

## **ELDERLY WOMEN OF MARGINALIZED SECTION OF ALIGARH CITY: PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study was conducted with an aim to know about the problems and challenges faced by elderly women residing in slum areas of Aligarh City. For this study, 50 elderly women were selected through systematic sampling from different slum areas of Aligarh City. Face-to-face interview schedule was used for data collection. The findings of this study reveal that the elderly women of slum areas are severely lacking financial, emotional and social security along with health problems. All these elderly women feel isolated and marginalized at the hands of their own family members and society. They face different kind of problems and challenges in old age when they should actually be provided with special attention and care.*

**Keywords:** Elderly Women, Emotional Security, Financial Security, Health Issues, Old Age, Slum Areas and Social Security.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, United Nations identified three most important socio-economic issues i.e. global warming, global terrorism and global ageing. As we can see that the topic of “ageing” is one of the most burning issues discussed throughout the world. It requires special attention as the proportion of elderly people is increasing rapidly than any other age-group in all over the world. Rapid and extensive advancements in nutrition, health system and medical technology have increased life expectancy and decreased mortality. This has resulted in population ageing. It was one of the distinguishing features of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is ongoing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century too. In the present scenario elderly people are considered as a „burden” rather than human resource owing to socio-economic changes and development. It tends to render elderly people helpless in the society. On the contrary, elderly people have contributed to the betterment and welfare of the society in myriad ways in the silver years of their lives (Khan, 2013).

In ancient and medieval times, agrarian society and joint family system were dominant features. At that period of time, elderly were a huge boon. Oldest male of the family was

always the head of the family. They had much authority, decision-making power and high status in the family. The situation of elderly women was different as they were a part of the predominantly patriarchal

system. Women were always forced to be socially, emotionally and financially dependent on their male counterparts. (Khan, 2013).

Sen pointed out after looking at the gender dimension that “..... *the roots of vulnerability in later life have, often, related to a life time of gender-based economic, social and cultural inequalities where social roles combined with differential opportunity structures available to men and women have their effect*” (Sen, 1994). Women were always stereotyped to being submissive, self-effaced and dedicated to husband. They were always expected to become a „good wife” and „daughter-in-law”. Their roles were always confined to the four walls of their houses, and interaction with anyone was openly discouraged.

It is interesting to know that in ancient and medieval times, elderly women used to enjoy some status and respect, though not same as their male counterparts. As mother-in-law, woman would exercise her authority over her daughter-in-law. She had right to engage in family household matters. All this, however, would seldom override the factors that influenced socialization process, molding the personality of children in ways that perpetuate female subordination (Panda, 2005).

After the processes of globalization, commercialization, industrialization and urbanization, the situation of elderly people has totally changed. Rapid technological advancements and the current self-centered approach to daily life have led to the elderly being ignored. Migration of young generation from their hometown to other cities for their education and employment renders elderly people uncared for. These aspects have made the condition of the elderly people especially elderly women highly vulnerable. It is claimed that in old age both psychological as well as sociological changes occur among elderly people, but both these changes are not universal and do not affect all the elderly people in the same ways and same extent. These changes differ from urban to rural, from society to society, from one gender to other gender and even from person to person (Saha, & Sain, 2012).. It might be possible that elderly people of rural areas have less medical advancement as compared to those elderly people who live in urban areas, elderly women’s issues are different from elderly’s men issue due to gender discrimination. When this matter shifts into slum areas we found different types of issues faced by elderly people. They have poorer basic

amenities, shortage of employment opportunities, lack of health facilities, less emotional as well as social support system and so on as these areas are the symbol of poverty. When we focus on particularly elderly women of these areas we found

that the condition of these women is worst as compared to elderly men. Lack of enough amounts of food, environmental hazards and gender based violence in the four walls of their homes affect the lives of elderly women of these areas. It is also seen that elderly women of these areas either partially or fully dependent on others. They suffer different kind of health issues either by considering it as a part of old age or with the negligence by their own family members (Hiremath, 2012).

This paper focuses on the elderly women of slum areas of Aligarh city, who are facing various problems and challenges. These women are deprived of shelter, food, clothes, access to water, sanitation, health, education and employment. Not only this, elderly women of these areas are also lag behind in benefitting from different kinds of supports such as emotional, social, financial etc. The municipal authorities and NGO's of Aligarh division have failed to provide basic requirements to elderly women who are residing in these areas.

Aligarh is one of the Districts of Uttar Pradesh, India. It covers 112 kms from west to east and 72

kms from north to south. Aligarh is located at the co-ordinates  $27.88^{\circ}\text{N } 78.08^{\circ}\text{E}$ . As per Aligarh Municipal Corporation, the population of total slums in Aligarh city is approx. 2.5 lakhs having 57 slums (Census Handbook, 2011).

