



(In Special Consultative Status with the
ECOSOC at United Nations since 2011)
(In association with UN-DPI-NGO)

Status Of Accessibility and Infrastructure In India

With Special Focus On
Participation Of Older People
In Public Life And Decision-Making
MAY 2024

An Agewell Foundation Study

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AGEWELL RESEARCH & ADVOCACY CENTRE

(For Needs & Rights of Older people)

A

Study Report on

**STATUS OF ACCESSIBILITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE
IN INDIA**

With Special Focus on

**PARTICIPATION OF OLDER PEOPLE IN PUBLIC LIFE
AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES**

MAY 2024

By

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INTRODUCTION

ACCESSIBILITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

India, like many countries, is experiencing a demographic shift with a rapidly aging population. By 2050, it is estimated that over 347 million Indians will be aged 60 years and above. While this demographic transition brings forth numerous opportunities, it also presents significant challenges, particularly in ensuring accessibility and inclusivity for older people. Across the nation, older individuals encounter various barriers that hinder their participation in social, economic, and cultural activities. Addressing these accessibility issues is crucial for promoting active aging and ensuring the well-being of older citizens.

HEALTHCARE INFRASTRUCTURE IN INDIA

India's healthcare infrastructure is vast and diverse, yet it faces significant challenges in accessibility, affordability, and quality. The country boasts a mix of public and private healthcare facilities, ranging from primary health centers to tertiary hospitals. However, the distribution of these facilities is uneven, with urban areas typically having better access compared to rural regions.

Primary healthcare services are provided through a network of government-run health centers, aiming to cater to the basic healthcare needs of the population. These centers often face resource constraints, including shortages of medical staff, equipment, and essential medicines. Consequently, there is a heavy reliance on the private sector for healthcare services, leading to disparities in quality and affordability.



At the secondary and tertiary levels, India has several prestigious medical institutions renowned for their advanced treatments and expertise. However, these facilities are primarily concentrated in major cities, making them inaccessible to many rural residents. Additionally, the high cost of treatment in private hospitals often puts quality healthcare out of reach for large segments of the population.

A recent report by the World Health Organization (WHO) highlighted that India has only 0.5 public hospital beds per 1000 population. India needs 3.5 million additional hospital beds to adequately serve the healthcare needs of the population.

Improving healthcare infrastructure in India requires addressing various systemic issues, including inadequate funding, inefficient resource allocation, and a shortage of skilled healthcare professionals. Initiatives such as Ayushman Bharat, aimed at expanding health coverage and establishing Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs) in rural areas, are steps in the right direction but require sustained efforts to achieve meaningful impact.

In India, many steps have been taken to ensure elderly friendly infrastructure across the country. However, in view of ever-growing population of older persons, much more needs to be done.

HEALTHCARE ACCESSIBILITY

Access to healthcare services is one of the critical concerns for older people in India. While the country boasts of a vast healthcare network, older persons often face barriers in accessing timely and affordable healthcare. Long waiting times, distant healthcare facilities, and limited availability of geriatric care services pose significant challenges. Strengthening primary healthcare infrastructure, training healthcare professionals in geriatric care, and implementing telemedicine solutions can improve healthcare accessibility for older individuals, particularly those residing in rural and underserved areas.



TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE IN INDIA

India's transport infrastructure encompasses a wide range of modes, including roadways, railways, airways, and waterways. The country's extensive road network is the backbone of its transport system, connecting remote villages to major urban centers. However, congestion, poor maintenance, and safety concerns plague many roads, hindering efficient transportation and economic growth.

The Indian Railways, one of the world's largest rail networks, plays a crucial role in passenger and freight transport. While it provides an affordable and accessible mode of travel for millions, infrastructure upgrades are needed to enhance safety, speed, and capacity. Projects such as the Dedicated Freight Corridors aim to modernize rail infrastructure and improve freight logistics.



India's air transport sector has witnessed significant growth in recent years, with the emergence of several domestic and international airports. However, congestion and capacity constraints at major airports remain a challenge, necessitating investments in expansion and modernization.

Overall, enhancing transport infrastructure in India requires a multi-pronged approach, including increased investment, technology adoption, regulatory reforms, and improved coordination between various stakeholders. A robust and efficient transport network is essential for driving economic growth, promoting trade and commerce, and enhancing connectivity and accessibility for all citizens, including older people.

One of the foremost challenges faced by older individuals in India is transportation. Many older persons rely on public transport systems, yet these often lack adequate facilities for accessibility. Buses and trains may lack ramps or lifts, making boarding and alighting difficult for those with mobility issues. Moreover, overcrowding and insufficient seating exacerbate the discomfort and safety concerns for older passengers. Improving public transportation infrastructure to include features such as ramps, priority seating, and accessible signage can significantly enhance mobility and independence for older individuals.



FINANCIAL AND SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN INDIA

India's financial infrastructure encompasses a wide range of institutions and services, including banks, stock exchanges, insurance companies, and regulatory bodies. The country's banking sector, dominated by public sector banks, plays a crucial role in mobilizing savings, facilitating credit flow, and supporting economic activities. However, challenges such as non-performing assets, liquidity issues, and governance lapses have underscored the need for reforms and restructuring.

India's insurance sector, comprising life, non-life, and health insurance segments, has witnessed significant growth in recent years, driven by rising awareness, regulatory reforms, and product innovation. However, penetration levels remain low, particularly in rural areas, highlighting the need for expanding access and affordability.

Social infrastructure in India encompasses education, healthcare, housing, and social welfare programs aimed at improving the quality of life and well-being of citizens. While significant progress has been made in expanding access to education and healthcare services, disparities persist, particularly across regions and socio-economic groups. Government initiatives such as the National Health Mission (NHM) seek to address these disparities through targeted interventions and investments.



In conclusion, strengthening the financial and social

infrastructure in India is essential for fostering inclusive growth, reducing poverty and inequality, and enhancing the overall quality of life. Continued investments, policy reforms, and innovative approaches are necessary to address existing challenges and build a more resilient and equitable society for all, particularly for older persons.

URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Navigating urban environments poses significant challenges for older persons, particularly those with disabilities or mobility limitations. Uneven pavements, lack of pedestrian crossings, and inadequate street lighting contribute to safety hazards and mobility restrictions. Urban planning and infrastructure development must prioritize the creation of age-friendly environments that accommodate the needs of older residents. Sidewalk repairs, installation of handrails, and creation of pedestrian-friendly zones can enhance accessibility and promote active living for older persons.

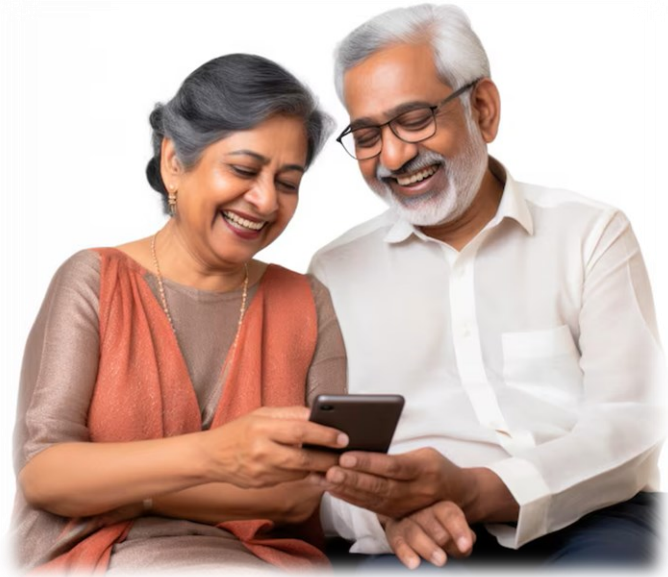
DIGITAL DIVIDE

In an increasingly digitalized world, the digital divide exacerbates accessibility challenges for older persons in India. Many older individuals lack the digital literacy skills necessary to access online services and information. Moreover, the design of digital platforms often overlooks the needs of older users, such as font size, navigation simplicity, and voice-

enabled features. Bridging the digital divide requires initiatives aimed at enhancing digital literacy among older persons and designing user-friendly digital interfaces that cater to their specific needs.

SOCIAL INCLUSION

Social isolation and loneliness are prevalent among older persons in India, exacerbated by limited access to social and recreational activities. Community centers, parks, and cultural institutions often lack facilities and programs tailored to the needs and interests of older individuals. Promoting social inclusion and active aging requires the creation of age-friendly spaces and the implementation of social support programs that facilitate social interaction and engagement among older persons.



In a nutshell, addressing accessibility issues for older people in India requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses transportation, urban infrastructure, healthcare, digital inclusion, and social support. By prioritizing the needs of older citizens and investing in age-friendly policies and infrastructure, India can foster a more inclusive society where older individuals can lead fulfilling and independent lives.

HOUSING FOR OLDER PEOPLE IN INDIA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

India's rapidly aging population underscores the pressing need for housing solutions tailored to the needs of older individuals. While traditional family structures have historically provided support for elders, changing demographics and urbanization are reshaping the landscape of elderly care in India. Housing for older people presents unique challenges and opportunities, requiring innovative approaches to ensure comfort, accessibility, and social inclusion.

One of the primary challenges in housing older people in India is the lack of age-friendly infrastructure. Many existing housing developments lack features such as wheelchair ramps, grab bars, and wide doorways, making them unsuitable for older residents with

mobility issues. Additionally, inaccessible bathroom facilities and multi-story buildings without elevators pose significant barriers to independent living for older individuals.

Furthermore, social isolation and loneliness are prevalent among older persons, particularly those living alone or in institutional settings. Housing solutions must prioritize social inclusion by incorporating communal spaces, recreational facilities, and support services that foster a sense of community and belonging among residents.

Despite these challenges, there are opportunities to improve housing options for older people in India. Government initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) aim to provide affordable housing for all, including marginalized populations such as older persons. Integrating universal design principles into housing construction and renovation projects can enhance accessibility and usability for older residents, promoting independence and quality of life.



Additionally, the growing trend of senior living communities and retirement villages presents an alternative housing model that caters specifically to the needs of older individuals. These communities offer a range of amenities and support services tailored to the preferences and requirements of older residents, including healthcare facilities, recreational activities, and social events.

In conclusion, addressing the housing needs of older people in India requires a comprehensive approach that considers accessibility, affordability, and social inclusion. By prioritizing age-friendly design principles and fostering community-based solutions, India can create housing environments that support the well-being and dignity of its aging population.

PARTICIPATION OF OLDER PEOPLE IN PUBLIC LIFE AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES IN INDIA

The participation of older people in public life and decision-making processes is crucial for ensuring inclusivity, diversity, and effective governance in India. Despite their valuable experience, wisdom, and contributions to society, older individuals often face barriers to meaningful engagement in public affairs. Addressing these barriers is essential for harnessing the potential of India's aging population and promoting their active participation in shaping the nation's future.

Ageism is one of the most disturbing challenges older people face in participating in public life. It manifests in stereotypes, discrimination, and marginalization based on age. Negative attitudes towards aging can undermine the credibility and agency of older individuals, limiting their opportunities to contribute to public discourse and decision-making processes.



Physical and cognitive limitations associated with aging can pose barriers to active participation in public activities and community events. Lack of accessibility in public spaces, inadequate transportation options, and limited technology literacy may further restrict older people's ability to engage effectively in civic life.

To promote the participation of older people in public life and decision-making processes, concerted efforts are needed to address these challenges. This includes raising awareness about the value of older individuals' perspectives and experiences, combating ageist attitudes and stereotypes, and creating inclusive spaces and opportunities for their engagement.

Active, Free, And Meaningful Participation Of Older Persons In India

Active, free, and meaningful participation of older persons in India and their representative organizations is essential for fostering inclusive societies and addressing the diverse needs of aging populations. Through grassroots initiatives and advocacy efforts, these organizations empower older individuals to engage in decision-making processes, advocate for their rights, and contribute to community development.

As champions of older persons' rights and well-being, these representative organizations are instrumental in shaping policies and programs that promote active aging, dignity, and social inclusion for older individuals in India.



Empowering older people through capacity-building initiatives, such as training programs on advocacy, leadership, and technology, can enhance their skills and confidence to actively participate in public affairs. Ensuring accessibility in public infrastructure and services, including transportation, polling stations, and digital platforms, is also essential for facilitating older people's engagement in civic activities.

Moreover, fostering intergenerational dialogue and collaboration can enrich public discourse and decision-making by bringing together diverse perspectives and fostering mutual respect and understanding across age groups.

In conclusion, promoting the participation of older people in public life and decision-making processes is essential for building a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable society in India. By recognizing and addressing the barriers that older individuals face and creating enabling environments for their engagement, India can harness their wisdom, expertise, and contributions for the collective benefit of all citizens.

OVERVIEW

Elderly-Friendly Infrastructure

India has been making efforts to improve infrastructure to be more elderly-friendly, but challenges remain in ensuring widespread accessibility and inclusivity for older persons.

In India, some cities have taken steps to make public transportation more accessible to older persons by providing priority seating, ramps for wheelchair access, and audible announcements on buses and trains. However, many public transportation systems still lack adequate infrastructure and support for older passengers.

Efforts have been made to create more age-friendly public spaces, such as parks with benches, well-maintained walking paths, and accessible toilets. However, accessibility remains a challenge in many areas due to uneven pavements, lack of ramps, and inadequate signage.

Older persons have access to healthcare services through government-run hospitals, community health centers, and private clinics. Some government schemes provide free or subsidized healthcare services for older persons.

Some hospitals and healthcare facilities have implemented measures to cater to the needs of older patients, such as priority queues, accessible entrances, and age-appropriate medical services. However, there is still a need for more elderly-friendly infrastructure in healthcare settings, especially in rural areas.

There is a growing awareness of the need for elderly-friendly housing options, such as senior living communities and accessible housing designs.

However, affordable and accessible housing remains limited, and many older persons continue to face challenges related to housing accessibility and safety.



While the digital divide among older persons remains a concern, efforts have been made to make ICT more accessible through initiatives such as digital literacy programs and the development of user-friendly technology. However, more needs to be done to ensure that older persons can fully access and utilize ICT resources.



Community-based services for older persons, such as daycare centers and older person clubs, play a crucial role in promoting social inclusion and well-being. Efforts have been made to make these services more accessible by providing transportation assistance and ensuring physical accessibility. However, there is a need for greater investment in community support services, particularly in rural areas.

