

Ageing, Care and Well-being

Reinventing Social Gerontology



Edited by

Antony Palackal
Nisha Jolly Nelson



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Essays in Honour of Professor Jacob John Kattakayam

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Nisha Jolly Nelson



RAWAT PUBLICATIONS

Jaipur • New Delhi • Bangalore • Guwahati • Kolkata

ISBN 978-81-316-1127-2

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Published by

Prem Rawat for **Rawat Publications**

Satyam Apts, Sector 3, Jawahar Nagar, Jaipur 302 004 (India)

Phone: 0141 265 1748 / 265 7006

E-mail: info@rawatbooks.com

Website: www.rawatbooks.com

New Delhi Office

4858/24, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110 002

Phone: 011 2326 3290

Also at *Bangalore, Guwahati and Kolkata*

Typeset by Rawat Computers, Jaipur

Printed and bound in India

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Elderly and Work Participation *Challenges and Prospects*

Swapna Rani S.S.

Ageing can generally be described as the process of growing old and is an intricate part of the life cycle. Basically it is a multi-dimensional process and affects almost every aspect of human life. The 'ageing of population' is a trend, which has characterized industrial societies throughout the twentieth century, but in recent decades, has become a worldwide phenomenon (Prasad 2011). There is no common definition regarding elderly. WHO defines those aged 60–74 years as elderly. In 1980, the UN recommended 60 years as the age of transition for the elderly segment of the population and has been categorized as follows: young old – between the ages of 60–75 years, old-old between the ages of 75–85 years, very old–85 years and above. World Population Data Sheet, 2002 considers aged population as population in the age group of 65 and above. In the Indian context, the age group of 60 years has been adopted by the Census of India for the purpose of classifying a person as old, which coincides with the age of retirement in government sector. The terms young-old for 60 to 69, old-old for 70 to 79 and oldest-old for 80 to 89 have been used (Shettar 2013).

Demographic Changes

Population ageing is in many ways a demographic success story, driven by changes in fertility and mortality rate together, i.e. the decline in fertility and increase in longevity are producing substantial shifts in the population age structure, such that the share of children is shrinking while that of older persons continues to grow. These increased population ageing is a trend in all over the world. India is no exception to this trend. The Indian aged population is currently the second largest in the world after China (100 million) (Prasad 2011). The following table provide varying trends in the population of elderly through Census Reports.

Table 1*Growth of Elderly Population Aged 60 and Over, by Gender, in India 1901–2001*

Year	Population 60+(in Millions)		
	Persons	Males	Females
1901	12.06	5.50	6.56
1911	13.17	6.18	6.99
1921	13.48	6.48	7.00
1931	14.21	6.94	7.27
1941	18.04	8.89	9.15
1951	19.61	9.67	9.94
1961	24.71	12.36	12.35
1971	32.70	16.87	15.83
1981	43.98	22.49	21.49
1991	55.30	28.23	27.07
2001	75.93	38.22	37.71

Source: Sharma, S.P. and Peter Xenos. Ageing in India: demographic background and analysis based on Census materials' Occasional paper No. 2 of 1992, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, New Delhi, 1992 (4) (Cited in Indira Jai Prakash, 1999).

The total number of elderly persons is expected to increase from 70.6 million in 2001 (6.9% of population) to 173 million by 2026 (Subaiya and Bansod 2011 cited in Dhar). Another projected calculation of India's elderly population is estimated at 10 crore in 2011 and will reach to 20 crore by 2030 (Singh 2013). Estimates by the Planning Commission (2011) indicate that, by 2050, one out of every five persons in India will be aged above 60 years (cited in Antara Dhar 2015). Both the above actual and projected data on population growth have various socio-economic implications. The highest presence of elderly is a very serious issue and it affects the whole society. World Population Ageing Report, 2015 also indicates that population ageing – the increasing share of older persons in the population – is poised to become one of the most significant social transformations of the twenty-first century, with implications for nearly all sectors of society, including labour and financial markets, the demand for goods and services, such as housing, transportation and social protection, as well as family structures and intergenerational ties. Thus the population ageing has social, economic and political implications. The discussion on work force participation of elderly is not only an economic aspect but also social and political issue. There are some stereotypes regarding elderly as unproductive group. But beyond such stereotypical view, the work force participation is appreciable in the country, which is positive trend. That is they are able to be a productive group and not to be a burden.

