

Economic Security for the Old-Age Population in India: Measurement across States

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1. Background and Objective:

If economic security is defined as “the anxiety produced by a lack of economic safety, i.e. by an inability to obtain protection against subjectively significant potential economic losses” (Osberg 1998), then the older population definitely experience disproportionately higher economic insecurity in comparison to the rest of the population. This is due to the reason that older persons remain as the society’s most vulnerable group in with limited possibilities of work and income opportunities, inadequate assets or savings, and furthermore not getting enough social protection and health support. Since the retirement benefits and old-age pension generally remain available mainly in the organized sector, resources to sustain adequate income security turn out to be insufficient in the end of the life-cycle in many developing countries. The number and the proportion of India's elderly are experiencing growth and are currently being visualized as one of the most significant social transformations of the twenty-first century. According to a recent publication, titled ‘Elderly in India 2021’, the technical group on population projections for India and States 2011-2036 arrived at an estimate of nearly 138 million elderly persons in India in 2021 comprising of 67 million males and 71 million females (GOI-MOSPI 2021). In terms of growth, the proportion of population in the age bracket of 60 years or more has increased from 5.6% in 1961 to 10.1% in 2021 and is likely to increase to 13.1% in 2031. It is further projected that the number of elderly females in India will exceed the number of males in 2031.

Several studies and reports have pointed that large numbers of old-age population in India undergo deprivations on account of socio-economic and access to health support. That is because, a high proportion of persons in various states of India face financial hardship in old age as most of them are not in a position to earn their livelihood. Further, India does not have a universal pension program and is ranked at the bottom of the Global Pension System Ranking. A recent GOI study that provided the Quality of Life for Elderly Index across Indian states and union territories observed wide-ranging variations both on the size of elderly population as well as in the well-being indicators. It is however interesting to observe that there has not been any conclusive result on the issue whether women in India face greater challenges in economic insecurity among the older adults. It may be recalled that women in India in any case undergo gender disparities on account of access to work and equal pay, along with the social norm that they had to participate in various unpaid family work. In this paper we propose to examine the gender disparities in the economic insecurity and health status for the older women in major states of India.

2. Methodology and Plan of Study: The main objective of this paper is to examine the gender differences in the economic insecurity and health status for the older women across major states

of India. Our analysis proceeds in two steps; we first examine the inequalities across states, and subsequently examine the patterns of gender differences within the states of India. To elaborate, we compare the indicators on economic independence, extent of financial supporting by family and status on health and illness for the male and females across the 30 states of India. We subsequently use these cross-sectional data to measure the parity between adult male and female well-being across states of India. Other than observing the variations and disparities, we would undertake some correlation and regression analysis on the links between family composition and gender-wise old-age support level.

3. Data Source: We would use the recent publication: Elderly in India (GOI-MOSPI, 2021) for data on aspects like state of economic independence, category of persons financially supporting the aged person and illness or otherwise by their perception about current state of health.

4. Policy Implications:

Women in different states of India already face gender disparity in their access to nutrition requirements, access to education, work and pay opportunities and health support. There is a need to consider the income security of the older female population for providing them an enabling environment. The results of our examination can provide some useful insights on the issue.