Status Of Transportation, Housing, and Older Person's Access To Public Life

Efforts have been made to make public transportation more accessible to older persons by providing ramps, priority boarding, and assistance services at stations. Many state transport corporations provide concessions on bus fares for older persons. However, accessibility remains a challenge in many areas, especially in rural regions.

There has been a rise in senior living communities in urban areas, offering various amenities and services tailored to the needs of older persons, including healthcare facilities, recreational activities, and security services.

Some developers are incorporating age-friendly features into housing designs, such as grab bars, wheelchair ramps, and wide doorways. However, accessible and affordable housing options remain limited, particularly for low-income older persons.

India has both government-run and privately managed old age homes that provide accommodation, meals, healthcare, and recreational activities for older persons who are unable to live with their families or lack adequate support.

Right Of Older Persons To Adequate Housing, Including Land, Property, And Inheritance

In India, older persons have certain rights related to adequate housing, land, property, and inheritance, which are protected by various laws and policies. The Constitution of India does not explicitly mention a right to housing; however, the Supreme Court of India has interpreted the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution to include the right to adequate housing. Additionally, various government schemes and policies aim to provide affordable housing for marginalized and vulnerable groups, including older persons.



Challenges And Barriers Faced By Older Persons

In India, older persons face numerous challenges and barriers that hinder the realization of their right to accessibility, infrastructure use, and habitat. These challenges span across various domains, including transportation, housing, and access to public facilities, and are often compounded by factors such as age-related mobility limitations, socioeconomic disparities, and inadequate infrastructure development.

Role Of Older Persons In Public Life And Decision-Making Processes

Older persons enrich public life and decision-making processes with their wealth of experience, wisdom, and historical perspective. Their involvement fosters intergenerational dialogue, promotes social cohesion, and ensures that policies address the diverse needs of society. As valued contributors, older individuals play a crucial role in shaping a more inclusive and equitable future for all.

Steps Taken at the Government Level to Ensure The Participation Of Older Persons In Public Life

- India has enacted laws like the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, safeguarding senior citizens' rights and ensuring their participation in decision-making without discrimination.
- National policies such as the National Policy for Older Persons outline strategies to enhance the participation of senior citizens in public life, advocating for their inclusion and representation.
- Through local self-government bodies like Panchayats and Municipalities, older persons are encouraged to participate in decision-making processes, ensuring their voices are heard at the grassroots level.
- Government initiatives and civil society organizations conduct awareness



campaigns to challenge ageist stereotypes and promote the active involvement of older persons in public life, without discrimination.

- Programs aimed at enhancing digital literacy and advocacy skills among older persons empower them to engage effectively in decision-making processes, contributing their valuable insights and experiences.

Discrimination Against Older Persons In India

Discrimination against older persons in India is prevalent across various domains, including employment, healthcare, and social interactions. Despite constitutional guarantees of the right to equality and prohibition of discrimination (Article 14), ageism persists, leading to stereotypes, prejudice, and unequal treatment based on age. Older individuals often face barriers in accessing opportunities, services, and resources due to age-related biases. Efforts to address discrimination against older persons require legal reforms, awareness campaigns, and policy interventions to promote inclusivity, combat ageist attitudes, and ensure equal rights and opportunities for people of all ages. Upholding the principles of equality and non-discrimination is essential for fostering a society that respects and values the dignity and contributions of older individuals.

Challenges And Barriers Being Faced By The Elderly in Participation in public life and decision making

Older persons often face ageist attitudes and stereotypes that undermine their capabilities and contributions, leading to marginalization and exclusion from decision-making processes.

- Digital literacy challenges and limited access to information and technology hinder older people's ability to participate effectively in public life, including accessing government services and participating in online forums.
- Inadequate infrastructure, such as inaccessible buildings and public transportation, presents physical barriers that restrict older persons' mobility and participation in community activities and public events.
- Reliance on pensions or family support for financial security may limit older persons' independence and decision-making autonomy, as they may feel obligated to conform to family expectations or lack the resources to engage in public life.
- Age-related health issues and disabilities can limit older persons' energy, mobility, and cognitive abilities, affecting their ability to actively participate in public life and decision-making processes. Access to healthcare services and accommodations for disabilities are essential to address these challenges.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the research initiative is to assess the status of accessibility, infrastructure, and habitat for older people in India, the level of participation of older people in public life and decision-making processes, and challenges being faced by older people through an in-depth qualitative and comprehensive study.

Given the ongoing general elections during April, May, and June under the study special emphasis was also on the role and importance of older people in the democratic process of the world's largest democratic country.

To further explore and understand the realism, the following is a set of specific objectives that have been framed to research the transport and communication system and services available for older persons in the study area:

- To assess the current status of transport and housing facilities available for older persons
- To assess the level of dependence of older persons on others
- To identify and recognize the primary challenges before older persons
- To assess the role and participation of older persons in decision-making and democratic process in the country
- To enlist opinions and views of older people on older people's right to participate in public life
- To organize suggestions and recommendations for concerned authorities and stakeholders



AREA & UNITS OF THE STUDY

The entire country constituted the area of the study. Therefore, rural and urban areas were selected for this study. All old people (60+) were taken as the target group of the study. Out of about 141 million elderly persons, a list of 10000 older persons who were willing to be part of the study was prepared.

Elderly respondents were divided into 4 categories on the basis of gender and rural-urban divide of the respondents.

For the study, the entire country was divided into 5 primary geographical zones. Under the study 390 districts. Spread across 28 states/Union Territories of India were covered.

Zone	States/UTs	No of sample districts	No of respondents
I.	Northern India		
	Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Uttarakhand, J&K	110	3000
II.	Southern India		
	Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala & Karnataka	85	1900
III.	Eastern India		
	West Bengal, Odisha, Assam, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura Arunachal Pradesh & Nagaland	60	1600
IV.	Western India		
	Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat & Goa	70	2000
V.	Central India		
	Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand & Chhattisgarh	65	1500
	All India Total	390	10000

As the literature review suggests older people, particularly those belonging to underprivileged sections of society faced with diverse issues, problems, and challenges ranging from frailty to functional inadequacies; physical & health problems; age and gender

discrimination, disability, social isolation & loneliness; neglect, economic insecurity, etc. Therefore, while developing this list of respondents or the sampling frame the representation of this diversity was kept in mind so that a vast variety of challenges are culled out from this research.

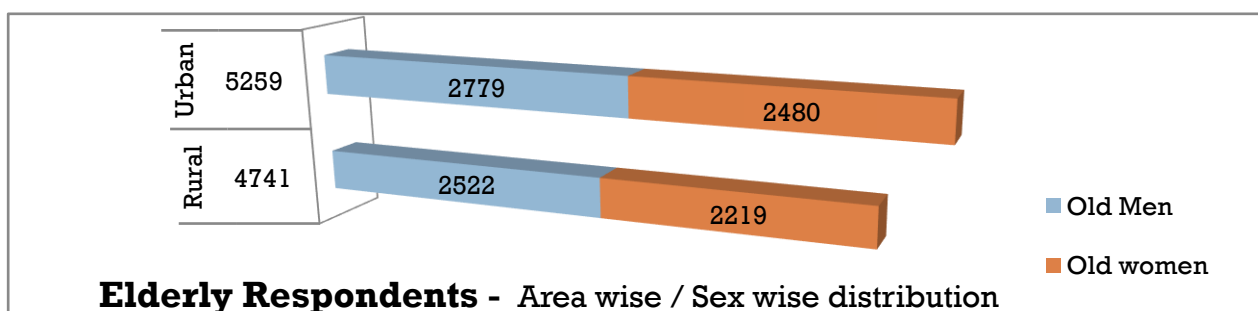
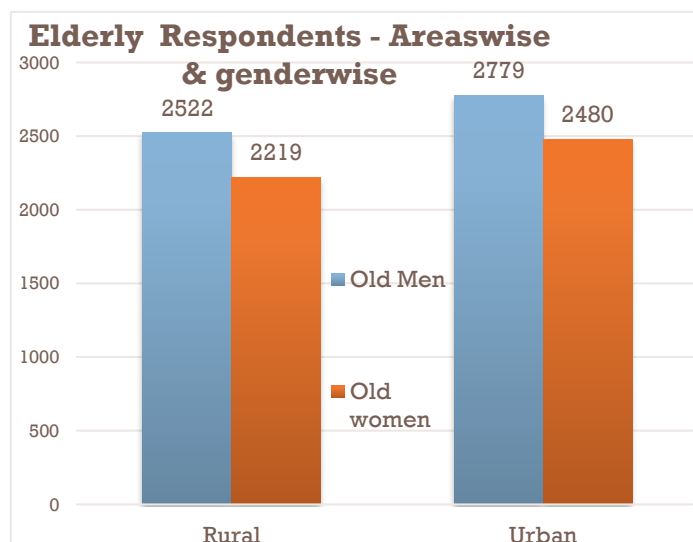
SCOPE & METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study is an attempt to understand the current status of the transport, housing, and access infrastructure, useful for older people. In addition, the study is also designed to review current socio-economic, demographic, and gender dynamics, highlighting the patterns that emerge with the contemporary economic, social, and healthcare issues and challenges faced by older persons. It has been endeavored to explore the relationship between the needs & rights of older persons and the transport, and communication services, available for older people.

SAMPLING, SAMPLE SIZE & DURATION

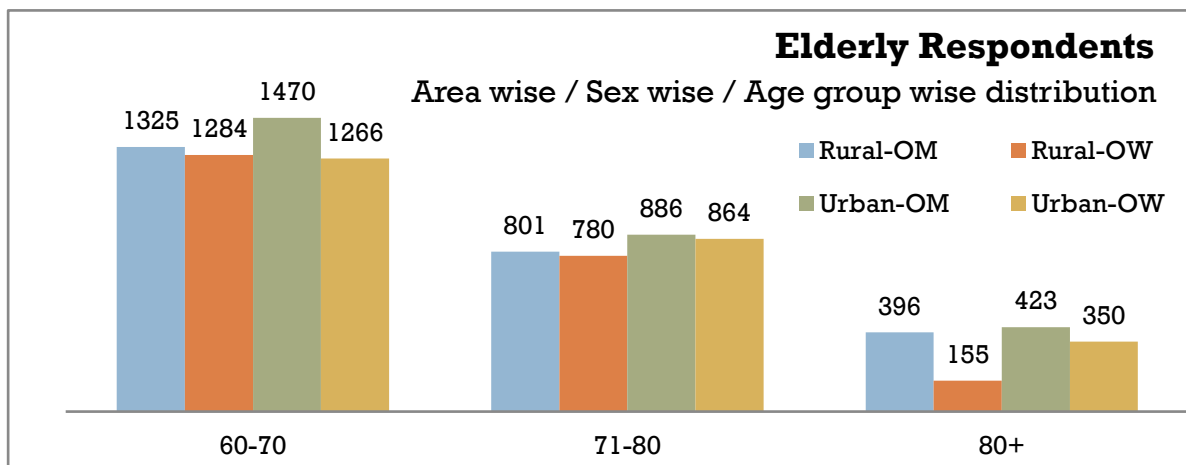
The respondents who comprised the sample for the study were selected based on random sampling based on gender, community (rural-urban), age group, income group, health status, etc.

- A total of 10000 respondents were studied by 510 volunteers across 28 states/union territories of India. The survey was conducted in April 2024.
- Among the respondents, 4741 were approached from rural and 5259 were from urban areas. As far as the gender-wise

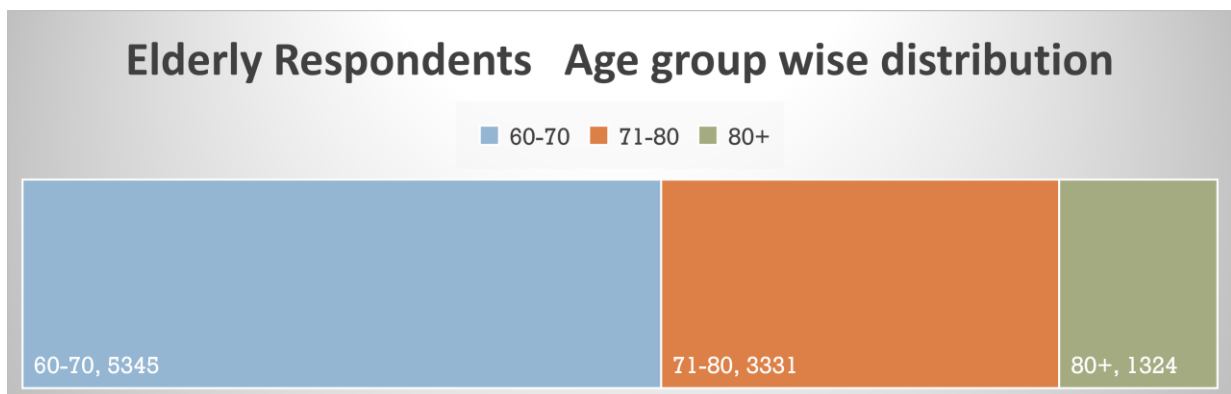


composition of the sample is concerned, out of 10000 total respondents, 5301 respondents were older men and 4699 were older women.

- The number of older men respondents from urban areas (2779) was comparatively higher as depicted in the diagram. The number of older women (2480) was comparatively lower than other groups of respondents.



- Age-wise, the number of younger older persons i.e., respondents in the age groups of 60-70 years were higher (53.5%) in comparison to other age groups i.e. 71-80 years and 80+ (33.3% and 13.2% respectively.) Out of 10000 elderly respondents interviewed during the survey, more than half, i.e. 5345 respondents were found to be in the age group of 60-70 years.



TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES FOR DATA COLLECTION

The main emphasis was on qualitative information; therefore, a more intuitive approach was adopted for the research to arrive at an understanding of the issue to cull out a pattern. The information was enriched with the help of focused group discussions and in-depth interviews.