Major Trends

The work participation of elderly is not a new phenomenon. Manoj K. Pandey (2011) observed in his study that unlike most Asian countries, India also have shown low elderly participation in the labour force possibly because of fewer job opportunities, low physical and mental alertness, lack of modern skills, unfriendly public transport system, low health status and high incidence of disability. It is evident in the work of Antara Dhar (2014), which quoted the findings of Rajan and Selvaraj from Census and NSSO. On the basis of the Census data (Rajan 2003) revealed that from 1961 to 1991 the work participation rate of elderly has decreased. As per the NSSO data from 1983 to 2004–05, Selvaraj et al. (2011) also revealed that there is decrease of work participation from 42 per cent in 1983 to 39 per cent in 2004–05. This is the first time span wherein a decline in the work participation of elderly has been noted. Selvaraj et al. (2011) has mentioned the reason that it is because of the growing number of population in higher age groups. This means that their bad physical conditions are not supporting them. This also throws light on the fact that population ageing is bringing so much of economic pressure to the society. The above studies also show that the work participation at that time was higher in rural areas than urban areas and more male participation than female was noted. Further, elderly workers are increasingly involved in the agricultural sector, with almost 80 per cent of the aged workers being engaged in this sector in 1991.

By analysing the work participation data of two rounds survey (2004–2005, 2011–2012) of India Human Development Survey (IHDS), conducted by National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) New Delhi and the University of Maryland, Barik et al. (2017) identified that a significant proportion of the older population in India was economically active. This includes those involved in salaried or business work, cultivation, farm and non-farm labour and animal care. Here also the nature of work done by the elderly varies by age, sex and place of residence. However, the same trend can be seen in this study with slight changes. About 61 per cent of the older male population in rural areas continues to engage in some economically productive work compared to 31 per cent of their female counterparts. In contrast, urban participation is lower, reasoning that it is because of the absence of women participation. Another trend seen is that many of the rural elderly are engaged in cultivation and farm related activities, but urban elderly are mostly engaged in family business and salaried activities. Barik (2017) also found that there is a substantial increase in non-farm employment in rural areas for both men and women between 2004–05 and 2011–12, which could be attributed to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). On the basis of 2001 Census data and NSSO survey 2007–08, Charan Singh (2013) analysed some of the trends in the work participation of elderly. The following table shows the details.

Table 2
Work Participation Rate of Elderly

<i>Place of Residence</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Population Census 2001</i>	<i>NSSO Survey (2007–08)</i>
Rural	Male	66	66
	Female	25	23
	Person	45	45
Urban	Male	44	39
	Female	09	07
	Person	26	23
Rural+Urban	Male	60	59
	Female	21	19
	Person	40	39

Sources: Population Census, 2001, NSSO survey 2007–08. Cited in Singh (2013).

In addition to the above data, Singh (2013) also specified that the work participation of the oldest elderly (80 years and above) is relatively high with 13 per cent among men and 3 per cent among women. He (2013) also noted that 95 per cent of the elderly population is engaging in self-employed activities and the reason for this is that the elderly are discouraged by the employers because of declining health and energy. Indira Jai Prakash (1999) also noted that there the highest presence of elderly in the unorganized sector, i.e. 90 per cent, among these 40 per cent are wage earners. She also mentioned that low wages, job insecurity and lack of legal and governmental provisions to protect their rights, make this group vulnerable to economic hardships (Prakash 1999).

As per the population Census 2011 data, the economic activity in the capacity of main or marginal workers of elderly population in rural areas is more than in urban areas. The proportions increased for women as compared to 2001 population Census data in both rural and urban areas (Central Statistics Office Report, Government of India, 2016). Here also it can be seen that there is an increase in rural participation, but a slight change is visible in female participation. The following table shows details.

