

Population Ageing and Work Participation in Kerala

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Abstract

One of the major features of demographic transition in the world has been the considerable increase in the absolute and relative number of elderly people. The problem of ageing population in Kerala has a special gender dimension as females not only outnumber males among older adults, but also differ from their male counterparts with respect to economic status, marital status and health status. This paper examines the elderly person's work participation over the decades and also examines the economical dependency of the elderly in Kerala. The study reveals that the elder's (60+) work participation rate in Kerala when compared to other Indian states is low. Work participation rate continues to be high in the case of older men compared to older women. In economic activity, percentage of elderly main and marginal workers has increased both in rural and urban areas. Elderly women are more economically dependent on others, compared to the men both in rural and urban areas.

Keywords: Work participation, Elderly, Dependency ratio.

Introduction

Population ageing has become one of the most important global trends in the twenty first century. One of the inevitable consequences of demographic transition is population aging. The revolution in longevity and the steady declining fertility rates dramatically raised the number and proportion of elderly (60+) all over the world. Since 1950, the proportion of elderly has been increasing steadily, passing from 8 per cent in 1950 to 12 per cent in 2013, and is expected to reach 22 per cent in 2050. Healthy elders are a resource to their families, communities, countries and economies (WHO, 2002). But for many older people with no savings, lack of old age economical security, poor health, no economic support from their children and little help from their children, friends and communities, old age is not a phase of life worth looking forward to (UNFPA, 2002).

Various studies reveal that older women actively participate in work in rural and urban areas. Despite various ailments and locomotive disabilities, older women contribute to their families and communities in many meaningful ways - cook, clean, fetch water, take care of grandchildren, and make repairs (UNFPA, 2002). Higher proportion of elders increases the old age dependency ratio, implying a rise in the number of retirees relative to that of workers.

1991 and 2001 Census results reveal a decline in the work participation among the 60+ age group. Such declines in work participation may be due to lack of employment opportunities for the elderly or due to obsolescence of skills or due to the expansion of the old age support systems in the form of pension and retirement programmes (Vaidyanathan K, 2006).

India has been in the process of ageing and is moving towards it at a faster pace. The elderly population in India has already crossed 100 million in 2010 and is projected to increase to 198 million in 2030 and 326 millions in 2050 (Krishnamoorthy, 2010). It is predicted that the number of elderly in Kerala will reach 7.2 million or 20 percent of the population in 2021 and 37 percent in 2051 (Rajan, et.al., 1999).

Table 1 Percentage share of elderly population (60 years and above) in total population in Kerala

Census	Total	Male	Female
2001	10.6 (6.9)	9.64 (6.6)	11.42 (7.1)
2011	12.6 (8.0)	11.8 (7.7)	13.3 (8.4)

Source: Census reports for various years

Note: figures in brackets refer to all India

Census of India 2001 and 2011 reveals that percentage share of elderly population (60 years and above) in total population has been increasing in Kerala. In Kerala, the proportion of elderly persons has risen from 10.6 per cent in 2001 to 12.6 per cent in 2011. The percentage of elderly to the population is greater in Kerala than at the national level. Females outnumber males among older adults. The percentage of elderly female is 1.5 percent more than Male as per 2011 census in Kerala.

Statement of the Problem

The demographic trends show that Kerala is currently passing through the most critical stage of demographic transition as a result of fertility and mortality changes and the consequent age structural transition. The shift in the age composition in favour of old age has profound implications on the state's socio-economic situation. Work participation at older ages not only promotes active ageing from an individual's perspective but can also lighten the fiscal burden of population ageing. Elderly persons' active participation in social and economical activities enhances their health status (Rajan, 2006, Fenech. 2006). In Kerala scenario, the booming fertility in the past has created a big volume of working population. With limited employment opportunities the competition between the young adult population and old population will be different. Women gain relatively higher autonomy in the later stages of their life cycle. In a familial setting, her primary role as a care giver could elevate her status relatively better than elderly men (Sengupta and Agree, 2003). This paper examines the elderly person's work participation over the decades and also the economical dependency of the elderly in Kerala.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are

1. To study the trend of elderly population's work participation in Kerala.
2. To study the pattern of work participation among the elders in Kerala
3. To examine the economical dependency of the elderly in Kerala.

