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**Thesis Abstract**

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS IN OLD AGE: INDIVIDUAL  
COPING MECHANISMS AND SOCIETAL RESPONSES**

Thesis Submitted for the Award of the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work

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## **Introduction**

Old age is part of our life cycle. Older persons have always been an integral and important part of the family in Indian society. Fast social and cultural changes have placed the elderly in a highly vulnerable position. Declining social support and failing health expose the aged to various socio-economic problems. Given this, the problem of ageing appears to be a major issue in present-day society. Age-related degenerative changes at social, physical and economic level have an important bearing on adjustment in old age. The situation is further complicated by rapid changes in the social matrix of the society. If these problems are not dealt effectively they can become source of tension and stress for the old people. This is what constitutes the substantive concern of the present study.

## **Objectives**

The purpose of the present study is to look into the situation in which the elderly live and the modality they have to get over the situations and problems. Motivated by these considerations, the study has the following main objectives:

- (1) To study the situation of the elderly in low socio-economic neighbourhoods in the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi;
- (2) To examine the economic, health and social problems of the elderly living in the family and community;
- (3) To look into various strategies adopted by the elderly to cope with their problems;
- (4) To describe and evaluate the range of social services available in the NCT of Delhi and
- (5) To suggest ways and means through which the situation of the elderly in the urban areas could be further improved

## **Findings**

### **Socio-economic Profile**

The demographic and socio-economic profile brings out that the average age of the elderly persons in the study sample is 68 years and the majority of them are illiterate. Most of the households are nuclear family group yet, the average size of the household is found to be of 7.4 members. More than a half of the respondents (66.7 percent) currently are not involved in any economic pursuit and those found working are engaged in self-employment or else depending on the children for the gratification of their needs. Looking at the health status, the aged are found grappling with old age ailments like experiencing progressive weakness, vision and hearing difficulty, arthritis, digestive problems etc. Sons, daughters and spouses not only provide care and support to the parents but also manage the expenditure on their medicare. The social life of the elderly is quite active as more than three-fourths of them are contributing in household activities. Many elderly report to have been involved in household decision-making affairs. However, gender differences have remained unfavourable for women.

### **Socio-Economic Problems**

The analysis of socio-economic problems faced by the elderly highlights that most of them experience financial difficulty and income is most important item of deprivation in their life after withdrawing from work life. Fifty percent of the elderly have to stop their medical treatment. This situation emotionally upset them but belief in religion help in maintaining social integrity. Seeking support from family members is most preferred strategy to cope with income inadequacy. Likewise, ill-health has disabling effect in the sense it restrict the mobility of older persons in the neighbourhood, their ability to work as well as their social and family life. In their efforts to overcome ill-health, treatment is best strategy followed by the elderly and also seek assistance of family members for managing their work. The third dimension of their life is inter-personal relationship. This has also got changed after attaining the status of non-earning member and main reason attributed is high dependency on children. Towards this, the elderly maintained non-interfering behaviour. On encountering conflicting situation the most preferred strategy of coping adopted by them is restraint or non-interference in family affairs. Economic

dependency is responsible for perpetuating intergenerational conflict. Even the life-style does not remain the same and deteriorating physical condition force them to reorganize life long attitudes and habits but is perceived as normal change in old age. It sad to know that for most of the elderly, the satisfaction of primary needs remain their main concern and other higher sets of needs are not even thought in their remote dreams. It is this insecurity due to which they have not thought of any specific plans for the future life. The dependency arising out of financial and health problems is noticeably higher among women and consequently face more familial or social problems than the men.

### **Societal Responses**

The first organized effort was the convening of World Assembly on Ageing in 1982 and adopting the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing. Later on, United Nations designated October 5 as International Day of Older Persons in the year 1991 and declared 1999 as the International Year of Older persons.

As a consequence of international initiatives, Indian government formulated and implemented National Policy on Older Persons in 1999, framed some age friendly legislations and granted concessions and privileges to the aged. Nevertheless, efforts done so far are merely the policy matters and any concrete welfare and development activities have not been designed so far. The three neighbourhoods covered in the present study truly reflect the poor attitude of governmental and non-governmental organizations as they lack focus on gerontological issues. Hence, the golden age group remains underserved. On the other side, even the respondent's uphold the family and relies most exclusively on familial resources for survival. Neighbours, states are all subservient to institution of family. Though a half of them stressed on the need to do financial planning for happy and satisfying ageing.