Table 3
Working Participation Elderly Population in 2011 (%)

<i>Elderly Population</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Rural	66.4	28.4	47.1
Urban	46.1	11.3	28.5
Total	60.4	23.4	41.6

Sources: Population Census 2011, SRS Report 2013 (cited in Central Statistics Office, India 2016).

According to recent India Ageing Report 2017, significantly higher proportion of elderly belonged to scheduled castes/scheduled tribes than other caste groups. The report (2017) also observed that the elderly work

participation rate also varies across the states of India with highest work participation rate in Meghalaya with nearly 60 per cent of the older persons in labour force and lowest in Goa, with only 8 per cent of the older persons in labour force. Among the major states, elderly work participation rate is above 40 per cent in Himachal Pradesh (48.8), Andhra Pradesh (40.3), Chhattisgarh (41.1) and Uttar Pradesh (41.2), whereas in Assam, Kerala, Haryana and West Bengal the work participation rate hovers around 25 per cent.

The overall picture of elderly work participation shows various trends. First time the participation level was low then it changed. Rajan (2010) also mentioned that older persons are willing to work in any job available to earn income to meet daily needs due to poverty and inadequate social security. Another major trend is that the rural participation is high along with a normal trend that many of them are working in the unorganized sector. This is a very important issue, because like other workers in formal sector there is no retirement or pension benefit. They are in the unending process of work. The recent India Ageing Report (2017) also indicates the highest presence of elders in informal sectors. Another important fact is that nowadays many of the older people are taking part in the MGNREGA programme. This programme also ensures security and employability. Gender-wise also, female participation is low. On the contrary, some other studies show that women participation is higher than men. On the basis of Building a Knowledge Base on Population Ageing in India (BKPAI) collected data on compulsion to work, India Ageing Report-2017 reports that 71 per cent of the elderly work due to economic compulsion and more so in the case of elderly women (82%) than men (68%). The Economic Development Report of Planning Commission (2008) also stated that in Kerala, the work participation of old-age women in the informal sector is higher than men. Elderly persons not only work to support themselves but also to make financial contributions to their households.

Reasons and Various Dimensions

The work participation rate of elderly is not only an economic phenomenon but carries socio political implications also. Most of the studies focus on work participation of elderly as a financial matter, but it is also a socially and politically relevant matter. In the discussion of work participation of elderly, two main factors can be identified. One is that the work participation of elderly as a solution and the other is, it as a problem.

India is a nation with strong ties of social and cultural values which guides one's life and it assures that the life of an elderly person is to be free from all responsibilities. In the traditional Indian culture, a human life span is one hundred years. Manu, the ancient lawgiver, in his *Dharmasastra* divided this span of life into four '*ashramas*' or life stages. The first, '*brahmacharya*' (life of a student) has to be spent at the teachers' (guru) house. Once education was complete, the boy (grown into adulthood) would be ready to enter the '*grihasta*' *ashram*. This is the life of a householder. Later, when a

man's head turns grey and wrinkles appear, he was to give up this life of householder and turn to '*Vanaprastha*' which literally means 'moving to the forest'. A mature and ageing man would gradually give up his worldly pursuits, move away from the mundane routine of householder and turn inward in search of spiritual growth. Finally, when he was spiritually ready, he would renounce the world completely and enter the stage of '*Sanyasa*' or asceticism (Prakash 1999).

Other religions also preached the responsibilities of youngsters. All these traditional cultural values considered old age as the period of rest and cultivate the idea that the younger generations are responsible to taken care of elderly. Parents were to be honoured as gods. It was considered the duty of a son to respect and care for his parents. Indian society is patriarchal and after marriage sons bring their wives to the parental household to live. This tradition assured that old people would have younger daughter-in-laws and grandchildren to care for them. Also, caste and kin group exerted pressure on younger members to obey and respect elders (Ibid.).

