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Socio-Economic Situation of the Rural Oldest-Old Females:Anthropological Study in Paschim Medinipur District, West Bengal

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Abstract

In India, as well as in states across the world the population ageing increases very rapidly. Ageing is a natural process in a life cycle. The paper outlines the status of research on Super Senior Citizen in India and provides a situational analysis of Super Senior Citizen in terms of economic and social factors. The present paper aims to highlight the socio-economic milieu of the oldest-old women residing in different gram panchayats under Medinipur Sadar Block of Paschim Medinipur district, West Bengal, India. The areas, which were explored, include some basic demographic features as well as other features like housing and living arrangement, different sources of financial support, and so on. However, the study demonstrate that, some positive scenario mentioned above the oldest old women under study area are seriously in disadvantageous position in many respects, which may be exemplified with the following facts: they are far less educated; economically more dependent; most of them are without work; a very good number of them do not get/receive any pension from any sources.

Introduction

India has the succeeding largest elderly population. The fast ageing of the population can create economic and social challenges for the society.[5] One the other hand, ageing can cause social and economic imbalance in the society and family as it affects normal life by affecting, composition and character of the family.[6,2,18,21] Elderly economic situation deals with the housing and living arrangement, different source of financial support; in addition, elderly financial support deals with different types of pension, income from retail shop, spouse, relatives and so on.

However, oldest old is a special group in human populations who always exist in terms of biological, social, or chronological where age has been varying and unclear. The term "Oldest-old" generally used to refer to the population aged 85 and older, was coined for a 1984 session on this population at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). But limitations of survey data resulting small sample sizes of the oldest population and which, forced to describe the oldest-old as the age of 80 and above.[16]

Since last decade the Election Commission of India has been started to publish separate voter list for the Indian citizens belonging to 80 years and above age. In the year 2011 these elderly people have been categorized as 'Super Senior Citizen' by the Department of Finance, Government of India for the purpose of income tax assessment. (ENS Economic Bureau, The India Express, New Delhi, March 01, 2011).[7]

The oldest old have the highest age prevalence of morbidity, disability, and institutionalization of any age group, the term does perhaps imply the progression of frailty associated with Neugarten's (1974) conceptualization of the "young old" (60-70 yrs of old) and "old old" (70-80 yrs of old).[10] But, unlike Neugarten's concept, which joined age, health, and social characteristics. Oldest-old simply defined the chronological age group of the people whose age 80 and above.

The Oldest old are much more likely to need help in daily living than the younger elderly. The oldest old consume medical care and other services and benefits of Government and private transfers far out of proportion to their numbers. It is evident that the proportion of individuals leading active daily lives declines and the disability rates increases dramatically with age among the oldest old.[22] Because the oldest old subpopulation is growing much faster than any other age group and because they are the most likely group to need medical and social services, it is necessary to investigate the demographic, socio-economic and health status of the oldest-old.[22] In a few countries, notably the United States and a few European countries, efforts have been made to attract the attention of academics and policy makers to the circumstances of the oldest-old.[17,3,20]. Elsewhere in the world, on the contrary, little attention has been paid to ensure statistically sufficient representation of the oldest-old in national surveys, and most studies on the elderly include few or no subjects aged 80 and older.[8]

A variety of studies highlighted the fastest growing elderly population affects the Indian economy and society. In India major aspects covered by the researchers on gerontology primarily centre around the economic crises, family environments and care, extra familial rehabilitation and living conditions under such rehabilitation, abuse, leisure and recreation, socio-psychological adjustment, health status and so on of the elderly population who living in different parts of India.[4] However, these studies considered elderly as a single age category (age 60 years and above) and therefore, did not consider the problems of oldest old population separately despite the fact that the octogenarian, nonagenarian and centenarians sub-population were very much in existence in the demographic scenario of India from the remote past.

Many elderly persons suffer from social, economic and health insecurity in old age and fall short of the basic amenities.[12,13,1] The elderly populations also suffer from socio-economic insecurity as they fall short of adequate income, since the formal safety net reaches out only to a minor section of the population.[11,15,19]

In 1997, M.Z. Khan's studies in the city of New Delhi entitled 'Elderly in Metropolis' only dealt with the demographic and socio-economic aspects of the elderly9. But he did not focus anything about the health aspects of the elderly residing in New Delhi. The socio-cultural and economic aspects have a bearing on the relation Ramamurthi, 2002.[14] The situation varies according to the economic condition and the social status of the aged in the family and the society. The socioeconomic condition of the elderly in India is in a bad shape. The majority of the elderly are deprived of the basic necessities and thus in chronic poverty.[13] Finally, it may be said that none of the above mentioned studies considered 80 years above aged elderly (referred as oldest-old in different literatures) as a special category while dealing various issues of the elderly population of India.

Studies of ageing are one of the most interdisciplinary fields in Gerontology. However, studies of ageing are also relevant in the field of anthropology, sociology, psychology, economics, and other disciplines. The study of human ageing in anthropology is to offering considerable challenge and potential for the future researches. Thus, the present authors considered the problems of the oldest-old from the socio-economic perspectives. Therefore, present paper considered as matter of micro-level study and an attempt has been made to highlight the socio-economic situation of the oldest old women in rural location, since such study is very limited or may be almost absent in the field of social gerontological as well as anthropological studies in India.