Data and Methodology

The study is based on secondary data. Secondary data was collected from the Census 2011, National Sample Survey, articles, journals, documents, printed literatures, web sites and other online data bases.

Trend and Pattern of Work Participation of the Elderly Population in Kerala

Individuals aged 60 and above are considered as elderly in this study. Work participation according to Indian Census is defined as 'participation in any economically productive activity with or without compensation, wages or profit. The reference period for determining a person as worker and non-worker is one year preceding the date of enumeration' (Census 2011).

Table 2 Work participation rate of Elderly in Kerala (in percentages)

Census	Total	Male	Female
1991	26.32	45.65	9.61
2001	22.9	40.5	8.8
2011	24.40	41.94	10.10

Source: Census reports for various years, Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India

Compared to other Indian states, the work participation rate of elderly in Kerala is low. The work participation rate (WPR) of older persons in the state in 2001 was 22.9 percent which increased to 24.40 in 2011. This low WPR in Kerala may be due to the relatively better social security system and relatively low level of poverty in the state. Work participation rate of elderly in Kerala has shown a decline during the period 199-2001 irrespective of gender. Work participation rate continues to be high in the case of older men compared to older women. Low physical stamina of females and their higher participation in household activities may be the reasons for their low participation in employment at old age (Rajan and Mathews, 2006).. A study by Rajan and Zachariah (1997) point out that older workers in the state is likely to be doubled by 2021 which pose a challenge for government in finding gainful employment for aged and providing them means of subsistence through pension and social security.

Table 3 Elderly Main and marginal workers by sex and place of residence (%)

Census	Total		Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1991	8.00	5.64	8.69	5.73	6.04	5.32
2001	7.74	6.48	8.35	6.68	6.03	5.84
2011	9.34	7.36	10.22	7.92	8.34	6.59

Source: Census reports for various years, Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India

Workers in India may be classified as main workers (those who had worked in the major part of the reference period, i.e. 6 months or more); and marginal workers (those who had not). In the 60+ age group there are more male workers than female workers. The share of male workers is higher in rural and urban areas when compared to female workers. The percentage of elderly main and marginal workers has increased both in rural and urban areas.

Table 4 Activity Status of Elderly Non-Workers in Kerala

	Activity status	1991	2001	2011
Male	Pensioners	23.3	23.3	30.3
	Household duties	8.2	9.4	6.8
	Dependents	65.5	50.6	48.0
	Others	3	16.7	14.9
	Total	100	100	100
Female	Pensioners	4.1	5.7	7.7
	Household duties	45.1	42.4	44.0
	Dependents	50	47.5	45.0
	Others	0.8	4.4	3.3
	Total	100	100	100

Source: Census reports for various years

Census data categorised non-workers in the state as pensioners, elderly engaged in household duties, dependents etc. Others in this category include beggars and inmates of mental and charitable institutions. The activity status of non-workers shows that majority of both older men and women are dependents. Trends indicated a decrease in the proportion of dependents from 65.5 percent in 1991 for older men and 50 percent to 45 percent for older women. This may be because of marginal increase in the proportion of pensioners during the same period. There are more male pensioners (30.3 percent) than female pensioners (7.7 percent) in the state. This may be due to the low work participation of females in organised sectors. It is expected that only elderly receiving pension are relatively better off than others. It is found that 44 percent of older women were engaged in household activities compared to 6.8 percent of older men. In most cases, older women engaging in household activities are contributing to family by cooking and child care. High proportion of dependent population especially among older women is a matter of concern as it put pressure on family and government regarding the care of elderly.

The Economical Dependency of the Elderly in Kerala

Dependency ratio of population is used to present the economic consequences of population ageing. It is the ratio of population below 14 years of age and above 60 years of age to the population in working age, 15-59 years. Overall dependency ratio of the state declined from 94.03 percent in 1961 to 55.67 percent in 2011. This decline in dependency ratio is due to the reduction in the number of dependent children as a consequence of fertility decline. However, a tendency to increase dependency burden of working age population is projected to reach a ratio of 71.17 percent by 2031. There may a change in the composition of overall dependency ratio in the state. Table 5 shows the gender-wise distribution of old age dependency in state.

