



## Mains Practice Question

Q. Why is there an increasing phenomenon of an ageing population in India? Discuss the vulnerabilities faced by the elderly and propose solutions to empower them. (250 words)

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### Approach

- Briefly introduce the phenomenon of an ageing population in India.
- Mention the Primary Factors Contributing to the Ageing Phenomenon in India.
- Discuss the vulnerabilities faced by the elderly population in India.
- Propose solutions to empower the elderly.
- Conclude by emphasizing ways to integrate the elderly into productive societal roles.

### Introduction

The WHO defines those aged 60 -74 years as elderly. In the Indian context, the age of 60 years has been adopted by the census of India for the purpose of classifying a person as old, which coincides with the age of retirement in government sector.

According to Census 2011, India has 104 million older people (60+years), constituting 8.6% of total population. Amongst the elderly (60+), females outnumber males. It is expected that the country will have 193 million elderly persons, constituting about 13% of the total population by 2030. As per UNFPA Report 2023, the percentage of elderly population in the country projected to double to over 20% of total population by 2050.

### Body

#### Primary Factors Contributing to the Ageing Phenomenon in India :

- **Increased Longevity** : One of the primary drivers of increased longevity in India is the remarkable improvement in healthcare services. Over the past few decades, there have been significant advancements in medical technology, treatments, and preventive care.
  - According to the World Health Organization, life expectancy in India has improved by 5.2 years from 62.1 years in 2000 to 67.3 years in 2021.
- **Improved Living Conditions**: Better living conditions, including access to clean water, sanitation, and improved nutrition, have also contributed to longer lifespans.
  - The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan has significantly increased sanitation coverage, reducing the prevalence of waterborne diseases.
- **Decreased Fertility Rates** : India has implemented various family planning programs aimed at controlling population growth, which have been successful in reducing fertility rates.
  - As per the fifth round of NFHS conducted during the year 2019-21, the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has declined to 2.0 children per woman less than the replacement level of fertility, which is 2.1 children per woman
- **Socio-Economic Changes** :
  - Socio-economic changes, such as increased female education and workforce participation, have also played a role in lowering fertility rates and increased

- Higher education levels among women correlate with delayed marriages and fewer children. Urbanization leads to smaller family norms, as raising children in urban areas can be more expensive and demanding.
  - Kerala, known for its high literacy rates and advanced healthcare, Kerala has one of the highest life expectancies and lowest fertility rates in India. The state serves as a model for other regions in managing the ageing population.

### **.Various Vulnerabilities Associated with Elderly Population in India:**

- **Restrictions in Activities of Daily Living (ADL)** : About 20% of the elderly experience restrictions in activities of daily living, which include basic self-care activities like bathing, dressing, eating, and mobility.
  - Elderly individuals living alone or without adequate family support often struggle with ADL, leading to a loss of independence and increased need for caregiving services.
- **Multi-Morbidity** : The coexistence of multiple chronic conditions is a common issue among the elderly, impacting their quality of life and increasing healthcare needs.
  - The Longitudinal Ageing Survey of India (LASI) reports that 75% of the elderly population suffer from one or more chronic diseases, such as hypertension, diabetes, arthritis, and cardiovascular diseases.
- **Poverty** : Economic vulnerability is a significant concern for the elderly, particularly those without stable sources of income which affect their quality of life and healthcare utilisation.
  - More than 40% of the elderly in India are in the poorest wealth quintile, with about 18.7% of them living without an income. (India Ageing Report, 2023)
- **Social Issues**: Factors such as familial neglect, low education levels, socio-cultural beliefs and stigma, low trust on institutionalised health-care services etc. exacerbate the situation for the elders.
- **'Inherently gendered'**: One of the emerging issues of population ageing is the "Feminization of Ageing", that is many more women than men reaching older ages.
  - Census of India shows that the sex ratio of the elderly was considerably high (1028) in 1951 and subsequently dropped to about 938 in 1971, but finally increased up to 1033 in 2011.

### **Steps to Empower the Elderly Population in India :**

- **Protection from Destitution**: The first step towards a dignified life for the elderly is to protect them from destitution and all the deprivations that may come with it. Cash in the form of a pension can help to cope with many health issues and avoid loneliness as well.
- **Emulating the Frontrunners**: The southern States and India's poorer States such as Odisha and Rajasthan have achieved near-universal social security pensions. Their actions are worth emulating.
- **Recognising Concerns of Elderly Women**:. The policy should particularly cater to the more vulnerable and dependent older single women so that they can live respectable and independent lives.
- **Transforming the Perception of the Elderly**: The perception of the elderly as liabilities can be transformed by innovative institutions and social agencies that empower them and integrate them into productive societal roles.
  - The University of the Third Age (U3A) is an international movement that offers lifelong learning opportunities to retired and semi-retired individuals. It encourages continuous education in various subjects, from technology to arts.
  - The Senior Employment Scheme in Singapore helps match elderly job seekers with employers who value their experience and reliability.

### **Conclusion**

Innovative institutions and social agencies play a crucial role in transforming the perception of the elderly from liabilities to assets. By providing opportunities for education, employment, volunteering, health and wellness, and social inclusion, policy initiatives should empower the elderly and integrate them into productive societal roles.

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