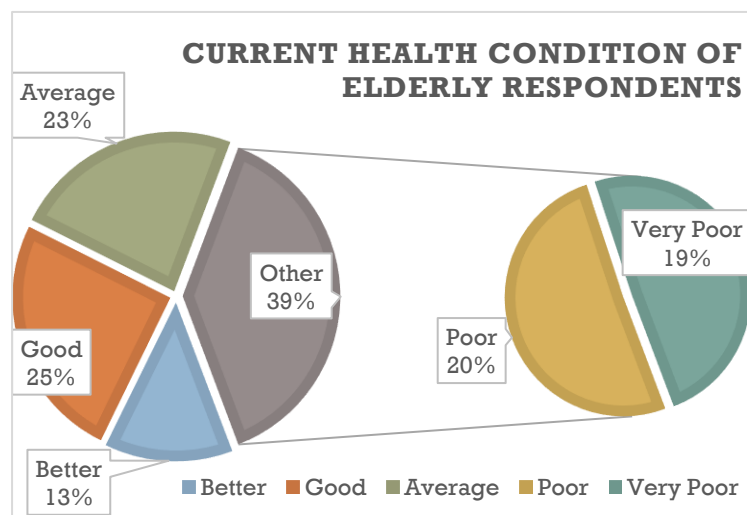
GENERIC FINDINGS

To assess and understand the current status of Accessibility, infrastructure, and habitat from an older person's point of view and their participation in public life and the decision-making process, it was attempted to have a general view of the health and socio-economic condition of elderly respondents.

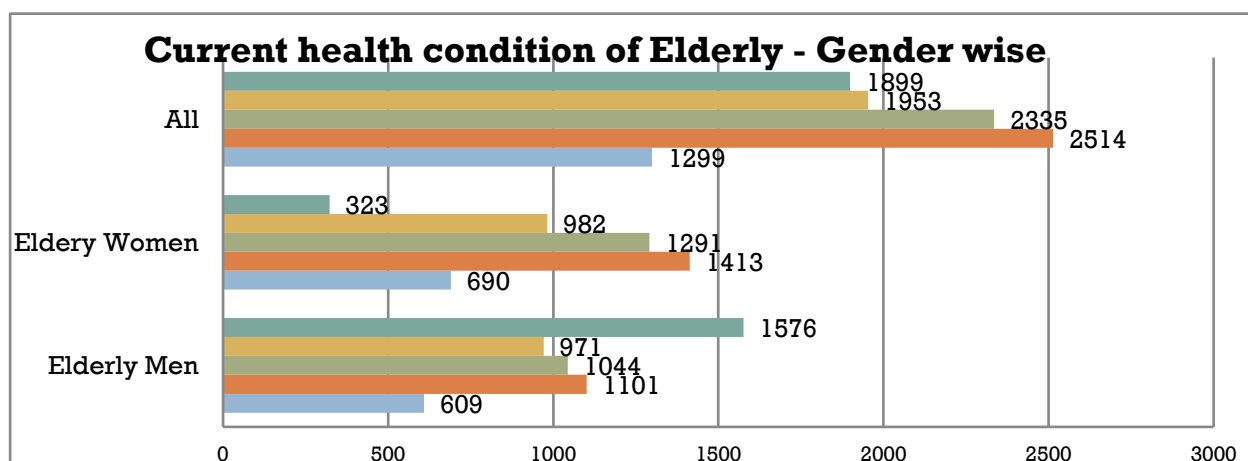
HEALTH CONDITION OF ELDERLY RESPONDENTS

- During the survey, more than 38.5% of elderly respondents reportedly claimed that their current health status is poor or very poor.

- Among sample respondents, 23.4% of older persons (2335 out of a total of 10000 respondents) said that their current health condition can be termed as average.

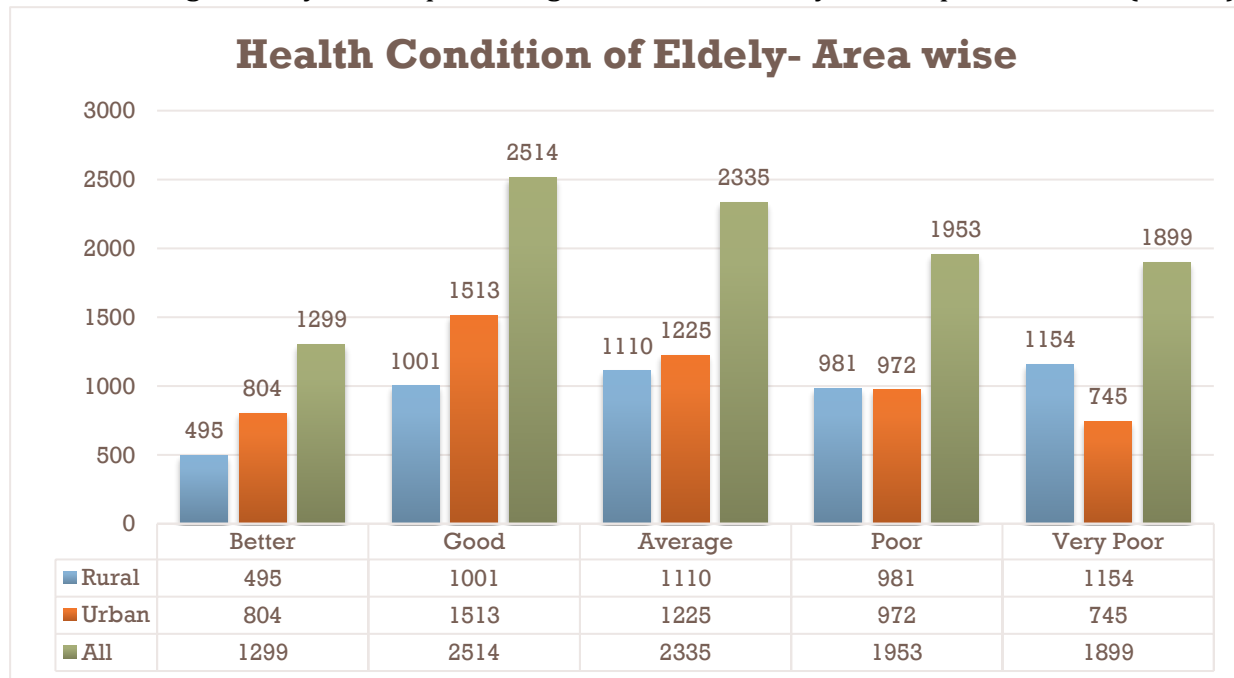


- According to 38.1% of elderly respondents, they were enjoying good or better health in old age. 13% of elderly respondents reportedly claimed that their current health status is better, while 25.1% of respondents said that their health status is good.



Gender-wise, 48% of elderly male respondents were facing health conditions while among female elderly respondents, 27.8% of elderly respondents reportedly claimed that they were facing health issues.

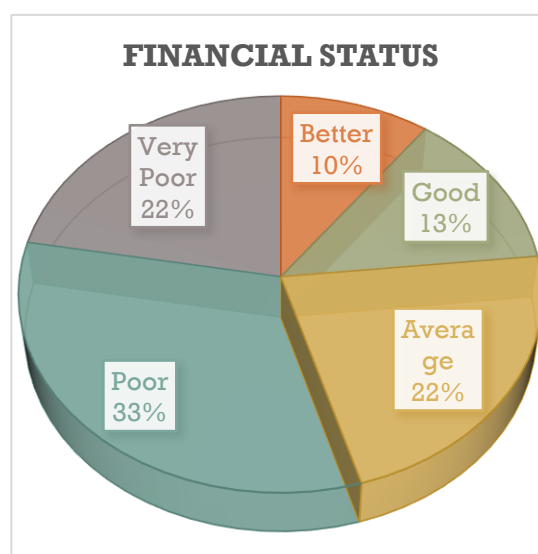
Among elderly women, 44.7% of respondents were found enjoying good or better health while among elderly men percentage of such elderly was quite lower (32.7%)



In rural areas, more than 42% of respondents complained of health issues in old age, their health condition was very poor or poor during the survey. In urban areas, 34.3% of respondents said that their health condition can be termed as poor or very poor.

FINANCIAL CONDITION OF ELDERLY RESPONDENTS

- For approx. 54.6% of elderly respondents, overall financial status was poor or very poor as per their responses.
- Approx. 23.3% of elderly respondents reportedly claimed that their financial status can be termed as above-average in their old age. Among them, 10.1% said

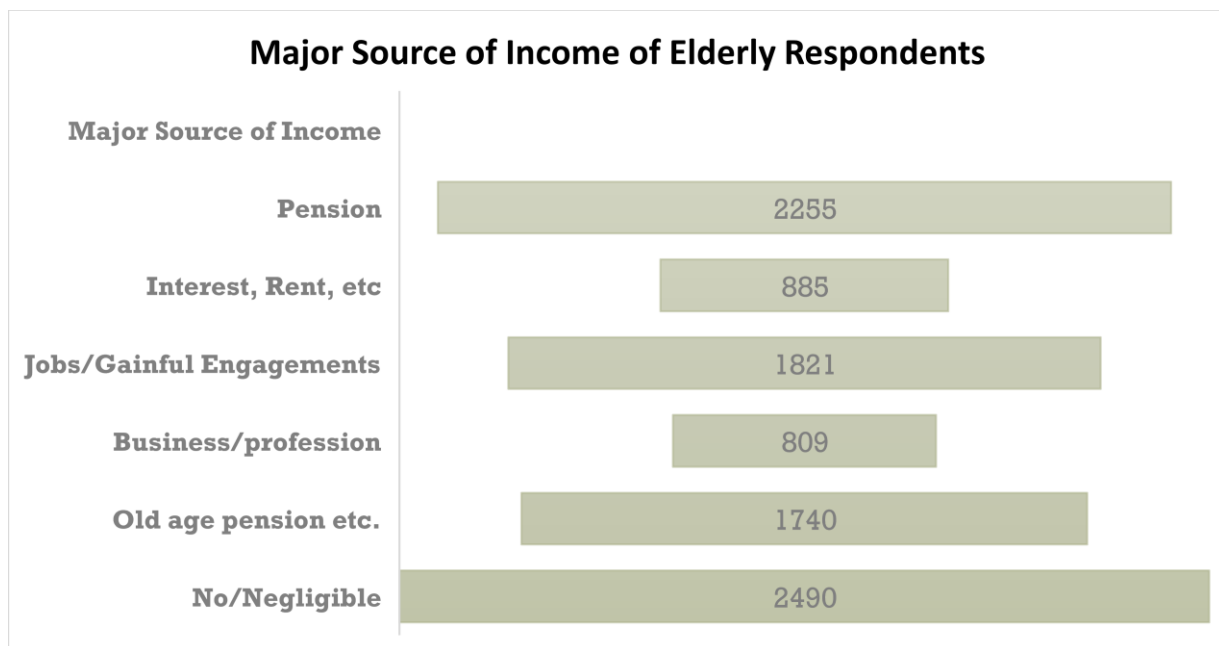


that their financial status is better and 13.2% of respondents expressed that their current financial condition is good.

- According to 22.1% of elderly respondents, their financial status was average.

Major Source of Income in Old Age

- 22.6% of elderly respondents reportedly claimed that a retirement pension is their main source of income in old age.
- 18.2% of elderly respondents were found engaged in some kind of jobs/gainful engagements in old age, which was their major source of income.

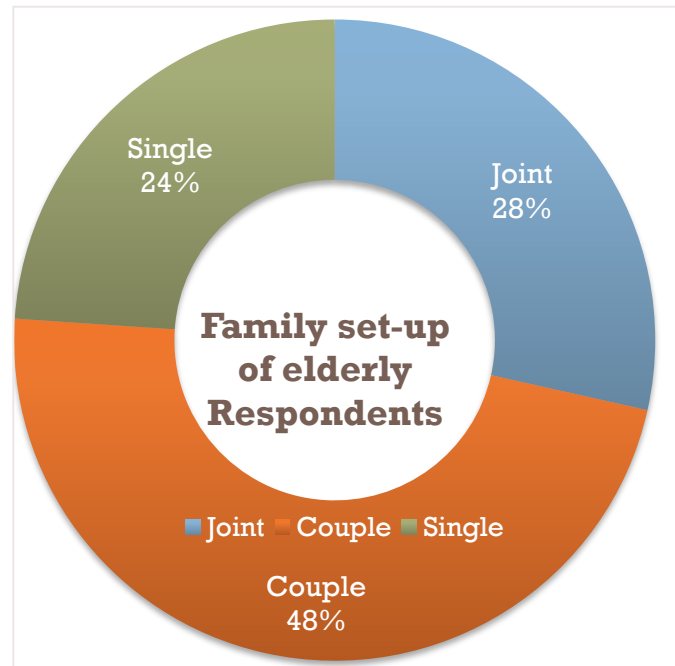


- Almost 8% of respondents expressed that they have their own business or profession, from where they receive the major part of their income.
- For 8.9% of elderly respondents, interest/ rent/other returns were the major source of their income in old age.
- Overall, 17.4% of elderly respondents were getting old age pensions, as their major source of income in old age. The percentage of elderly getting old age pensions in rural areas was 22.8.
- Almost every fourth of elderly respondents i.e. 24.9% of the elderly reportedly said that they have no regular income in old age. In rural areas, the percentage of such elderly was 33 in comparison to 17.5% in urban areas.

FAMILY SET UP IN OLD AGE

The family setup in which people live in old age determines the level of need for accessibility, infrastructure, and habitat and also determines the level of older persons' participation in public life as well as in the decision-making process at different levels.

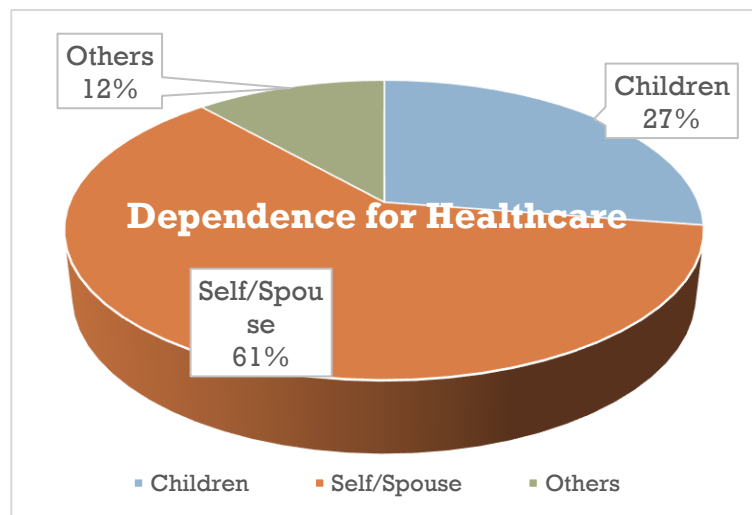
- During the study, it was found that approx.28.5% of older persons were living with their children and others in joint families. While approx. 47.6% of elderly respondents admitted that they live with their spouse only and almost 24% of respondents were living alone without any family support in old age.