Table 5 Gender Wise Old Age Dependency Ratio in India and Kerala

		1991	2001	2011
Kerala	Male	13.72	15.24	18.61
	Female	15.07	17.73	20.46
	Total	14.41	16.53	19.59
India	Male	12.16	12.45	12.37
	Female	12.23	13.77	13.37
	Total	12.19	13.08	12.8

Source: Census reports for various years

Compared to other Indian states, Kerala is having highest old age dependency ratio. From 1961 onwards Kerala's old age dependency ratio is higher than India. This higher dependency ratio is an indication of increased proportion of aged in the state. In India and Kerala the female dependency ratio is higher than males but this gender-gap in dependency ratio is more in Kerala. Higher proportion of females among old age population as result of greater longevity may be the reason for this high female dependency ratio in Kerala. Dependency ratio has only limited scope in assessing the economic consequences of population ageing. All the persons above 60 need not be dependents. There are evidences that elderly continue to participate in economic activities even at old age. Economic dependence of elderly gives the exact burden of population ageing.

Table 6 Percent distribution of persons aged 60 years and above by state of economic independence in Kerala

Place of Residence	Male			Female		
	Not dependent on others	Partially Dependent on others	Fully Dependent on others	Not dependent on others	Partially Dependent on others	Fully Dependent on others
Rural	36	20	43	10	18	70
Urban	47	18	35	19	16	64

Source: CSO-National Sample Survey, 60th round (Jan-Jun 2004)

It is known fact that it is the family that remains the major source of support for most of the people. It is the primary support system on which elders depends upon especially on spouses and on children. The dependency of elderly on others can be either financial, personal or both. However, in majority cases such dependency is financial in nature. As expected it is generally women who are highly dependent on others, compared to the men both in rural and urban areas. The reason for this lies in the socio-structural system that always relegated the secondary position to women imposing on them to lead a dependent status on men- first on father, then husband and on sons during old age. Lack of any economic security of one's own in terms of job, property etc. also increases their dependency over others more often. Despite such circumstances, noteworthy fact is that there are elderly people who are either partially dependent or not dependent. Economic security or being economically productive can be assumed as the reason for differences in their dependency level. While understanding dependency of elders on family, it is also important to note that it is not always true that dependency is common to all elders and they always depend on others. It is rather that their dependency varies, with many depending partially on their family. It may be due to the fact that they are either engaged in some economic activity or receiving monetary support from state/central/others that make them economically independent to some extent. Such independent status of old seems important considering that there may be cases where their economic status is relevant for the family as children may be dependent on elderly. In other cases the economic independent status of the elderly might reduce the financial burden on the family with respect to their care.

Conclusion

The demographic trends show that the share of elderly population in total population has been increasing in Kerala. Females outnumber males among older adults. The percentage of elderly female is 1.5 percent more than male as per 2011 census in Kerala. The changes in the age structure and gender of elderly population have posed serious challenge in the demographic and development field. Compared to other Indian states, the work participation rate of elderly in Kerala is low. This low WPR in Kerala may be due to the relatively better social security system and relatively low level of poverty in the state. Work participation rate continues to be high in the case of older men compared to older women. In coming decades the major challenge before the state is provision of employment opportunities, social security and pension for the aged. A large share of old age population will increase the welfare expenditure of the government in the form of social security. Further, high life expectancy raises the cost of promoting benefits as the government has to provide benefits over a longer period. The activity status of non-workers shows that majority of both older men and women are dependents. In Kerala the female dependency ratio is higher than males. Higher proportion of females among old age population as result of greater longevity may be the reason for this high female dependency ratio in Kerala. Women are more economically dependent on others, compared to the men both in rural and urban areas. Non Contributory Pensions to the Older Persons in BPL Families, Income Generation Opportunities for Able and Willing Older Persons, Special Schemes for Women, Dalits, Rural Poor, Destitute and Disabled Older Persons, Widows etc can improve their position. Universal health insurance should also be introduced to allow all older persons to maintain health and participate actively in the labour market.

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