

HEALTH AND ILLNESS AMONG THE GERIATRIC OF GUJARAT: A STUDY IN SOCIOLOGY OF HEALTH

“The Population that does not take care of their elderly, children and their young has no future because it abuses both its memory and its promise”- Pope Francis

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine and understand the health and illness status of the geriatric population in Gujarat from a sociological perspective. The study will explore the many facets of social, economic, psychological and political scenarios in relation to the elderly respondents in the study. Ageing as a phenomenon is new to India as the country still has a population in which majority are productive or young as a result not much consideration has been given to the ageing time bomb which could explode with various social and economic issues. India being a culture rich country has been for years giving tremendous respect and reverence to their aged family members. But with the penetration of western thoughts and lifestyle the myth that the aged have a protected and secure life in India have been broken, bringing out stories and facts about abandonment and neglect of the aged.

The main focus of the study is on assessing the health and illness of the elderly/geriatric living in family settings and old age homes in relation to their different social settings like religion, class and caste and also their level of activity or disengagement.

In order to have a holistic approach of the problem and to have a representative data across the state, five districts are selected which fall in different regions of Gujarat. By doing so, the researcher would like to find out whether there are any sub cultural variations in dealing with the elderly. The study is an empirical research based on field work. To collect the required information for the study a structured interview schedule with both open ended and close ended questions were used. The interview was carried out by the researcher on a one to one basis. The interview schedule was piloted and tested in a small sample for its reliability and necessary changes were

made. Secondary data has been collected through reviewing literature from various books, research papers, government documents, websites and also census and NSSO data, which was largely used to project the demography of the previous years or to support the findings of the study.

Health or illness are two unavoidable aspects of a living being, it could be understood and explained using different paradigms. The study is being analysed using mainly three perspectives (1) Socio-cultural Perspective for analysing and assessing the social, cultural and economic settings and their effects on health and illness of the sample population (2) Psycho-social Perspective to analyse and understand the intergenerational relationships and their effect on health and illness of the sampled elderly (3) Neo- liberalism to analyse and comprehend the Institutional and governmental role and interventions and their impacts on the health and illness of the sampled geriatric population. Though there are several theoretical paradigms the study has applied these three approaches to comprehend the various aspects of the study as it aptly applies to it.

Several objectives have been set to examine and explore the health and illness of the elderly population in Gujarat. The objectives of the study are the following:

- 1. To study the following ‘social aspects’ effecting the health and illness of the elderly** – To find the variation in health status among the rural and urban elderly respondents; to know the health status of the elderly staying in households and old age homes; to understand the relation between marital status and health and illness.; to ascertain health status of the elderly in joint families; to know the impact of literacy level on health and illness; to examine the availability of basic sanitation facilities; and to examine whether cultural norms, beliefs and practices affect health and illness.
- 2. To study the following ‘economic aspects’ effecting the health and illness of the elderly** – To examine the relation between health, illness and class; to understand the difference in health and illness of employed and unemployed elderly; to find the health and illness status of the superannuated elderly with pension; to find the health and illness status of the elderly with no income; to find the health and illness status of the elderly who are dependent on their children for sustenance; to find if there is any occupational related health issues.

- 3. To analyze the impact of the following ‘psychological aspect’ on health and illness of the elderly** – To study the effect of spirituality on health status of the elderly; to know the effect of recreational activity on health and illness; to examine the intergenerational relationships and its effect on health and illness.; to understand the attitudinal and behavioral changes and their effect on health and illness; to know the impact of elderly abuse on their psychological health; to know the impact of loss of spouse/ partner on the status of health and illness; to examine the occurrence of depression and other psychological problems faced by the elderly; to examine the facilities provided by the old age homes and the level of satisfaction and happiness among its residents
- 4. To study the effects of the following ‘physical problems’ on the health and illness of the elderly** - To examine the health status of aged males and females; to find out the disabilities found among the aged; to know the long term illness found among the aged; to examine the morbidity pattern among the aged.; to find out the addictive habitual practices; to know whether the elderly are physically abused; to examine the availability of proper health interventions and accessibility to health care centers; to find out the interval of medical examination; to find out the rate of hospital visits; to know the availability of nutritious diet and supplement; to know the type of health care accessed and approached; to relate the health of the elderly who are active with the elderly who are inactive.
- 5. To analyze the role and achievement of various organizations and policies for the elderly** - to find whether there are age-friendly hospitals and health care centers, to examine the role of NGO’s in elderly health; to understand the various schemes, policies and programs of government and their effectiveness; to examine the infrastructure, manpower and administrative efficiency of old age homes.

The thesis has been categorized into four parts:

Part I

It deals with an introduction which gives a description on the evolving issues of ‘ageing population’ in our country as well as world over. It further goes on to explain what is ageing and who are considered as aged by putting forth several definitions of the key words used in the study to give a clear understanding of the meanings

interpreted for those words. The historical development of sociology of health and illness at the global level as well in India gives a clear picture on how the subject has evolved over the years. A brief sketch of the study locations is followed by the aim and focus of the study. The hypothesis formulated gives a definite direction to the research conducted (**Chapter-1**). A compilation of review of several literatures which gives a clear idea on the issues related to ageing as well as health and illness related to the elderly at the international, national and local level are discussed at length (**Chapter-2**). The conceptual framework discusses the various theoretical paradigms applicable to study ageing and health. The research methodology gives an idea of the sample, tools and techniques applied to collect the required information on the subject and to analyse and interpret it based on the strategy planned for enquiry to achieve the set objectives (**Chapter-3**).

Part II

It deals with the analysis and interpretations of the various aspects of the study pertaining to the socio-cultural and economic aspects that lead to health and illness of the elderly (**Chapter-4**). It also deals with the psychological and physical characteristics of the elderly in context of health and illness (**Chapter-5**). It gives the status of health and illness of the elderly who are staying in several Old-age Homes in the study location by assessing several variables (**Chapter-6**). Further it discusses the role of hospitals and NGO's (**Chapter-7**).

Part III

It deals with the government policies and programmes pertaining to the aged giving a clear idea on the effectiveness of the programmes implemented (**Chapter-8**).

Part IV

It showcases the concluding reflections of the study with suggestions and some recommendations (**Chapter-9**).