The structure of family was also very supportive to elderly and it was the basic agency which cultivate these values to generations. Younger generation was also more respectful to the older generation. But nowadays many changes have taken place with regard to these values and family structure. Conventionally, the family takes care of the aged and generally the eldest son is considered responsible. In recent years, with the social and economic transformation of the economy, there is a disintegration of the joint family system and this has resulted in isolation of the elderly, especially in urban India (Dak and Sharma, 1987, cited in Prasad 2011). The growth of individualism and desire of the independence and autonomy of the young generation (Serrow 2001, cited in Prasad 2011) affected the status of the elderly.

The changes in the family structure and value system are more important phenomena in the context of elderly care and it should be considered in the context of work participation also, because changes in the value system and family structure created new values and attitudes, which affect the elderly. The absence of care and protection from the family, also forced the elderly to engage in work force participation.

Many of the studies report that one of the main reasons for the larger representation of elderly in work force is poverty. The condition of poverty among the elderly has been a consistent phenomenon in the third world as the older population finds it hard to fulfil their basic needs (Keyfitz and Flieger, 1990 cited in Prasad 2011).

The poverty situation of elderly shows the ineffective social development programs in the country. The lives of many older people are more frequently affected by the social and economic insecurity that accompany demographic and development process (World Bank 1994 cited in Prasad 2011). So the government took measures to take care of the elderly and provide welfare measures for them. It was reported that a majority of the elderly work due to economic necessity and not by chance or choice. India

does not have a population-wide mechanism of providing social security because of which people work as long as possible to support themselves (Mathew and Rajan 2008 cited in Singh 2013). The impact of rising inflation lowers the income that may be allocated to health (Singh 2013) the risk of slipping into poverty may increase for the elderly (Reddy 2016). Studies such as that of Rajan (2010) and India Ageing Report (2016) also argued that poverty is a main reason for older persons having to work.

In developing countries like India, old age social security support system is almost negligible and the traditional structures of family care for the old people are eroding (Reddy 2016). There is a view that in developed countries, many older persons can afford to retire early because of the availability of pensions or social security, which are often missing in developing countries (Kinsella and Velkoff 2001 cited in Rajan 2010). There is also an argument that labour force participation is associated with a country's wealth, i.e. countries with high gross national product tend to have lower labour force participation among the elderly than countries with lower gross national product (Clark, York and Anker 1997, cited in Rajan 2010). Thus the absence of security measures in the country also forced elderly to work.

In the case of elderly poverty, absence of resources is one of the major reason to increase work participation. But another aspect connected with it is the physical capacity to work. Employment of the elderly can be interrupted by retrenchment, sickness and disability. However, Rajan (2010) observed that while opportunities for gainful employment decline as age advances into the 70s and 80s, many older persons need employment. Even those retiring with a pension tend to search for contract-based re-employment in the formal sector or join the informal sector.

Thus, poverty, changes in the family structure, values and absence of security measures cause the increase in the work participation of elderly and this situation is worse as the presence of elderly is high in the unorganized sector. It is important to note that the above socio-economic and political dimensions are affecting the work participation of elderly negatively. In this context, work participation is a problem, because these socio-economic and political conditions are not favourable to elderly. They are forced to work and there is no security of work or social security.

Other side of work participation of elderly is that it is a solution. That means those who are interested to work without any physical hurdles, positive impact can be seen. Hence, it brings more social relationships, social exposure and social mobility. The improved social environment makes them to be healthy till the end of their lives. There is no boredom, loneliness, isolation and unhappiness.

Conclusion

Increase in elderly population tempts to think of elderly protection and care. The urgency is to ensure a better social environment to older people in the changing social situations. The issue of work participation of elderly should be considered seriously as a problem as well as a solution. When it

considered as a problem, the policy makers should implement measures to overcome the difficulties of work as a burden. The thing is that if aged people are forced to work in the absence of unfavourable socio-economic and political situations, should consider seriously. When the work participation of elderly is considered as a solution, active life provides more advantages to them. They can even contribute whatever they can to the development and financial growth of the society. Moreover they can achieve social recognition and can fulfil their own needs. So the very urgency is to think of elderly work participation in the above discussed contexts also.

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₹ 1395

ISBN 978-81-316-1127-2



9 788131 611272