DEPENDENCE FOR HEALTHCARE IN OLD AGE

Dependence on healthcare needs in old age is affected by the different kinds of infrastructure available for older people.

- During the study period, it was found that almost 2/3rd of elderly respondents i.e. 6105 out of 10000 respondents were primarily dependent on their own or their respective spouses.
- 27% of respondents said that they have to depend on their children and 11.7% of elderly respondents said that they depend upon others for healthcare-related needs.

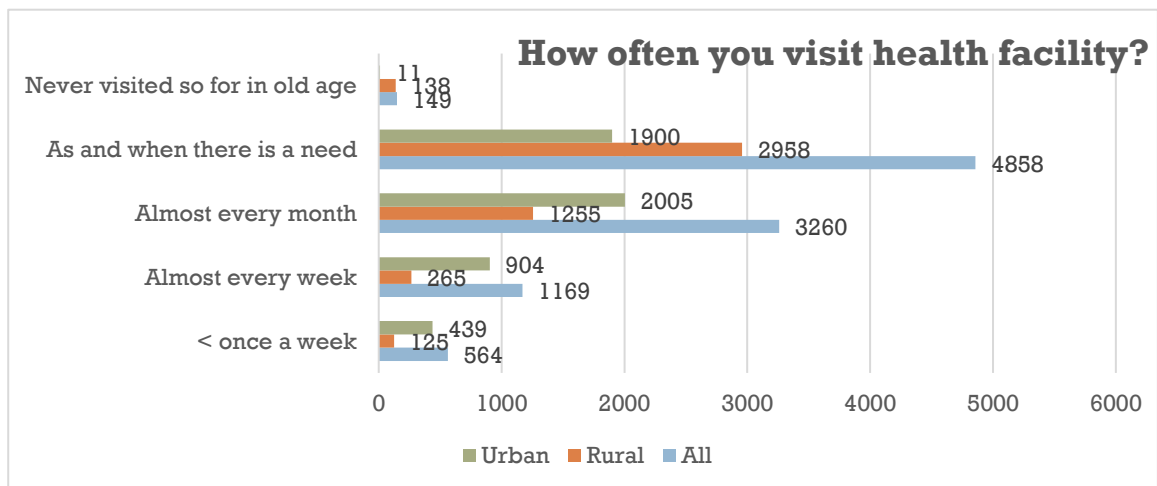
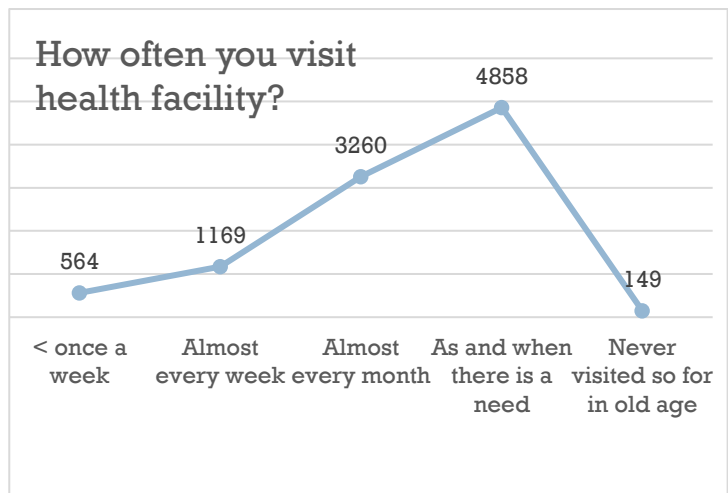


MAIN FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Healthcare infrastructure

Healthcare infrastructure comprised of healthcare facilities, services, and healthcare support system.

- During the survey, it was found that every second person in old age visits a healthcare facility only as and when required. As per the study data, 48.6% of elderly respondents said that they don't visit hospitals/doctors regularly.
- In rural areas, 62.4% of elderly respondents said that they visit hospitals/doctors only when they need treatment or medicines. Whereas in urban areas, 36.1% of elderly respondents reportedly claimed that they visit hospitals/doctors as and when there is a need.
- Only 17.3% of elderly respondents (733 out of 10000) agreed that they visit healthcare facilities/doctors once a week. In rural

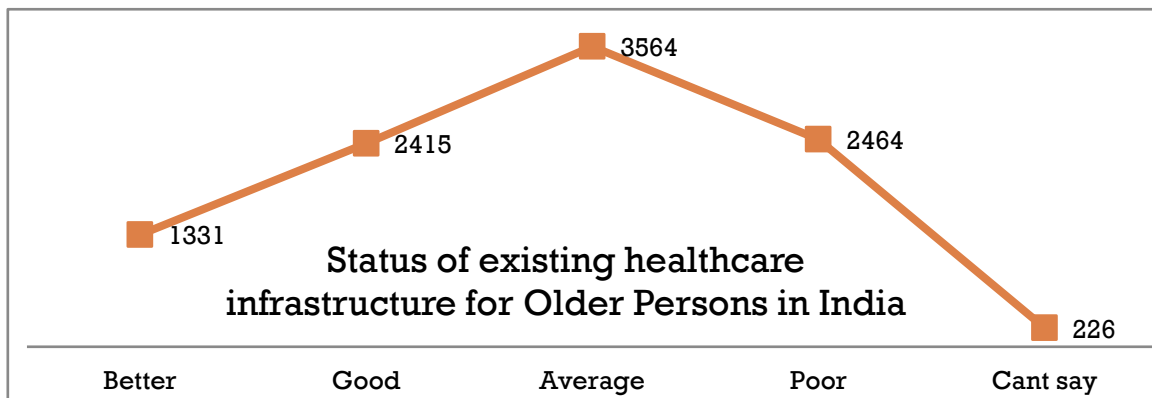


areas, percentage of such elderly was very low (8.2%) as compared to urban elderly (25.5%).

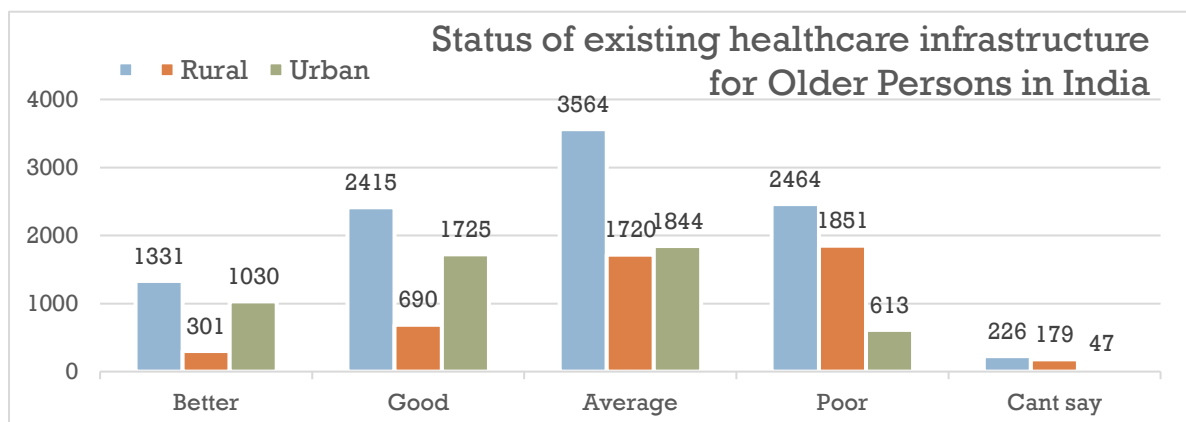
- According to 32.6% of elderly respondents (26.5% in rural areas and 28.1% in urban areas), they have to visit healthcare facilities almost every month.

Current status of healthcare infrastructure

- When elderly respondents were asked about the current status of healthcare infrastructure for older persons in their respective areas, only 13.3% of elderly respondents(6.3% in rural areas and 19.6% in urban areas) said that it is better.
- 24.1% of elderly respondents termed the current status of healthcare infrastructure as good while 35.6% of elderly respondents said that the current status is average in their opinion.



- Among the total respondents, 24.6% elderly said that the status of healthcare Centres and services in their areas is poor.
- The percentage of respondents in this category was quite higher in rural areas, where 39% of the elderly were not happy with the situation of healthcare facilities and services meant for older persons.

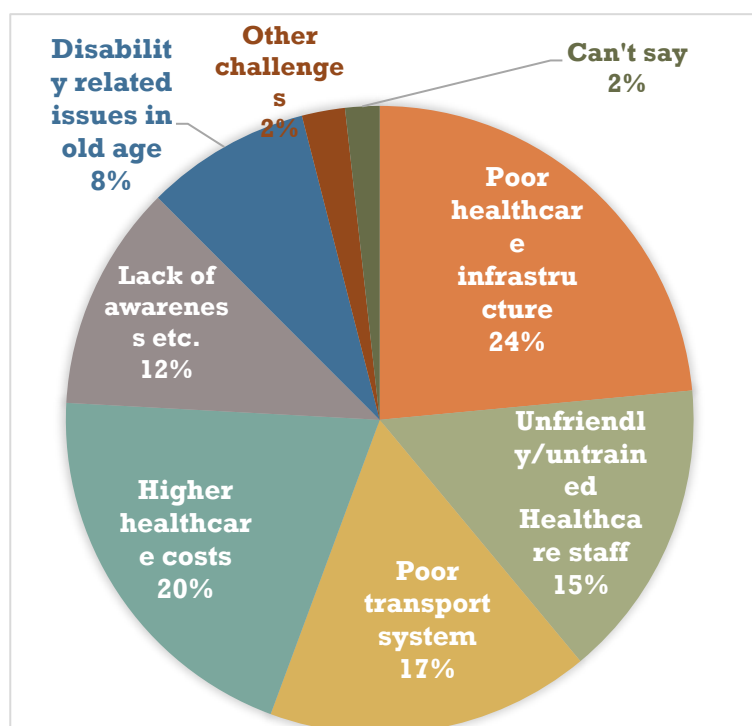


- In urban areas, 11.7% of elderly respondents accepted that the condition of healthcare infrastructure is critical in their area.

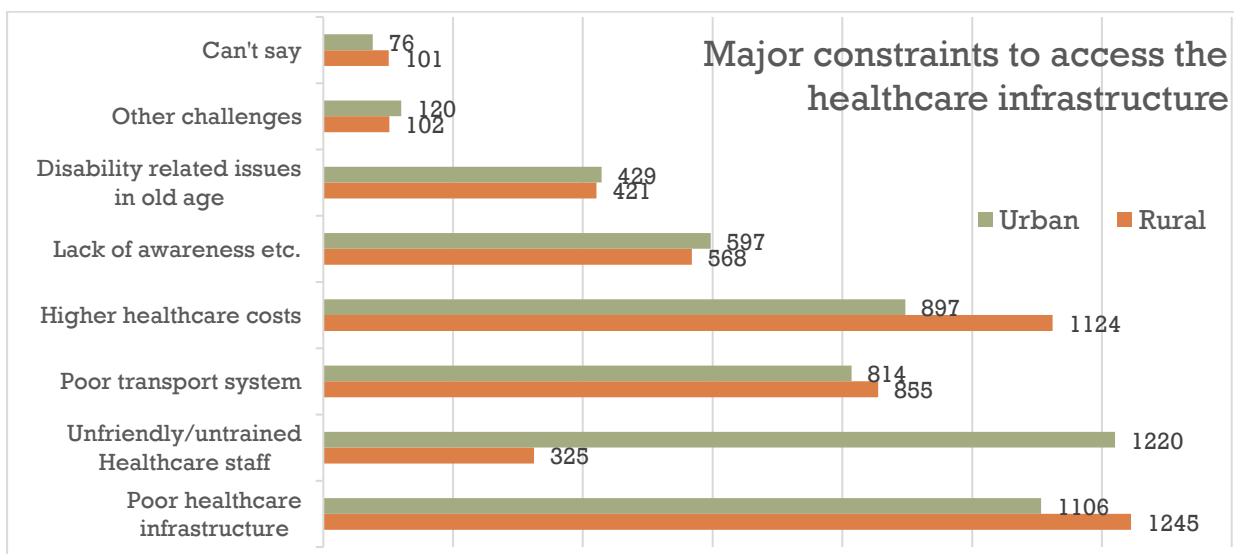
- 2.3% of elderly respondents didn't reply or expressed their inability to respond to this question.

Major constraints to access the healthcare infrastructure

- During the study, it was also tried to record the major constraints to access the healthcare infrastructure based on feedback received from sample elderly respondents.
- On analysis of the data obtained during the survey, it was found that poor healthcare infrastructure is a major hurdle to accessing healthcare in old age itself according to 23.5% of elderly respondents.
- Among rural elderly, more than ¼ respondents i.e. 26.3% claimed that due to poor healthcare infrastructure, they avoid visiting healthcare facilities or could not access healthcare services properly.
- In urban areas, 21% of elderly respondents said that poor condition of healthcare infrastructure is the most critical constraint to accessing healthcare centers.
- 15.6% of elderly respondents claimed that unfriendly/untrained Healthcare staff is a major constraint in their opinion. In urban areas comparatively, a large number of respondents (23.2% in comparison to 6.9% of rural elderly) were not happy with the healthcare staff deputed at different healthcare facilities.
- According to 17% of elderly respondents, poor transport system including the bad condition of roads, is a major hurdle to accessing the healthcare centres in their opinion.
- Higher healthcare costs is a major constraint to accessing the healthcare infrastructure according to 20.2% of elderly respondents (23.17% rural and 17% urban elderly).