Materials and Methods
The present study has been conducted among the oldest old (80 years and above) populations across both the sexes distributed over seventy villages under five Gram Panchayat of Sadar Block in the district of Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal, India. The Gram Panchayets are namely Dherua, Chaandra, Bonpura, Panchkhuri I, Panchkhuri II.

For the purpose of locating and sampling the oldest-old population residing in the villages mentioned above the present researcher at the first stage downloaded the voter list of the Assembly Constituency no 236 uploaded in their official website by the Election Commission of India in the year 2015. This list, under its different part number, bears the name, age, sex and address of the voters residing in the villages under above referred five Gram Panchayats.

It appears from the said voter lists that there are altogether 606 'oldest old' people residing in the above referred villages among whom 292 are male and 314 are female. However, for the present study the researchers selected 50 oldest-old female from each of the five Gram Panchayats respectively using S+ random sampling table which formed the sample size of 250 respondents.

In case of sampling of respondents the provisions were made for one substitutes from each village so as to replace the same in case of the originally sampled respondent were not available, unwilling or physically unfit to respond during the field survey. After the sampling of the respondents a door to door survey was made to locate the specific address and/or resident of each sampled person. It was initially difficult to gain access to those sampled elderly persons owing to their special fears of crime or exploitation. A few of our study participants expressed concern that their responses to our questions/interview may create misunderstanding within the family. However, such difficulties an over cum with the help and cooperation of the local Club and /or Gram Panchayat members.

Data on socio-economic background of the individual respondent have been collected by interview technique with the help of household census survey and structured questionnaire schedules.

Measuring the socio-economic condition of rural oldest-old women rigorous difficulties and it may be miserable to research, as well as slow down to policy making. In this paper we think about advantageous characteristics of socio-economic status measures in studies of oldest old female population under study area and the strengths and weaknesses of the main indicators to measure the socio-economic situation.

Results and Discussions
Table-1 deals with the demographical aspects of the respondents under study. From this table it is revealed that in case of 'Age Group' wise distribution, among the total number of the respondents maximum number of oldest old females has been found in the age group of 80 – 84 years, which 43.20% of the total number of the respondents and followed by age group 85-89 has 32.80% of the total number of the respondents. Similarly, 19.20% espondents belongs to the age group of 90 – 94 and 4.80 % respondents belong in the age 94 and above. Thus, the age group distribution may be illustrated that number of oldest old female in higher age group has been decreasing gradually.

In case of '*Religion*' wise distribution of the respondents, the Table-1 exhibits that the maximum number of oldest old female has been found as Hindus religion which represents 75.20% respondents. Similarly, among the remaining respondents, 16.80% has Muslim, Christianity has

Table 1

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES	NO OF PERSONS (N)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Age Group		
80 – 84	108	43.20
85 – 89	82	32.80
90 – 94	48	19.20
94+	12	4.80
Religion		
Hindu	188	75.20
Muslim	42	16.80
Christianity	3	1.20
Other	17	6.80
Marital Status		
Married	57	22.80
Unmarried	3	1.20
Widow	178	71.20
Separated	12	4.80
Educational standard		
Non-literate	64	25.60
Ability to sign	78	31.20
I – IV	57	22.80
V – X	34	13.60
S.F.	17	6.80

1.20%. However, remaining 6.80% respondents has tribal religion which includes Santal, Munda and Lodha tribal communities.

In case of '*Marital Status*' wise distribution, it is revealed from the Table-1 that most of the oldest old women were widow and they constitute 71.20%. The number of married oldest old female (i.e. spouse is alive) constitute 22.80%. The separated and unmarried oldest old female respectively constituted 4.80% and 1.20%. It's interesting to note that not a single case of divorce has not found under study area.

In case of '*Educational Standard'* wise distribution, it is exposed from the Table-1 that 25.60% respondent illiterate and 31.20% respondent has the ability to sign, whereas, 22.80% respondent has been attended the school i.e. class I-IV and 13.60% respondent has been attended the high school i.e. class V-X. But, 6.80% respondent passed School Final examination. Therefore, the educational status of the rural oldest-old female indicated that approx.

60 years ago the rural areas of undivided Medinipur district conscious for their education level.

Table-2 exhibits that in case of '*Sources of Financial Support*'. However, source of income of the respondents deals with earnings, private and public pensions which refers the economic situation. Table-2 expressed 41.20% respondent has been financially dependent on different types of pension whereas, 19.20% respondent has been dependent on their sons and their husbands. It's further revealed from the table that 12.80% respondent has been dependent on their respective daughters. But, 4.40% respondent has been dependent on their respective relatives, whereas 3.20% respondents financially depended on their own small scale retail shop.

