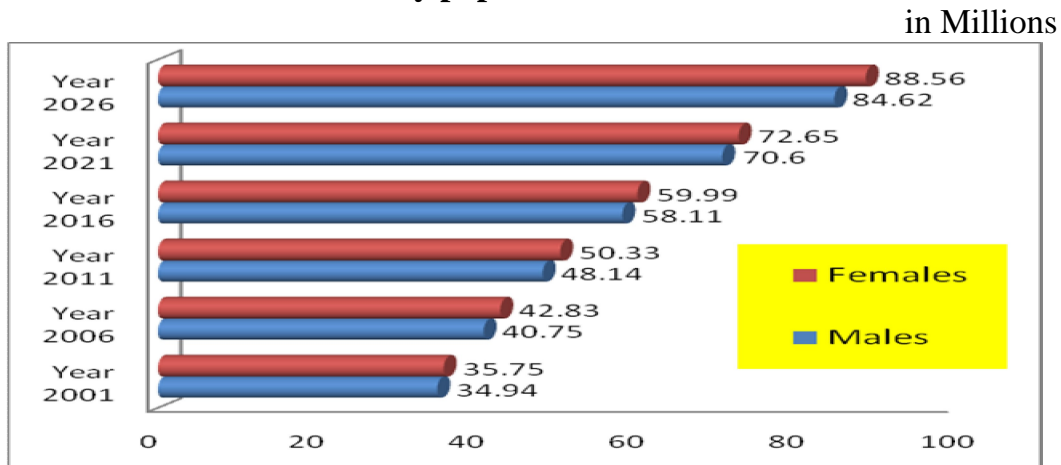


Older women in India

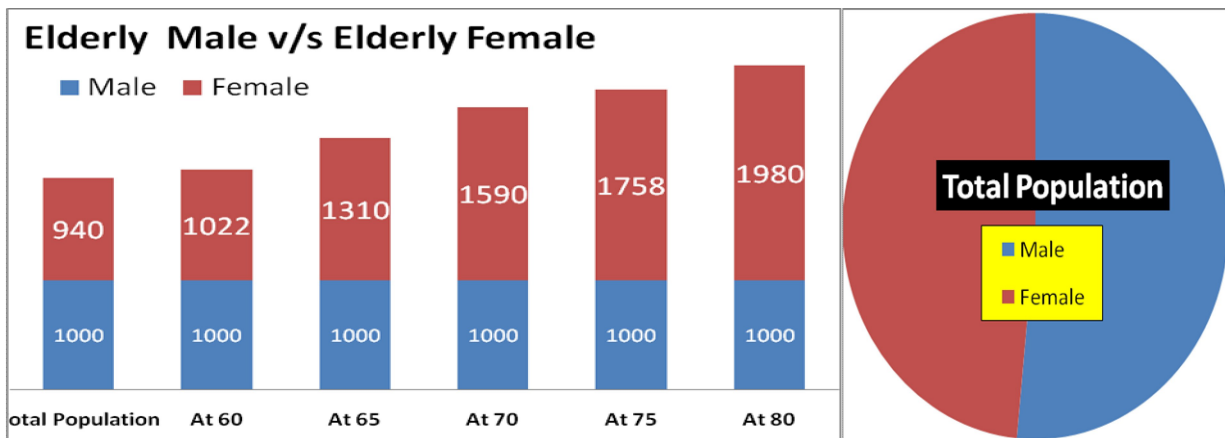
India's elderly population has already crossed 100 million mark during 2011. As per analysis of census data and projections, elderly population sex ratio is in favor of female elderly. As per the census 2011, whereas for total Indian population sex ratio is in favor of male population in ratio 940:1000, for elderly at (60+) population it's in favor of elderly women by 1022:1000.

Elderly population of India



Source: Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections constituted by the National Commission on Population, May 2006 published by the Office of the Registrar General, India.

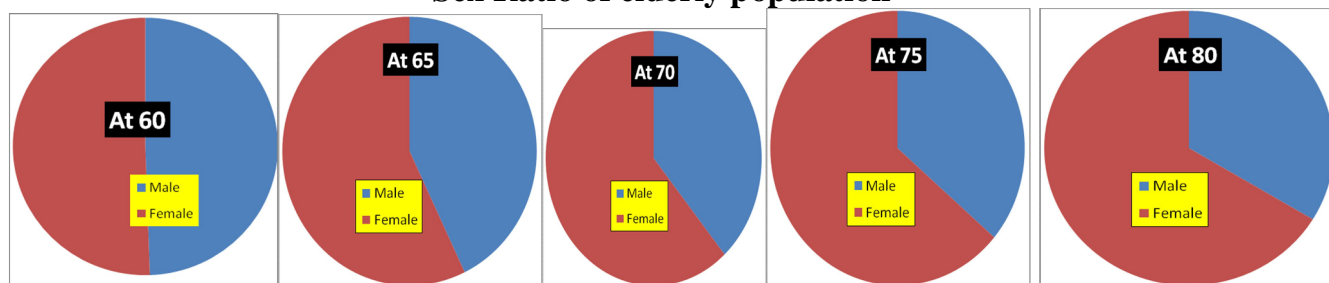
Elderly population analysis shows that in upper age groups, population of older women is increasing remarkably. At the age of 65, 70, 75 & 80 there are 1310, 1590, 1758 & 1980 elderly women respectively per 1000 elderly men.



