RESEARCH ARTICLE

Socio-demographic attributes of the elderly :A gender perspective

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted in Dharwad district, Karnataka state during 2005-2008. A sample of 500 elderly was drawn from both urban and rural area, consisting both the genders. The research design was chiefly exploratory with three cohort age groups of 60-65, 66-70 and 71+. Interviews were conducted to study the functional ability as a result of aging. The interview schedule to guide the interview and to collect and record the data was developed and used during the interview. Frequency and percentages were computed for the classification of respondents. Socio-demographic profile of respondents by gender revealed that, majority of the female respondents were from 60-65 years age and, were illiterate. The employment status revealed that, housewives were of the major category.

KEY WORDS : Socio-demographic attributes, Elderly

INTRODUCTION

Biologists explain that, there is a strong genetic basis for aging. In the body, the brain ages much slower than other organs which explains why some people continue to be intellectually active even after the body becomes frail (Ramamurthi, 2002). He also explained that, chronological age is the poor indicator of aging and there is heterogeneity in speed of ageing. Bagga (2002) opined that, the educational level of an individual plays an important role in how the aged deal with the changing scenario of their life and better economic resources may help to cope with it better. The financial security alone will not solve all the problems of elder care. If people have to continue to be part of the family system they should also make suitable adaptations to changing circumstances. The gender dimension in ageing and the related aspects are also of crucial importance . The disparity between gender among the elderly exists in all the societies. These studies indicate that gender perspective among the aged is rarely studied. Hence, it was felt to focus on the gender perspective of the elderly.

With the increase in number, the older population faces a number of problems and adjusts to them in varying degrees. These problems range from absence of ensured and sufficient income to support themselves and their dependent to ill health, absence of social security, loss of social role and recognition and to the non-availability of opportunities for creative use of free time. The needs, problems and adjustment patterns of the elderly vary significantly according to their age, socio-economic status, health, living status and such other background characteristics. The health related quality of life of elderly, especially women, from rural areas, is considerably lower in India when compared to other countries. Poor nutrition, inadequate health care, socio-economic conditions and gender have been major factors explaining the ability of the elderly to maintain competence.

It is also noticed that, socio-economic and demographic variables influence the changes in functional abilities to a great extent. Hence, the elderly with various background differ in their functional ability. Assessing the socio-demographic levels of elderly would benefit the policy makers to design and modify the pension policies and retirement schemes.

METHODOLOGY

The elderly of Dharwad urban and rural area formed the sample. The rural sample was selected by locating

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villages which were around 10 KM radius from Dharwad city. Thus, there were six villages from which the data were gathered. The list of elderly population from the respective village Panchayats was obtained through voter's list and then the randomization was done by selecting the elderly from extreme ends of the villages. In the urban area , the places where the aged constantly and frequently available such as religious organization or place of worship, public parks, market places were visited. When initial contacts were established, more sample were selected by snowball sampling. Thus, a total of 500 elderly were selected as follows.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	238	47.6
Male	262	52.4
Total	500	100

The research design was chiefly exploratory. Interviews were conducted with a sample of 500 elderly men and women to study the functional ability as result of aging. The interview schedule to guide the interview and to collect and record the data was developed and used during the interview sessions. The data were collected by face to face interview method.

On perusal of standardized test, it was felt to develop a comprehensive tool to suit the sample in the present study. Since, they called for higher levels of literacy than was seemed among the elderly people. It comprised of two major parts. Part I of the schedule elicited the information on variables like socio-demographic profile, health status, leisure time activities. Part II of the schedule assessed the changes in functional ability.

Reliability of the schedule was calculated at the end of three tests conducted subsequently. Guttman's split half reliability was calculated for all the domains of functional ability as well as health and leisure time components of Part I of the interview schedule. The overall reliability of the schedule was found to be 0.77. The frequency and percentages were computed for the classification of respondents by selected variables.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

From Table 1, it is very clear that, majority of the elderly women belonged to 60-65 years age group. While elderly men belonged to 65-70 age. On the whole, the elderly from 60-65 years represented larger group as compared to other two groups.

The results presented in Table 2 revealed that, more number of elderly men were from urban area as compared to elderly women. Nearly half of the elderly women were

Table 1 : Distribution of respondents by age and gender

Age group	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
60-65 years	Male	132	55.7
	Female	105	44.3
	Total	237	100.0
66-70 years	Male	51	37.0
	Female	87	63.0
	Total	138	100.0
>70	Male	55	44.0
	Female	70	56.0
	Total	125	100.0

Table 2 : Distribution of respondents by gender and place of residence

Gender	Place of residence	Frequency	Percentage
Female	Rural	113	47.5
	Urban	125	52.5
	Total	238	100.0
Male	Rural	69	26.3
	Urban	193	73.7
	Total	262	100.0

from rural area.