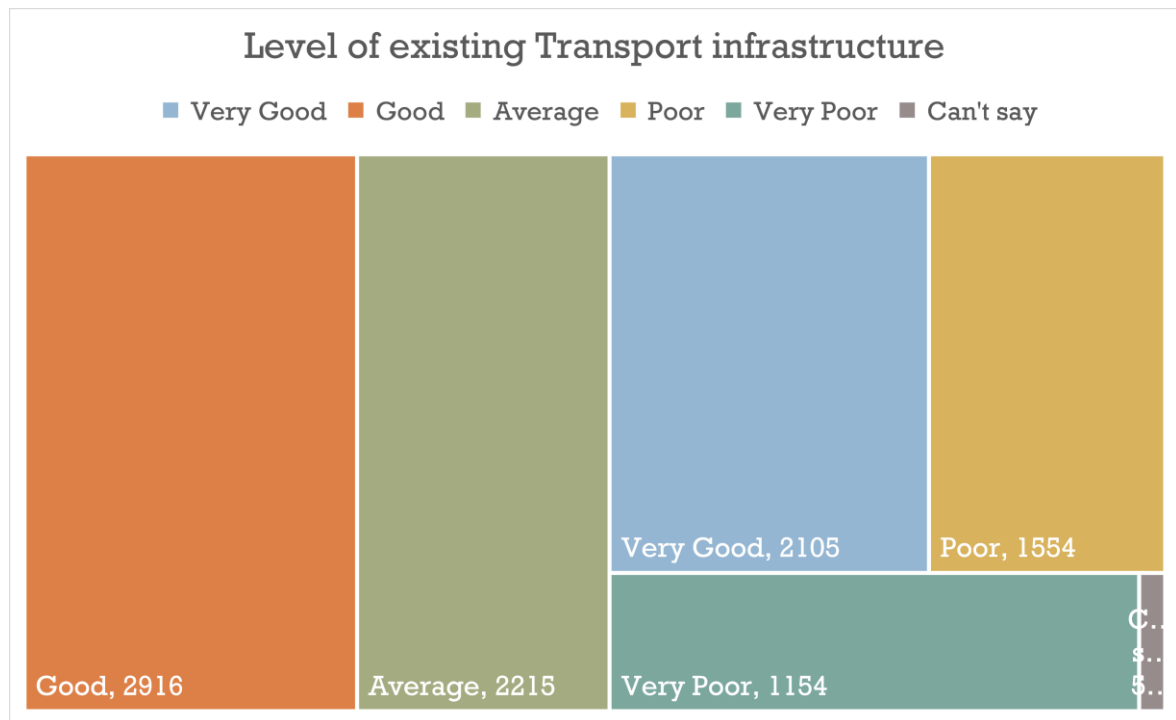


- In this category, more than 50% of elderly respondents admitted that some medicine, being used by them on a regular basis, are beyond their reach in old age
 - Almost 33% of elderly respondents in the category also agreed that they could not afford wheelchairs, adult diapers, walkers and other healthcare equipment, when they need such support.
 - More than 25% of elderly respondents in this category reportedly claimed that due to higher costs of healthcare support and medicines, they have to compromise in old age and have to lead a marginalized life in old age.
 - Many of them have to live in unhygienic and inhuman conditions due to lack of healthcare support.
- Further, 16.7% of elderly respondents complained of a lack of awareness or information about healthcare infrastructure. It was a major constraint in their opinion.
 - Among elderly respondents, 8.5% of total respondents said that issues related to disability, critical health conditions, etc. are major hurdles to healthcare accessibility in old age.
 - 2.2% of elderly respondents said that despite the above constraints there are other challenges also which are the most critical hurdle in their opinion. 1.8% of elderly respondents didn't reply to this point.

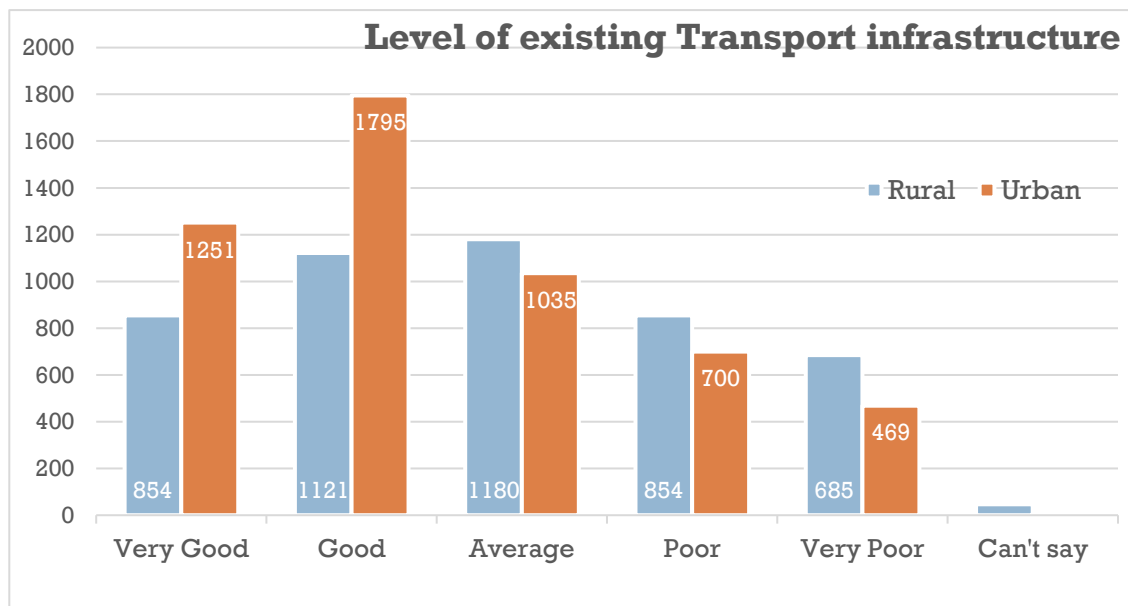


TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

- To assess the existing status of transport infrastructure, particularly elderly-friendly transport systems, views of elderly respondents were also collected and analyzed during the study.

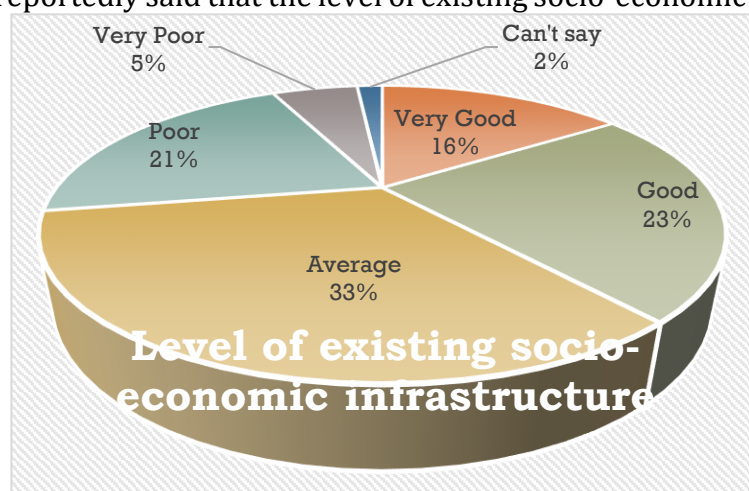


- More than 50.2% of elderly respondents expressed their satisfaction with the existing transport infrastructure in the country. Among all respondents, 21.1% respondents said that the level of existing transport infrastructure is very good whereas another 29.2% of respondents termed it good.
- In rural areas, 41.7%, and in urban areas, 57.7% of elderly respondents admitted that the current situation of the transport system is satisfactory from older person's point of view.
- 22.2 % of older persons who interacted during the survey said that the status of existing transport infrastructure is average.
- 27.15% of elderly respondents (32.5% rural elderly respondents and 22.2 urban elderly respondents) think that transport infrastructure is poor or very poor.

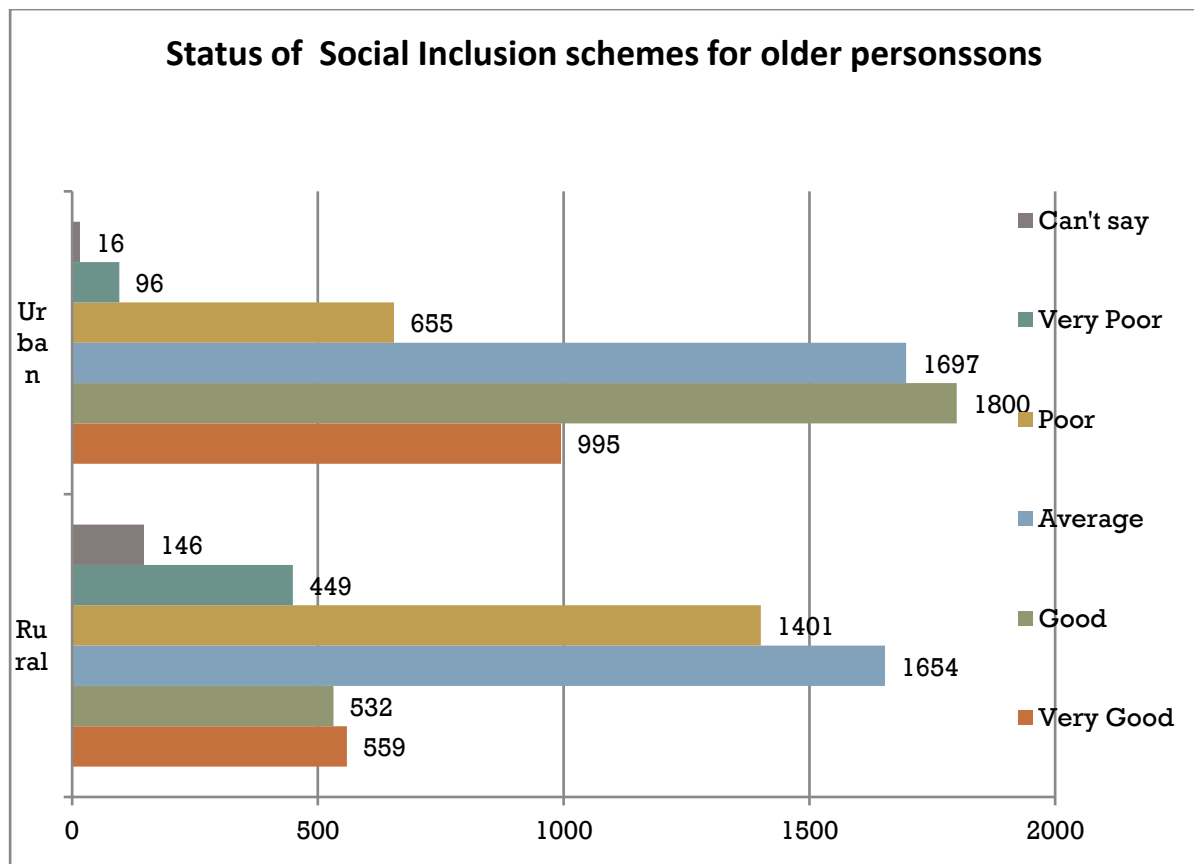


SOCIO-ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE

- According to 23% of elderly respondents level of existing socio-economic infrastructure is satisfactory. Among them all 15.5% elderly respondents (11.8% of rural elderly respondents and 18.9% of urban elderly) said that the existing level of socio-economic infrastructure is very good and 23.3% of elderly respondents (11.2% of rural and 34.2% of urban elderly) reportedly claimed that level of socio-economic infrastructure is good.
- Study data suggest that the condition of the existing socio-economic infrastructure is average according to every third of elderly respondents (33.5%).
- 26% of elderly respondents reportedly said that the level of existing socio-economic infrastructure is poor or very poor.
- In rural areas, the current condition of socio-economic infrastructure is poor or very poor as per the statements received from 39% of elderly respondents. In urban areas, the percentage of such elderly respondents was 14.3.



- Among all, 1.6% of respondents say that they are aware of the issue and didn't respond.

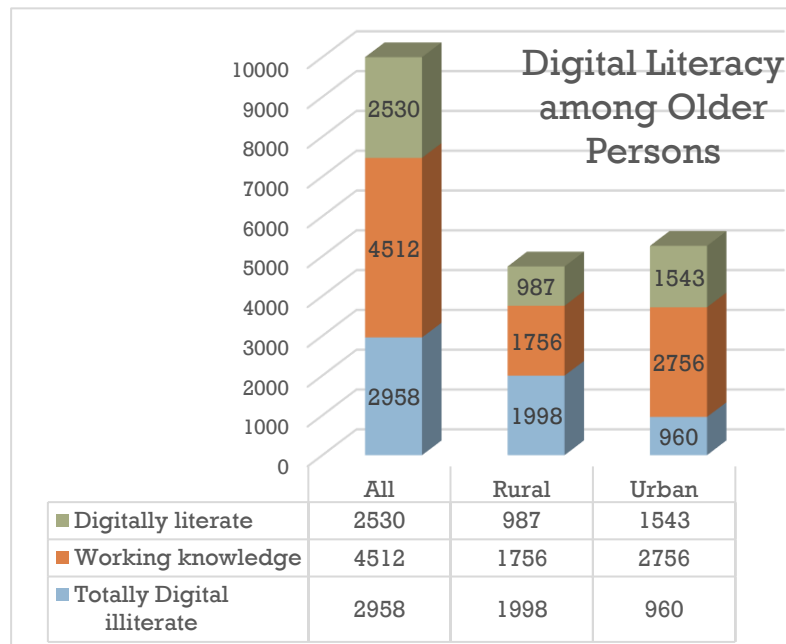


DIGITAL DIVIDE

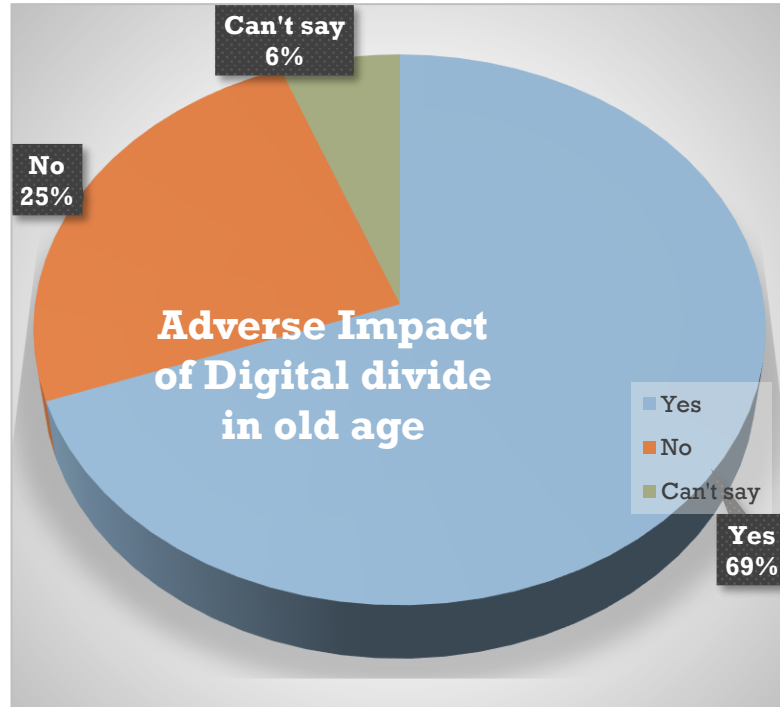
The study concludes that the majority of older persons find themselves deprived and marginalized due to the modern digital age as for many internet is a comparatively new phenomenon in our country. However, digitally illiterate older persons are keen to learn soft skills, despite their old age and keep them connected with the new world order, governed by the internet and information technology.

