms of morbidity but even self rated health measured in terms of graded opinion on their health status. But how far this is true with respect to mental happiness of the elderly remain unknown. This is mainly because the data on mental health or happiness are rarely collected and as such its linkages with various other important socio-economic dimensions are still not clear. This paper therefore tries to understand the levels of mental health status of the Indian elderly and its major socio economic determinants. It also examines the relationship between physical and mental health status. Further it investigates the impacts of household economic status on the mental health of the elderly by considering several intervening forces behind this relationship.