Educational status (Table 3) of the respondents revealed that, a large majority of the elderly women were illiterates vs. one third of the men elderly. There was a major disparity in educational levels. Negligible percentage (2.5 %) of female elderly were educated for more than 15 years. In both male and female groups, elderly with 6-10 years of education represented larger groups.

Table 3 : Distribution of respondents by gender and level of education

Gender	Level of education	Frequency	Percentage
Female	Illiterates	137	57.6
	1-5	37	15.5
	6-10	47	19.7
	11-15	11	4.6
	>15	6	2.5
	Total	238	100.0
Male	Illiterates	88	33.6
	1-5	49	18.7
	6-10	73	27.9
	11-15	30	11.5
	>15	22	8.4
	Total	262	100.0

The percentage of elderly women in the widow category was more (57.6%), while only 10.7 per cent of the male elderly were widowers. Even among the married

Table 4 : Distribution of respondents by gender and marital status

Gender	Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Female	Widow	137	57.6
	Married and living with spouse	99	41.6
	Divorced	02	0.8
	Total	238	100.0
Male	Widower	27	10.7
	Married and living with spouse	234	89.3
	Divorced	28	10.8
	Total	262	100.0

group, a large majority (89.3 %) of the men were married and living with spouse alive. While 41.6% of elderly women were living with the other spouse alive. This trend may be because the women who were married at the younger age with a partner who was 8-10 years elder to her might have *i.e.*, while the reverse might have been true with men, that is why a large majority of male elderly were married and living with spouse. This signifies the role of spouse in adjusting with each other and importance of marriage bond as sacred as laid down by the society.

A glance at the employment status of the elderly revealed (Table 5) that women were in lower employment status as compared to the elderly men, as majority of the elderly women belonged to housewives category. It is disheartening to note that, even at this age of 60+, about 28 per cent of them were still working as coolies, and 10 per cent were retired.

While, among the men, majority *i.e.*, 40.8 per cent

Table 5 : Distribution of respondents by gender and employment status

Gender	Employment status	Frequency	Percentage
Female	Housewife	136	57.1
	Coolie	67	28.2
	Business	4	1.7
	Agriculture	7	2.9
	Retired	24	10.1
	Total	238	100.0
Male	Not working	03	1.1
	Coolie	40	15.3
	Artisans	15	5.7
	Business	42	16.00
	Agriculture	46	17.6
	Retired	107	40.8
	Doctor and lawyer	09	3.4
	Total	262	100.0

were retired, followed by agriculturists (17.6%), businessmen (16.0 %) and coolie (15.3%). Doctors and lawyers were about 3.4 per cent among men and none among women.

Head of the family status among the elderly revealed (Table 6) that even after 60 years, a large majority of the elderly men (96.6%) reported themselves as head of the family vs 31.9% elderly women. Among elderly women, 36.1 and 29.4% reported that, husband and son/daughters were head of the family, respectively.

Table 6 : Distribution of respondents by gender and responsibility of head of the family

Gender	Status of head of the family	Frequency	Percentage
Female	BIL/SIL and grandson	6	2.5
	Son/Daughter	70	29.4
	Husband	86	36.1
	Self	76	31.9
	Total	238	100.0
Male	BIL/SIL and grandson	01	0.4
	Son/Daughter	08	3.1
	Husband	-	--
	Self	253	96.6
	Total	262	100.0

A perusal at the income levels of the elderly (Table 7) revealed that percentage of the elderly women belonging to lower income level was more (44.5%) than the elderly men in the low income level (35.5%). Similarly for high income groups the same trend was observed. While more number of elderly men were in middle income group (47.3%) as compared to elderly women (34.0%).

Table 7 : Distribution of respondents by gender and income levels

Gender	Income levels	Frequency	Percentage
Female	Low income	106	44.5
	Middle income	81	34.0
	High income	51	21.4
	Total	238	100.0
Male	Low income	93	35.5
	Middle income	124	47.3
	High income	45	17.2
	Total	262	100.0

Conclusion:

It may be concluded from the results that, elderly women were in the age group of 60-65 years, while men elderly were in 65-70 years age group. The more number

of elderly women lived in rural area as compared to elderly men, and women elderly had lower educational status as majority were illiterate. The percentage of widows was more among the elderly women and as the educational status was low most of these women belonged to housewives category and they were economically dependent on others. While, among the elderly men, majority were working in a job and retired. The differences existed even in position of head of the family. A large majority of the men still were heading the family. Income levels of the elderly revealed a different picture that, more number of elderly women belonged to lower as income group while elderly men belonged to middle income group. This shows that, there exists a wide gap in the economic levels of the elderly.

The education of girl child also needs to be given stress. To upgrade the economic level of the elderly women the pension has to be increased for the elderly below poverty line apart from the widow and widower's pension.

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