## **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Panda (1998) explained in this article „*The Elderly in Rural Orissa: Alone in Distress*“ that family is an important institution for elderly people. It is expected in India that the family should provide support and care to the elder members of the family in the form of social, emotional, economical and health related support. But the reality is that due to rapid changes in the societal structure, the young generation has started giving lesser attention and support to the elderly. Because of this elderly people feel isolated at the hands of their own kith and kin.

Chakraborti (2004) discussed in the book „*The Greying of India: Population Ageing in the Context of Asia*“ that how elderly people's lives have been affected by education, health and marital status. Elderly people have to be involved in informal sectors or low paying

jobs due to modernized occupations. They are always neglected by both public as well as private schemes.

Panda's work „*Elderly Women in Megapolis: Status and Adjustment*" (2005) explained that how elderly women face ageing in their later life. Author focalized on the ability of elderly women to deal with their health, well-being, economic security, life satisfaction and attitude and acceptance of the family and neighborhood.

Singh (2015) mentioned in the article „*Ageing in India: Need for Universal Pension Scheme*" that elderly suffer health, financial, physical and mental problems in myriad ways. It is seen that due to their non-economic status, elderly people are always considered as a burden on the family. That is why policy makers, authorities and voluntary organizations have taken these issues into consideration for the betterment of elderly.

Kulkarni (2017) in „*Hand-Holding the Elderly*" discussed that growing elderly population suffer different kinds of challenges due to continuous fluctuating arrangement of the society. At this age many elderly people have no income so they have to be financially dependent on others; either partially or fully. To look into all these issues, the government introduced many policies and programmes to provide social security to the elderly.

### **OBJECTIVES OF STUDY**

- To know the status of elderly women in Slum area of Aligarh city.
- To examine the problems and challenges faced by elderly women residing in Aligarh slums.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

- **Universe and Sample-** All the elderly women living in slum areas of Aligarh City constituted the universe of this study. All the respondents for this study were selected by systematic sampling.
- **Research Design-** The research design was descriptive as well as explanatory.
- **Sources of Data-** Both primary as well as secondary data were used for data collection.
- **Methods for Data Collection- Primary data** was collected from face to face interview schedule having open-ended questionnaire while **secondary data** was collected from articles, journals, books, census handbook, newspapers, reports and magazines.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

It is a fact that slums are marginalized sections of the society. As elderly people are considered to be a burden on their families, the condition is even worse in this marginalized section of the society owing to limited resources. The situation of elderly women residing in these areas is getting worst day by day because of triple jeopardy i.e. being old, being poor and being women. It is widely acclaimed that Indian society is patriarchal one so women of this country have to face gender discrimination throughout their lives. Through the literature review, it was noticed that much of the research targeted elderly people in general, not much work has been done in the field of gerontology with special attention to elderly women as they are always considered as a burden on their family. The findings of the present study thus provided a new dimension to the existing literature in this area. Research of this nature is significant because it discusses the problems and challenges faced by elderly women of marginalized community in their daily lives. It was observed that people hardly pay attention towards these issues because of negligence. So, this study was done having an aim to bring in light the problems faced by the elderly people particularly the elderly women of the slums areas. This research places itself into the field of feminist studies, which provide space for multidisciplinary intellect to engage with each other. Here, problems of elderly women are studied from a feminist perspective, placing elderly women at the center of analysis, which enhance the significance of the present research.

## **DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

- The study was limited to 50 elderly women in slum areas of Aligarh city.
- The researcher had to limit the data collection period to 2 months due to dearth of time.

## **RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

Old age is a noteworthy period of anyone for their life. Elders should not just confirm their „survival“ rather they must ensure their productivity and enjoy an equitable standard of life. Elderly women in slum areas of Aligarh City are living in these areas with lack of

basic facilities such as shelter, food, clothes, water, sanitation etc. as well as the absence of various kinds of securities like social, economical, health and emotional, etc.

## **PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES OF ELDERLY WOMEN**

### **LIVING CONDITION OF ELDERLY**

The data which is collected for the present study reveals that each and every respondent of this particular study are living in „jhuggi-jhopries" made with bamboos and curtains. These elderly women reside in these areas without any proper facilities like electricity connection, water supply, drainage system, toilet facility etc. These elderly women have to arrange everything for fulfilling these requirements, even when it should be provided by the local municipal corporation. They use candles for lighting their houses, fetch water from municipal water supply or from government hand pump for their own use. These respondents have to use either open spaces or makeshift toilets for relieving themselves. Drainage system of the area of slum is in a deplorable state, due to lack of proper maintenance. These problems have led to these areas rising as epitomes of „poverty“.