Many older people use mobile phones but due to lack of digital knowledge they hardly use many useful mobile apps. Most of them use their mobile phone to receive calls and make a call only.

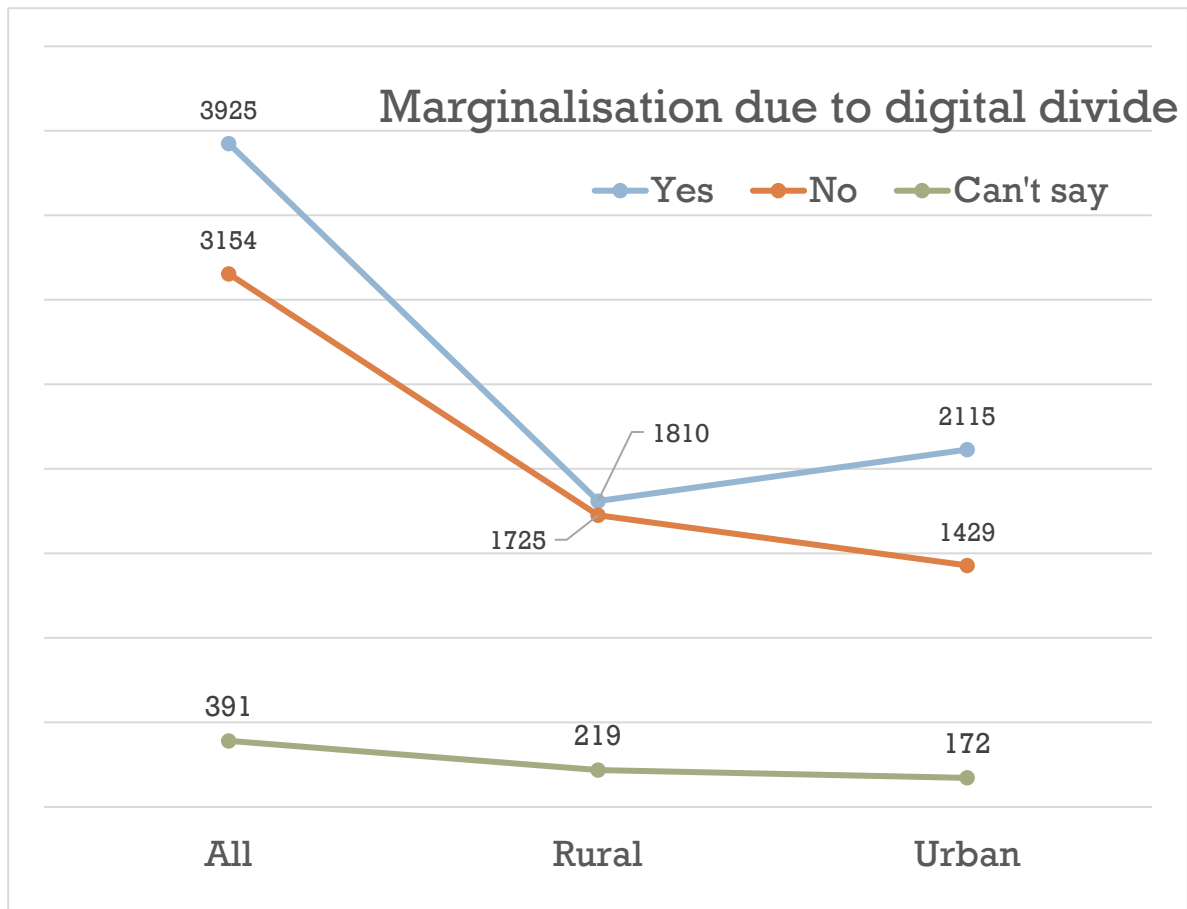
- Approx. 29.6% of elderly respondents were found to be totally digitally and computer illiterate and another set of 45.1% of elderly respondents had a working knowledge of digital literacy.
- In rural areas, 42.1% of elderly respondents and in urban areas, 18.3% of elderly respondents said that they don't know how to operate computers/laptops, etc.
- Overall, 45.1% of elderly respondents (37% of rural and 52.4% of urban) claimed that they have working knowledge of computers, etc.
- Approx. 69.4 % of digitally illiterate and less educated respondents said that lack of computer skills and digital illiteracy is affecting their life in old age adversely.



- Percentage of such affected elderly was found quite higher in rural areas (74.3%) as compared to urban elderly (64.5%).
- 82.4% of digitally illiterate respondents reportedly claimed that they consider
- themselves as a marginalized and underprivileged lot of society in new settings, which is governed by modern IT and the internet.



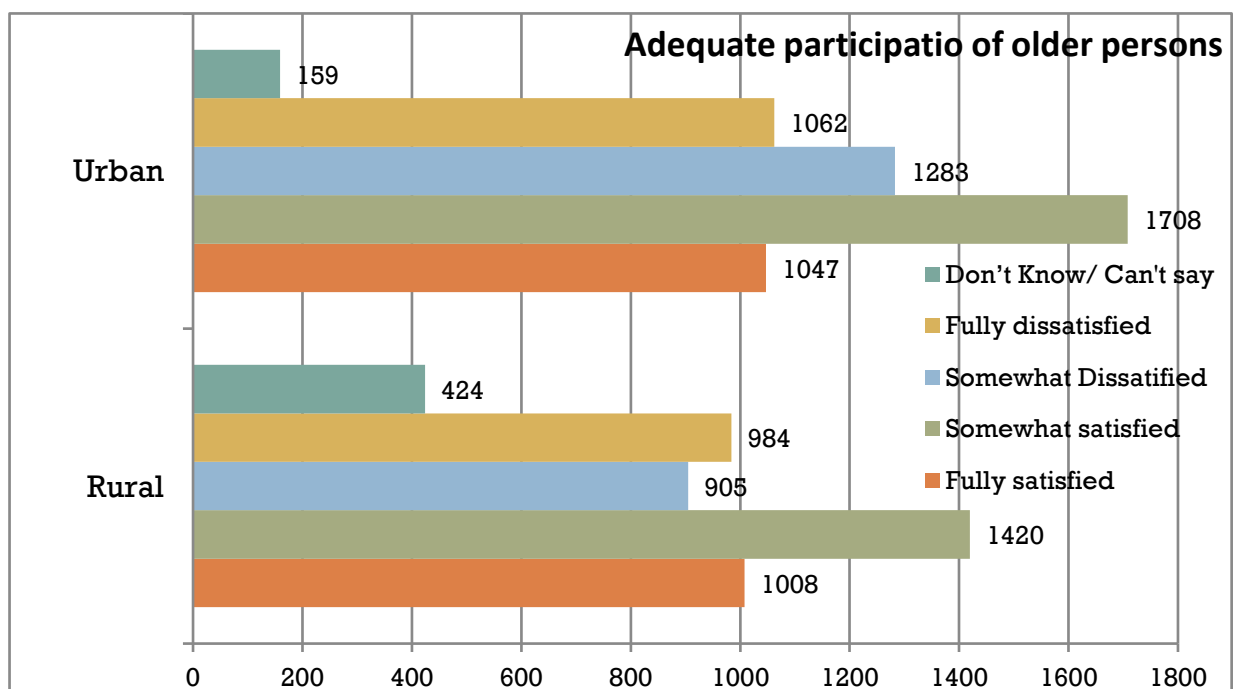
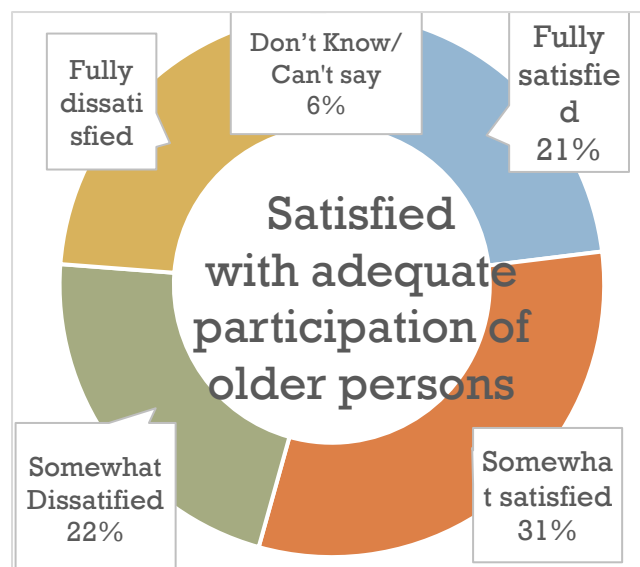
- 81% of respondents grumbled that their younger family members avoid communicating with them due to their relatively more demanding lifestyle and the inability of older family members to understand modern digital communication.



- During the survey, older persons also accepted that they have to face marginalization due to the digital divide. According to 52.5% of digitally illiterate elderly, they are living marginalized/isolated life due to the growing popularity of modern digital technology,
- 48.2% of rural and 56.9% of urban elderly respondents complained of this issue during their interactions with the volunteers.
- 42% (46% rural and 38.5% urban) of elderly respondents said that they don't think so as they are not facing marginalization or isolation due to the digital divide only.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

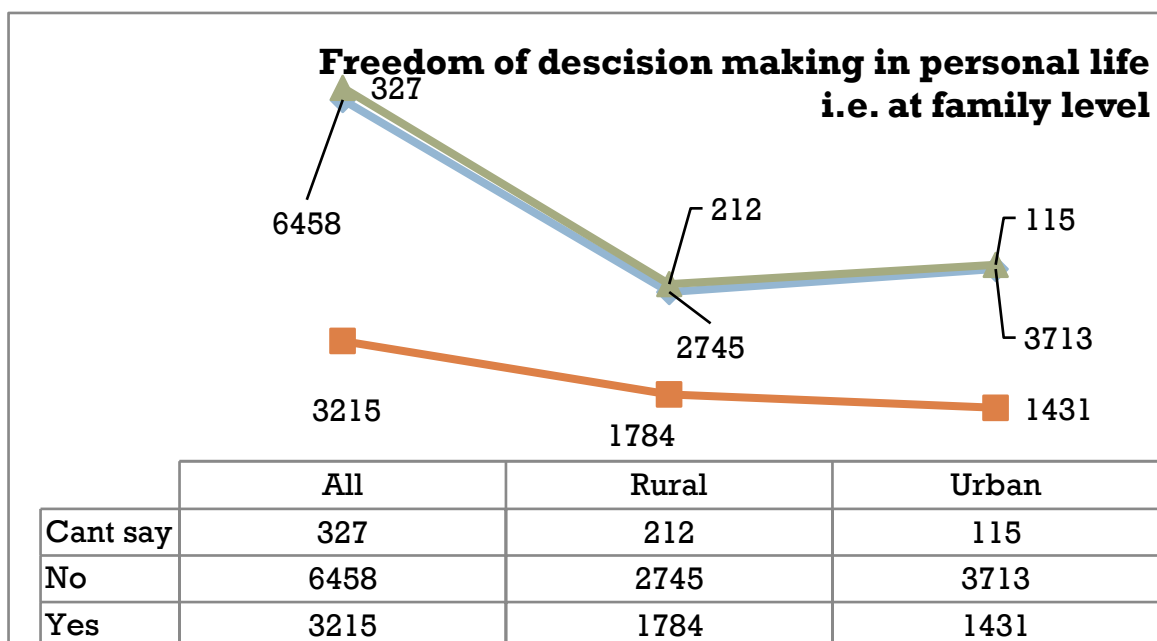
- Under the study, it was also attempted to assess the status of participation of older persons in public life and decision-making processes at different levels.
- When respondents were asked about whether they were satisfied with the participation of older persons in public life, approx. 20.6% of elderly respondents expressed their satisfaction to a great extent.
- Approx. 31.3% of elderly respondents reportedly agreed that they are somewhat satisfied with the current provisions/measures/status of participation of older persons in public life and the decision-making process.



- Approx. 21.9% (19.1% of rural and 24.4% of urban) of total respondents said that they were somewhat dissatisfied while 20.5% (20.8% of rural and 20.2% of urban) of elderly respondents said that they were fully dissatisfied with the existing level of participation of older persons in public life at different levels.
- Some elderly respondents (8.9% in rural and 3% in urban areas) expressed their inability to comment on the subject.

During the survey, older persons were also asked about freedom of decision-making at the personal / family level.

- When data was analysed, it was found that according to 32.2% of elderly respondents, there is full freedom of decision-making in personal life at the family

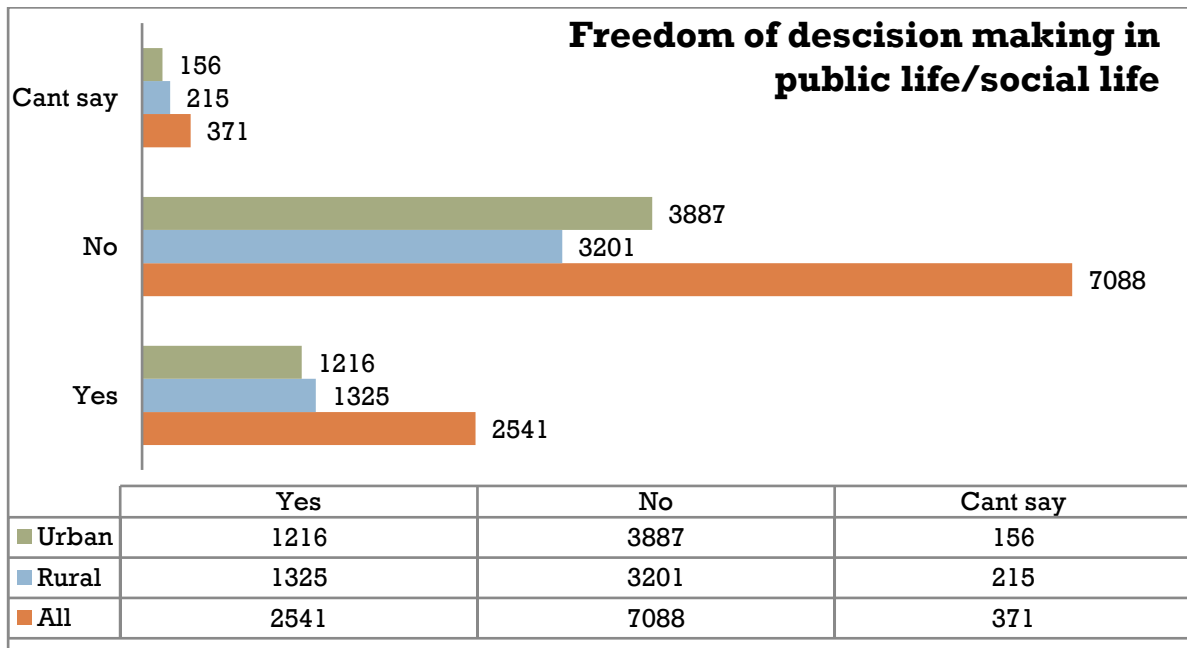


level. In rural areas, 37.6% and in urban areas 27.2% of elderly respondents claimed this while responding to the interviewers.