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Sex Ratio of elderly population



We all know generally women live longer than men but the study suggests that there is a sudden acceleration in decline of the number of old men from the age of 70 onwards. Where as it has been found that the faster decline in number of old women starts only after the age of 80 years.

Source: Analysis by Agewell Research & Advocacy Centre based on Census of India's data

Major Concerns of Older Women

Destitution/ Alienation / Isolation

Marginalization/isolation or alienation in old age is among the most common issues that are affecting older women constantly. Older women, who are still living with their sons/daughters and grand-children are also suffering from emotional alienation. Due to fast changing socio-economic scenario of the country, fast paced modern life style & rapid urbanization across the country younger generations hardly interact with their elderly family members. Popularity of nuclear family system has virtually crushed strong traditional bond between grand-children & grandmothers.

Social insecurity

Older women, who live in cities, are prone to social alienation/marginalization in comparison to older women of villages. Joint family system (to a certain extent) is still alive in rural areas. Older women, who live in semi urban situations/industrial townships also find it difficult to cope with old age, particularly after their children have grown up and husbands retire. Due to lack of social protection, older women are forced to lead a life full of distress. Ignored by their own kith and kin, they don't expect any kind of social security from others.

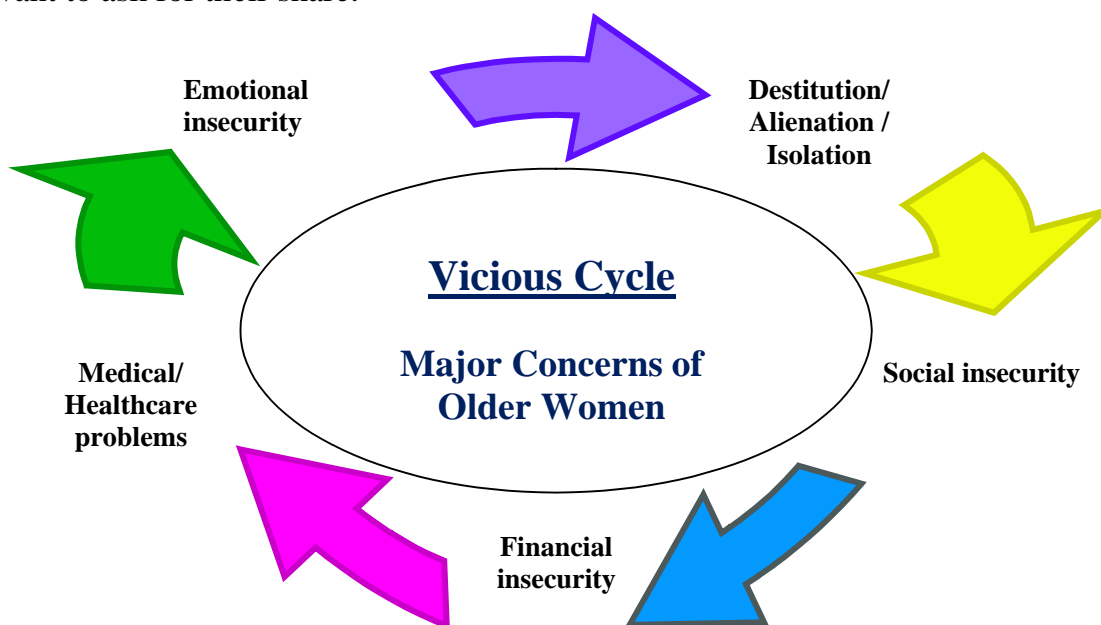


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Financial insecurity

With increased life span of older women in old age, their financial needs are emerging as a major concern. However, today, many older women have property/money but they cannot possibly use the money or take financial decisions on their own. Social traditions don't allow them to use their ancestral property / money for their own welfare. They may be rich or poor; they always have to act according to others' directives. Since they are habitual of sacrificing their own interests for the good of other family members throughout their life, in old age they don't want to ask for their share.