The Table-2 also reveals the '*Sources of Pension*', where, 4.85% respondent received pension due to the death of their spouses who were in the Govt. services and 2.91% respondent received their own pension after their retirement from the Govt. services. But some person received pension for

both the reasons and which simultaneously included both the categories namely '*Own Pension after retirement from Govt. Services*' and '*Govt.* Pension of respective spouses after their death'. The table also depicts that 61.17% respondent received 'Widow Pension' and 31.07% received '*Old Age Pension*'. It may be mentioned in this context that said two types of pensioned under the scheme of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Govt.

of India. Therefore, it's pertinent to mentioned here that very few respondents financially dependent on two or more than two economic sources and thus, they included in more than one category under the heading of '*Sources of Financial Support*'. That's why the total number of respondents under the heading of '*Sources of Financial Support'* and which exceeds the actual number of sampled respondents.

Table 2

VARIABLES	NO. OF PERSONS (N)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Source of Financial Support		
Spouse	48	19.20
Pension	103	41.20
Sons	48	19.20
Daughters	32	12.80
Own small scale retail shops	8	3.20
Other relatives	11	4.40
Source of Pension		
Own Pension after retirement from Govt. services	3	2.91
Govt. pension of respective spouses after their death	5	4.85
Widow pension	63	61.17
Old age pension	32	31.07
Amount of Pension (in Rs.)		
Below 1000	95	92.23
2000- 3000	0	0.00
3001-4000	0	0.00
4001-5000	0	0.00
5001-6000	3	2.91
6001-7000	0	0.00
7001-8000	0	0.00
8001/- and above	5	4.85
Financial/ Economic Dependency		
Independent	32	12.80
Partially Dependent	141	56.40
Fully Dependent	77	30.80

It appears from the Table-2 that about 92.23% respondent received less than Rs. 1000/- per month as *old-age pension* or as *widow pension* which sanctioned by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Govt. of India. The data clearly demonstrated that majority of oldest old female dependent on *old-age pension* or as *widow pension*

under study area. That refers Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Govt. of India has been played important role for elderly population. Further, revealed from Table-2 that post-retirement monthly service pension amount ranging from Rs. 5001/- to Rs. 6000/- which received by 2.91% respondent and Rs. 8,001/- and above received by 4.85% respondent.

The Table-2 exposed that in case of '*Economic Dependency*', 12.80 % respondent has been economically independent whereas, 56.40% respondent economically partially independent and 30.80% respondent economically dependent.

Table-3 deals with the aspects of '*Housing Arrangements*' and '*Living Arrangements*' of the respondents under study. In the case of Housing Arrangements of the respondent revealed that 26% respondent lived in their own houses, 38.80% respondent lived in their respective son's house; whereas, 19.20% respondent lived in their married daughter's house and remaining 11.20% respondent lived in rented house but, 4.80% respondent lived in their respective neighbour's house without any rent.

In the case of *Living Arrangements* of the respondents, Table-3 exposed that 15.20% respondent lived with their respective spouse, 46.80% respondent lived jointly with their respective married son; whereas, 11.20% respondent lived along with their respective unmarried son. It's further revealed from table that 19.20% respondent lived with their married daughters and 2.80% respondent lived with their unmarried daughters. But the noticeable fact 4.80% respondent lived in solitary.

Moreover, the above discussion stated that majority of the oldest-old female faced financial poverty because most of them were not in a position to earn money. However, their savings, if any, that's not enough to meet their day to day expenses and the financial status associated with their financial dependency. Therefore, the present study stated that financial dependency closely related with both the housing arrangement and living arrangement of the female oldest old persons under study area.

Table 3

VARIABLES	NO. OF PERSONS (N)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Housing Arrangements		
Neighbour's House	12	4.80
Own House	65	26.00
Rented house	28	11.20
Son's house	97	38.80
Married Daughter's House	48	19.20
Living Arrangements		
Only with Spouse	38	15.20
With married Sons	117	46.80
With unmarried Sons	28	11.20
With married daughter	48	19.20
With unmarried daughter	7	2.80
Living alone	12	4.80

Conclusion

In recent years, aging studies have become central importance in anthropological research. Therefore, the study provides a socio-economic portrait of the oldest old female who residing in different villages under Medinipur Sadar Block of Paschim Medinipur district in West Bengal who is likely to need assistance from programmes organized by the Government both at the State as well as at Central level. Marital status stated most of the oldest old were widow and minimum oldest old female separated divorced case totally absent. These features reflected on the stability and life pattern among the oldest old female under study areas.

The study also illustrated that good number of oldest old female achieved school final level of education about 50 years ago when undivided Medinipur district was little connected with the places having the high school study center which deserves special mention.

However, despite some positive scenario the oldest old female of Paschim Medinipur district has been seriously in disadvantageous position in many respects, which may be exemplified with the following facts: they are far less educated; economically more dependent; a very good number of them (about 59% respondents) did not get/receive pension from any sources. Moreover, among pensioners about 92% respondents received pension below Rs. 1000/- per month and about 50% respondent relies on their spouse and children for financial support. Thus, this fact may be considered as the presence of thick family bondage between the oldest old female and their children.

Finally, the present study may be helpful to raise the different issues on social dimension of ageing studies in anthropology as well as in gerontology to the study of ageing seem to offer considerable potential for the future research.

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