- Most importantly, almost 2/3rd of elderly respondents i.e. 64.6% said that they don't agree with the fact that older persons are free to take decision within their respective families in their personal life.
- Among rural elderly respondents, 70.8%, and among urban elderly respondents, 59% said that there is no freedom in the decision-making process in personal life or at the family level.
- Approx. 3.3% of elderly respondents didn't reply to this question.

During the survey, it was observed that older people have to compromise on many fronts in old age due to their dependence on their children and/or other family members. In many cases, elderly respondents agreed that younger family members exploit/harass/mistreat/threaten dependent elderly family members more often.

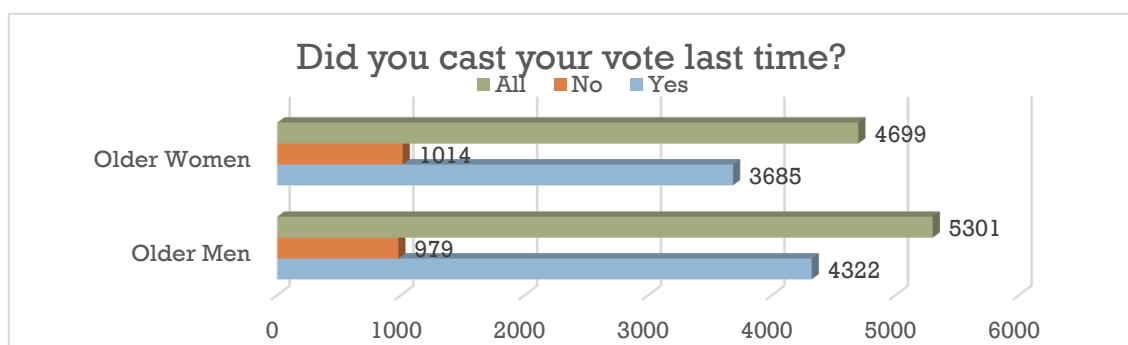
- Overall, 70.9% of elderly respondents (in rural areas 67.5%, and in urban areas 73.9%) said that there is no freedom for older persons when they have to decide on matters in public life or their social life.
- Approx. 25.4% of elderly respondents (27.9% rural and 23.1% urban) reportedly admitted that in public life/social life, older persons are free to make decisions.



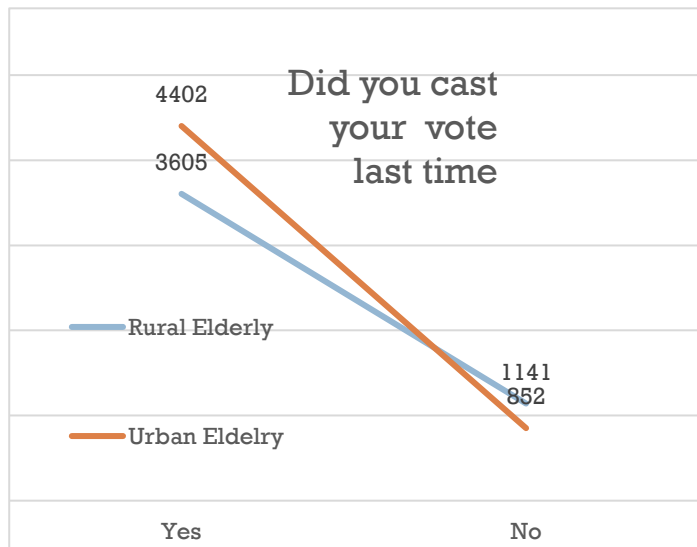
- Approx. 3.7% of respondents could not respond or didn't reply.

PARTICIPATION IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

- 80.1% of the older person respondents (81.5% male and 78.4% females) cast their votes during the last elections.

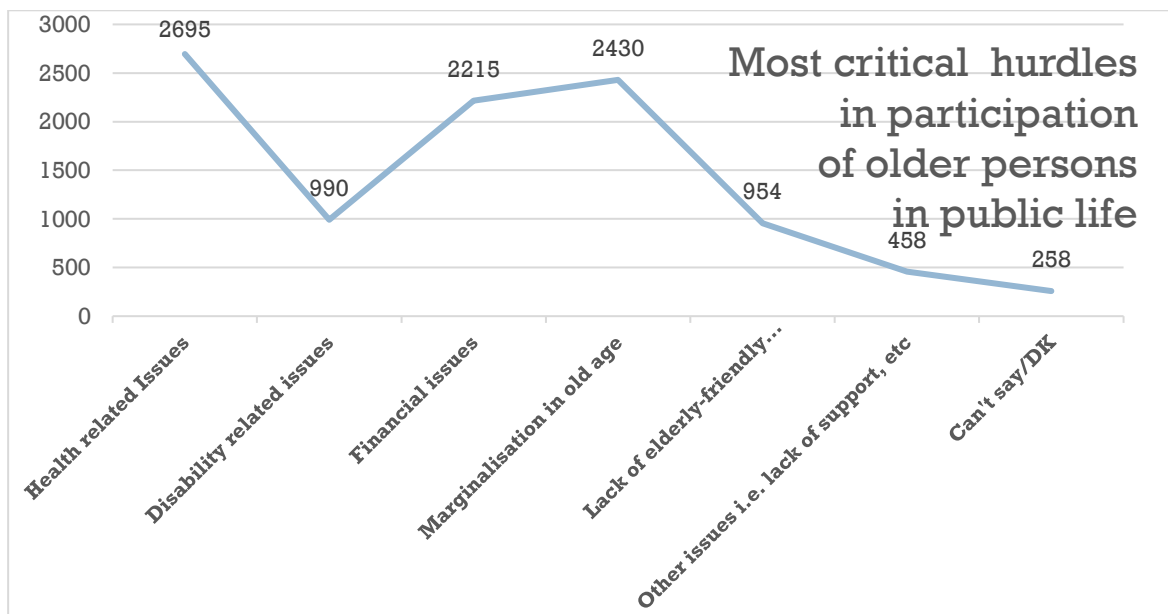


- Voting in urban areas by older persons was found to be marginally higher (83.7%) and in the rural areas (76%). In both cases, it is much higher than the actual voter percentage.
- Overall, 19.9% of elderly voters could not vote due to certain factors. In rural areas 24.1% whereas in urban areas 16.2% of senior voters said that they didn't vote last time.

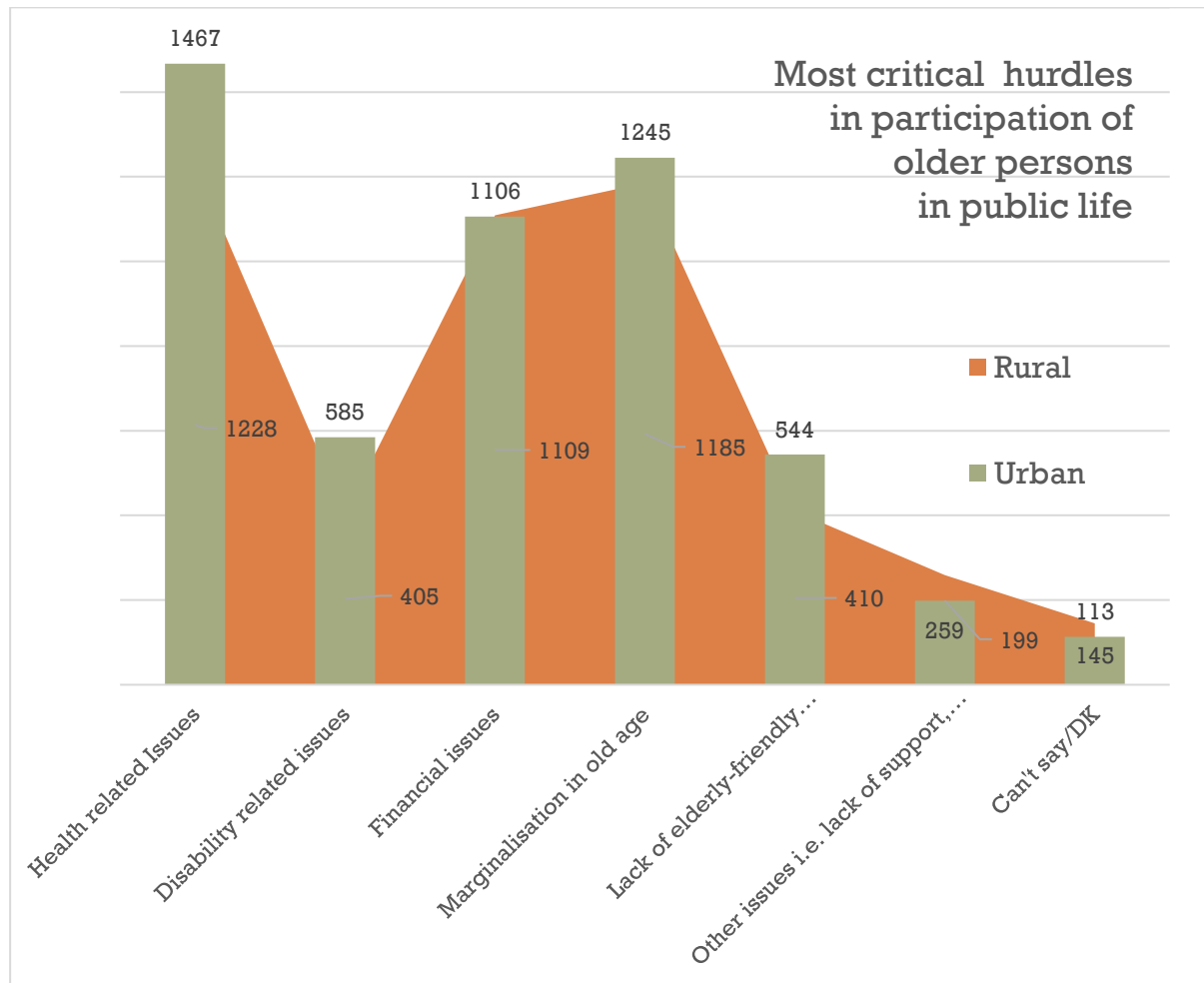


MAJOR HURDLES IN THE PARTICIPATION OF OLDER PERSONS

- When older persons were asked to comment on the most critical hurdles in the participation of older persons in public as well as social life, it was revealed that most older persons i.e. 2695 elderly out of 10000 sample elderly respondents opined that health-related issues in old age the most critical challenge. Overall, 27% of elderly respondents (25.9% rural and 27.9% urban) confirmed this.



- Approx; 24.3 % of elderly respondents (25% & 23.7% in rural and urban areas respectively) see marginalization in old age as the most critical hurdle in ensuring the participation of older persons in public / social life.
- Analysis of data suggests that financial issues in old age are major hurdles for approx. 21.2% of elderly respondents (23.4% rural and 21% urban).



- According to 9.5% of elderly respondents, the lack of elderly-friendly infrastructure and according to 4.9% of other issues i.e. support mechanisms are the most critical challenges for ensuring equitable participation of older persons in public and decision-making process.

OBSERVATIONS

By the year 2050, India will have 1/5th population in the age group of 60+. Management of such a large section of retired and older people, who will have time, experience, and even resources, but no opportunities, may be a huge challenge for the government of India.

Older persons must be given equal rights and opportunities in a non-discriminatory manner so that their participation in the mainstream and decision-making at different levels can be ensured. The Government of India has initiated several schemes for exploring gainful engagement opportunities for retired and older persons, but much needs to be done because of the ever-growing elderly population of the country.

It was observed that irrespective of economic, cultural, or educational background or gender divide most of the older persons are opined about democracy and believe that their age has given them enough experience and understanding of the democratic process. Most of them believe that they have a major responsibility towards the country and their opinion matters. However, older people have very little say in the day to day lives of their children or grandchildren.

In our country, the majority of the older persons are not prepared for their old age, hence most of them have to depend on others for their various needs and requirements, particularly related to finance, health, social support, etc. Low or no income in old age, increased medical expenses, ever-increasing cost of living in old age and infirmity/disability make their life more complicated.

On the other hand, older persons in India have an important role in the democratic process. They not only constitute a larger chunk of actual voters but also form a bigger set of elected representatives. Their opinions and decisions are purely based on their vast experience of life and their surroundings. The higher voting pattern of older persons shows that they are sincere voters and tend to assert their right to vote.