Medical problems

Due to negligence, lack of awareness, financial support and religious mindset of women, older women often have to face acute health problems. Since most of the older women are living within the four walls and barely come out in open public places, most of their health problems remain unnoticed. Their family ignores these – saying that in old age diseases are common. Older women living alone could not share their pain, since there is no one to lend her patient hearing. Above all, many times, due to lack of health awareness older women themselves ignore symptoms of diseases. Most of them believe more in divine powers instead of medical science. In India, still there are a few religious sects, that don't allow its followers to take particular medicines.



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Emotional insecurity

In old age most of the older women face family problems like uncomfortable relations with son & daughter-in-law, limited interaction with children, grand-children. Their daughters-in-law don't like their interference in family matters, children are busy with their jobs, and their husbands invariably have mood swings after retirement and mostly restrict their free movements.

Most old women are self conscious. In old age, women turn towards religious rituals & activities, pilgrimage, etc. after losing their life-partner or any other family members. Many are from orthodox/religious background and have been following religious lifestyle since childhood.

Since women have been emotionally attached to their near and dear ones throughout their life, in old age when they are not with them, they miss it a lot. Emotional support is much needed in old age.



Human Rights and Older Women

Older women have to face age related discrimination, mistreatment, harassment and elder abuse in their life due to lack of awareness about their rights and support system available for them in old age. Indian women have always been introvert by nature, that's why they are vulnerable and soft target of wrong doers. Human rights of the elderly women are violated from time to time. Majority of cases of Human Rights violation are due to poverty of older women.

Core poverty due to deprivation of

- Proper/Nutritional food: Ironically, older women, particularly in rural areas do not get proper/nutritional food.
- Clean potable water: Health condition of older women is affected due to non-availability of clean potable water.
- Shelter : Many poor & dejected older women are shelter-less in India.
- Sanitation : In old age sanitation is a big problem for fragile older women.

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- Health/medical care: Younger people often ignore health conditions of older women and older women are not able enough to care for their own health.

“My son & daughter-in-law, both are working. I have to look after my grown-up grandchildren all the time. My son & his wife don’t allow me to go out of home, even when they are at home. After death of my husband I am being marginalized in my own house. Sometimes it seems that I am not the owner of the house, but a care-taker. ”.

Premwati Verma, 75-year-old widow, Kanpur,

I have been fed up of mistreatment by my daughter-in-law with me. She treats me like with a servant and abuses me verbally. I left my home for many occasions but every time I returned for my sons and grandchildren. I suffer a lot in old age only for sake of my sons & grandchildren.

Noor Bano Begum, 77, Ahmadnagar, Maharashtra

Relative poverty due to deprivation of

- Literacy – Information: Most of the older women even don’t know about their rights & powers.
- Equal livelihood : Most of the older women count themselves after others.
- Leisure/recreation – family/society : They have hardly any such opportunities
- Access to rights – individual/ community: They are never taught how to fight for their rights. What they know, is how to struggle?
- Savings – personal/ family: This is distant dream for majority of older women in India.
- Dignity – Respect in family/Society: Due to their subliminal presence, older women never come in limelight.



Older women in India, a point of view

In traditional Indian society, women are treated as responsibility. Even if the parents are reluctant, they remain responsible for the girl child invariably because of social pressures. With her, their responsibilities also grow. After marriage, women play crucial role in their

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respective families which automatically ensures basic social security cover for them as long as they are active and useful for the family.

But in old age this equation is completely reversed for most women. With their growing age, their role in family decreases up to the negligible extent. It is when women need stronger security cover, instead their support infrastructure, emotional connects and security cover gets thinner by every passing day. Their family members don't understand their own responsibilities towards old women and their presence in the family/society is often ignored, they invariably become redundant for all concerned.

With children settled in their own lives, their husbands remain mostly aloof primarily because of their own pre-occupation and or die before them. This is the age, when they need a lot; instead they have to suffer a lot. With no social security, no gainful engagement opportunities, no old age related support and facilities, no shelter, no or fewer rights and above all, no awareness... their life is full of physical, social, emotional, financial insecurities... they suffer silently.. but cannot afford to complain, essentially because there is usually no one to listen to their complaints. Many older women suffer destitution... destitution of loneliness and heartfelt sense of redundancy.

Since there is no ray of hope in their present life and a long life ahead, they find themselves completely lost. At this juncture, they have no option but to adjust themselves in whatever circumstances. In these adverse circumstances, older women want to remain useful within the four walls of their own families till the last breath. For the sake of a peaceful and respectful life, they have to compromise with all odd situations and never complaint about anything.

Are we concerned?



Till few decades ago, when average age of women in India was less than 60, condition of older women was never even mentioned. But now with fast growing elderly population, increased life expectancy and higher percentage of elderly women in Indian elderly population, issues concerning elderly women cannot be ignored any longer. If ignored today, this may turn in to a major social development challenge.

Focus should be shifted on older women. Since they have specific needs they need special attention.

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