### **HEALTH STATUS OF ELDERLY**

It is observed that respondents of these areas suffer from different kind of diseases such as arthritis, hearing loss, vision problem, asthma, diarrhea etc. It is interesting to know that they are not aware of any kind of symptoms of any diseases due to lack of awareness and negligence. Mindset of these elderly women also plays an important role in the negligence of their health. Younger generation of these areas are busy in their own daily struggles so they neglect the issues of their elder parents; especially elder mothers by stating that „these problems are the part of old age". Less interaction between children and parents means that the elderly women can not share their emotions with their children. Most of the respondents of this study believe in divine healing more rather than medical treatment. A limited number of respondents (only 17) take any sort of treatment for their disease. But owing to lack of financial resources they are not able to continue their treatment completely. They also face problems in transportation, communicating with the physician and; as mentioned above; arrangement of funds, which further prevents them from receiving proper medical attention and care. It is also seen that respondents of these areas are less supported by their family members at the time of sickness.

### **FINANCIAL STATUS OF ELDERLY**

Financial needs of elderly women in old age are a major concern for them. In old age, women are mostly dependent on others for fulfilling their financial needs. This is happening due to increased life expectancy of elderly women at this age. It becomes more critical when the matter shifts into slum areas because elderly women of these areas suffer a lot of financial crises throughout their life. In old age they have limited sources of income, which restricts them from meeting their daily requirements. The young generation of slum areas fulfills their daily needs with lots of difficulties so it is very difficult to think that how they would take any responsibility of their elderly parents particularly elderly mothers. So, elderly women of these areas seek to engage in productive work until their last physical strength because of their two square meals. It is seen that more than half of the respondents of this study are involved in different kind of low paying jobs for procuring two square meals. While 13 respondents reported that due to their physical incapability, they are unable to engage in any kind of productive work so these elderly women have to be dependent on helpers for their foods. It is observed that some of these women (13) have to spend some nights empty stomach. It is very painful that they have to suffer all this at that stage of life which requires special consideration and precaution.

### **EMOTIONAL SUPPORT OF ELDERLY**

In this study, it was ascertained that majority of the respondents have less interaction with their children as well as grandchildren. 34 respondents of this study are widows. These women could have shared their pain and problems with their husbands but now they feel anxiety because of the lack of partner with whom they could share all these feelings. These elderly women have been emotionally attached to their near and dear ones throughout their life. Remaining of the respondents of this study faces different kind of problems. They always face mood swings of their husbands whenever their husbands are short on money; drunk etc. Elderly women of these areas are always less emotionally supported by anyone. Younger generation of these areas is busy in their own lives and earning money so they have limited time to share with their family (wife and children). They pay even less attention to their elderly mothers. This phenomenon neglects elderly women in terms of emotional support. That is the reason of isolation and marginalization of elderly women which elderly women suffer in old age by their own kith and kin. Emotional support is much required at this age. This is helpful for elderly women to feel relaxed at this stage of their lives.

### **SOCIAL SECURITY OF ELDERLY WOMEN**

Elderly women are exposed to lead a life full of pity because of lack of social protection. These elderly women are almost ignored by their own children so they do not suppose any kind of social security from them. At this age it is difficult for them to earn money and survive by themselves. If these elderly women engage in any kind of productive work, they earn limited amount of money by which they can hardly meet their daily needs. After considering all these issues, government has taken appropriate action and implemented many policies and programmes for improving the condition of elderly people of marginalized section. These policies are **National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), 1995, Integrated Programme for Older Persons (IPOP), 1992, National Policy on Older Persons (NPOP), 1999, National Council for Older Persons (NCOP), 1999, National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE), 2010**, and many others. Constitution of India also provides two Articles i.e. **Article-41** and **Article-47** which directly target elderly people. **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** is supporting elderly people by providing Old Age Homes, Day Care Centers, Mobile Medicare units, etc. These policies and programmes are providing different kind of support for elderly people in myriad ways.

On the contrary, it is found in this study that a limited no of respondents (only 21) are benefitting from any type of government assistance. While remaining respondents (29) are not getting any assistance from the government. Some of them (13 respondents) applied for it but due to incomplete documents they could not complete the process. While 16 respondents of this study could not apply for any kind of governmental assistance due to not having the required documents.

Respondents, who are receiving any governmental assistance, face lot of struggles for getting it. They suffer delayed payment of financial assistance, long queues for receiving it and many more things. Transportation is another hindrance which is faced by these elderly women. These respondents reported that illiteracy is one of the major causes of everything. Due to illiteracy they lag behind in getting any information about these aids.



## CONCLUSION

Elderly women of Aligarh slums are struggling a lot for getting basic amenities like shelter, food, clothes, water sanitation etc. They suffer from financial constraints all their lives and in old age it

is very difficult for them to obtain just two square meals. Due to their poor physical strength, these women are not capable of earning money. Health condition of elderly women residing in slum areas is even worse owing to negligence of their diseases. Elderly women of these areas accept their diseases as a compulsory part of old age. These women even do not get proper emotional support even by their own family members as a result they feel isolated. Government of India still has to go a long way to decrease the problems of elderly women who are below the poverty line. Elderly women of these areas lag behind in receiving any governmental assistance due to lack of awareness and access. Government should introduce awareness programmes for elderly people of marginalized groups which will educate them about obtaining better access to governmental policies and programmes.

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