REPRESENTATIVE STATEMENTS

“I have been suffering from arthritis for the past 10 years and am unable to walk for longer distances and climb stairs. It is very painful for me to visit the hospital for routine checkups. Sometimes, I have to postpone my medical checkups due to such old age-related issues. If there were door-step or mobile health check-up services, it would be very helpful for people of my age group. ”

- Prabhkar Sharma, 78 Years, Agra, UP

“In our locality, there are different kinds of healthcare services but their charges are very high. Since I depend on my retirement pension and our children do not support us, I cannot afford higher medical charges. The extraordinarily high cost of medical services discourages me from accessing better medical treatment in old age. If I had some Mediclaim policy, perhaps I could afford better medical services. ”

- Rajesh Kumar, 72 Years, Ludhiana, Punjab

“After the demise of my husband, I distributed my entire property, including my house and money among my children. Now I am dependent on them for all my needs. When I fall ill or have some health issues, they avoid taking care of me and do not fulfill their responsibility towards their aging and ailing mother. They never took my opinion on family matters and even objected when I talked to my relatives/neighbors. ”

- Lajwanti Devi, 68 Years, Indore, Madhya Pradesh

“In today’s IT-dominated world, children and grandchildren are ignoring or neglecting their parents/grandparents. Earlier our children and grand-children used to interact with their elders and seek useful information/guidance/direction from them. Nowadays, they prefer to google instead of going to their elders for their queries and keep themselves engaged with electronic gadgets all the time. Due to the digital divide, older people are not only facing isolation but also marginalization. ”

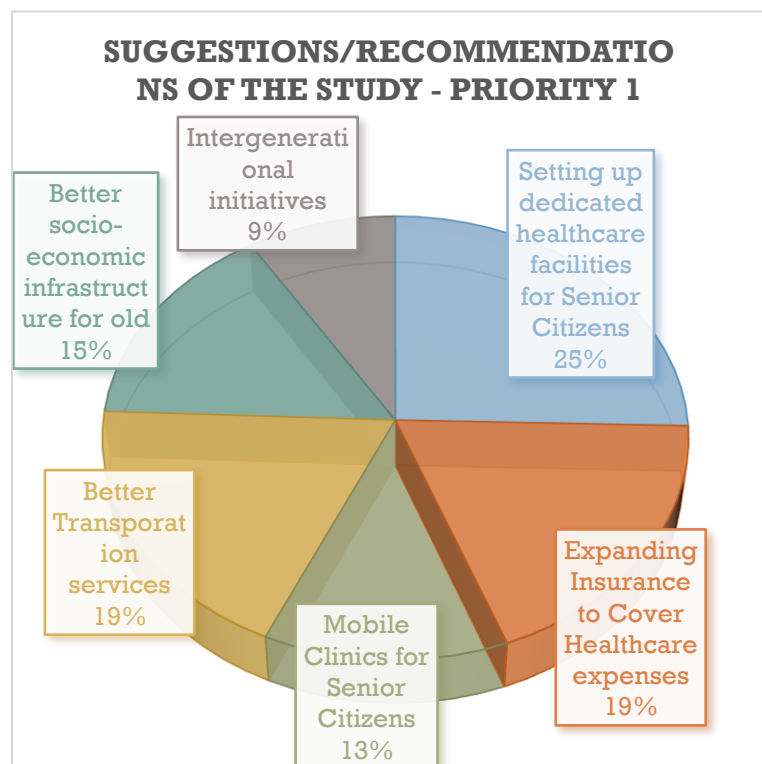
- Suraj Manchandani, 66 Years, Mayur Vihar, Delhi



SUGGESTIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

- Agewell Foundation has also compiled suggestions and/or recommendations based on feedback received from older persons during the survey about issues related to accessibility, transport, habitat and participation in public life.
- When the data obtained was analyzed, it was found that 25.4% of elderly respondents have given 1st priority to setting up dedicated healthcare facilities for senior citizens as their suggestions.
- Approx. 18.8% of elderly respondents refer to expanding insurance coverage to older people as their 1st priority. Almost similar number of elderly respondents i.e. approx. 18.9% think better transportation services are a more urgent requirement of older persons in old age.

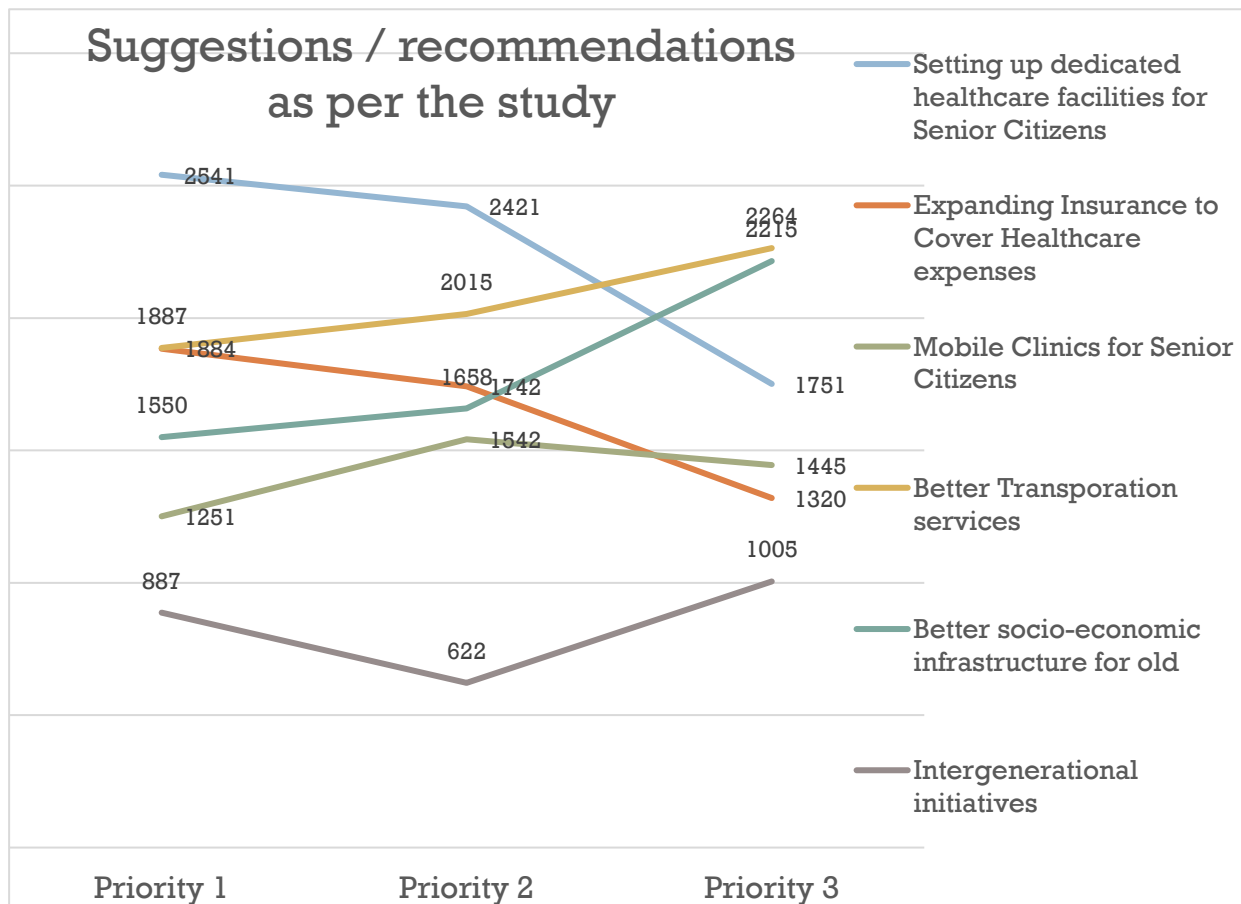
- Further, 15.5% of elderly respondents reportedly suggested better socio-economic infrastructure as their 1st priority to ensure better accessibility and participation in public life.



- 12.5% of elderly respondents said that in their opinion arrangements of mobile clinics for older persons is an urgent requirement in old age.

- When asked about their 2nd top most priority suggestions/recommendations, it was found that 24.2% of elderly respondents were of the view that setting up dedicated healthcare services for older people is their 2nd priority.
- For 2nd priority, approx. 20.2% of elderly respondents, termed better transport infrastructure and services as 2nd priority.

- Approx. 14.4% of elderly respondents opined that expanding health insurances services to older people can be their 2nd priority.

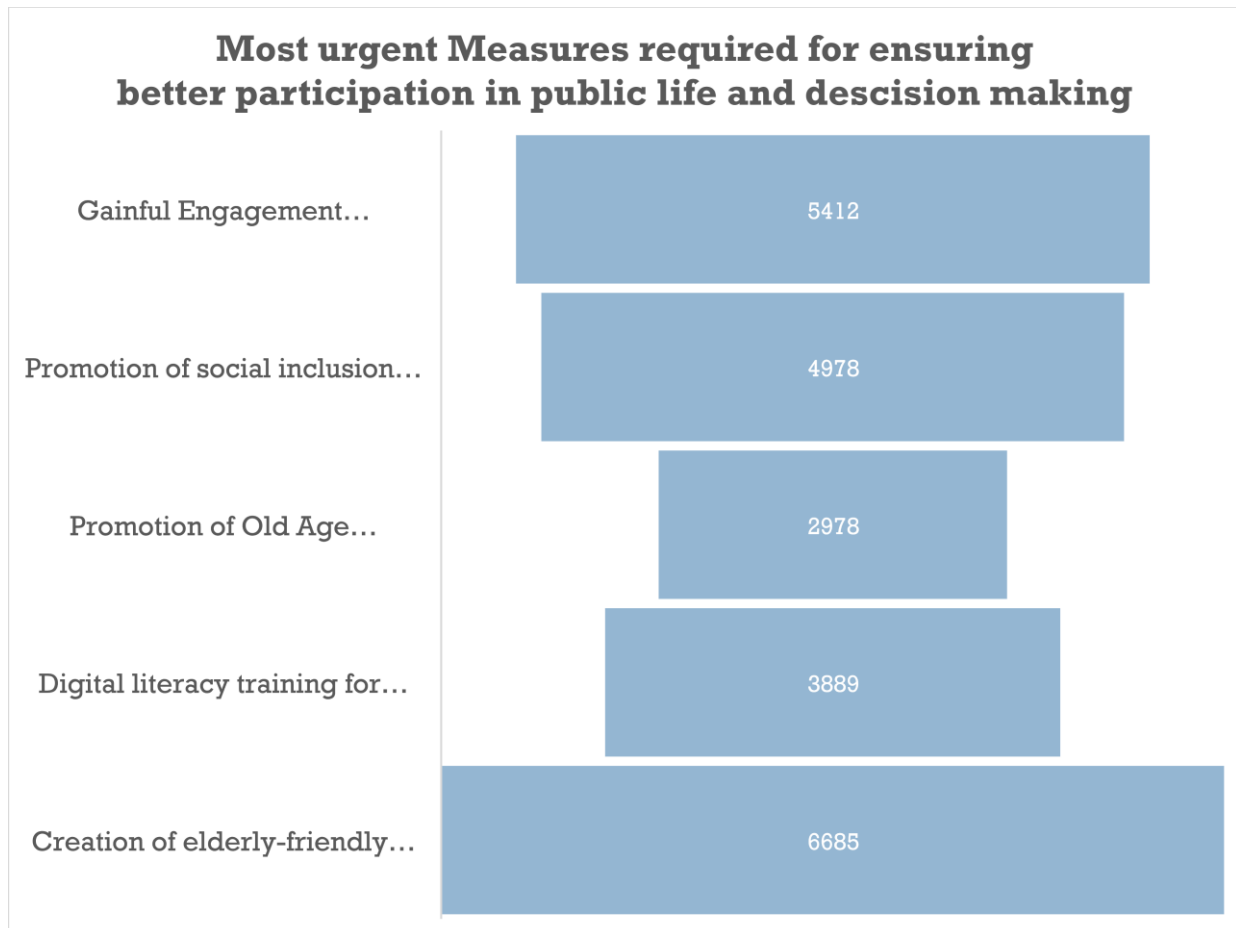


- In addition, older persons also suggested intergenerational initiatives to bridge the gap and strengthen family/social support mechanisms to ensure better access and participation in old age.
- Among all, 8.9%, 6.2%, and 10.5% of elderly respondents gave intergeneration initiatives 1st, 2nd and 3rd priority respectively.

MOST POPULAR MEASURES/STEPS FOR ENSURING BETTER PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE AND DECISION-MAKING

- When elderly respondents were asked to suggest the most popular measures/steps for ensuring better participation in public life and decision-making, more than two-thirds of respondents i.e. 66.9% agreed that the creation of elderly-friendly infrastructure is the need of the hour, which is one of the most popular measures in their opinion.

- Further, data analysis also revealed that gainful engagement opportunities in old age are the most popular measure according to 54.1% of respondents.
- For the promotion of social inclusion in old age, almost half of the respondents, i.e. 49.8% agreed that it is also among the most popular measures for ensuring better participation in public life and the decision-making process at different levels.



- Among all respondents, 38.9% opined that digital literacy training for older persons can be included in the most popular measures for ensuring better participation in public life and decision-making.
- When elderly respondents were asked about the promotion of old age recreational Centres, it was found that 29.8% of respondents agreed that it should be the most popular measure for ensuring better participation in old age.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONCERNED STAKEHOLDERS

To address the ever-growing challenges about accessibility issues concerning older people, governments at all levels, need to modify their old age-related policies, and schemes and make them older persons friendly. To ensure accessible transport and communication facilities for older people, there is an urgent need to take these steps;

- Develop and create older persons-friendly infrastructure in the country, be it healthcare, transport, socio-economic or digital to facilitate their access and participation in the mainstream.
- Special focus should be given to dedicated healthcare services for older persons
- Develop, formulate and implement requisite policy programs for the elderly population
- Explore gainful engagement creating opportunities for retired older people
- Create an older persons-friendly environment in the country to ensure better access to transport, communication and housing services in old age

To ensure older persons' participation in public life and decision-making process, the following initiatives should be adopted at a larger scale;

- Pre- and post-retirement training programs for older persons to provide soft skills, digital literacy, communication and other training for skill enhancement.
- Employment Exchanges for Old and Retired People at the national level
- Provisions for encouraging employment of retired elderly in the unorganized service sector by initiating incentives schemes.
- Promotion of anti-age discriminatory practices in the labor market
- Special training programs for public health practitioners, mental health providers, health care professionals and volunteers to provide better and more effective care to older people.
- Recreational / entertainment activities for older persons through social/electronic media and encourage their participation



Agewell Foundation

Agewell Foundation is a not-for-profit NGO that has been working for the welfare and empowerment of older persons of India since 1999. Agewell interacts with over 25000 older persons on daily basis through its volunteers' nationwide network. Recognizing the work being done by Agewell Foundation ECOSOC granted Special Consultative Status to Agewell Foundation at United Nations in 2011. It is associated with the Department of Public Information, United Nations (UN-DPI-NGO). Agewell Foundation is currently associated with the Working Group on Awareness and Capacity Building for Senior Citizens, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment; Sub-Group on Elderly Care, under NITI Aayog's CSOs Standing Committee and Committee of Experts on "impact of COVID-19 pandemic on human rights and future response", National Human Rights Commission.

Agewell Foundation

*(In Special Consultative Status with the ECOSOC at United Nations since 2011)
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