

## Old Age - A Social Problem

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Article History:</b> Received: 01<sup>st</sup> August 2025 Accepted: 05<sup>th</sup> August 2025 Published: 11<sup>th</sup> August 2025</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Old Age, Social, Problems of Old Age, Urbanization</p>	<p>Old age is an inevitable stage of human life, yet in modern India it has emerged as a serious social problem. Unlike earlier times when elders held respected positions within families and communities, rapid industrialization, urbanization, disintegration of joint families, and changing social values have marginalized them. This paper examines the biological, psychological, social, and economic dimensions of aging, highlighting issues such as declining health, loss of income, dependence, loneliness, and reduced social status. It also explores how modernization, erosion of traditional systems like caste and joint families, and occupational changes have intensified these challenges. Using secondary data sources, the study emphasizes that old age problems are not uniform across rural, urban, and tribal societies, but are shaped by geography, family structures, and socio-economic conditions. The findings underline the urgent need for social awareness, supportive policies, and community initiatives to address the growing crisis of elderly care in India.</p>

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The issue of the elderly is a modern one. In the last century, there was no trace of the problems of the elderly. But currently, the nature of the problems faced by the elderly in India has increased. Its nature is not uniform everywhere. The problems of the elderly in urban, rural, and tribal societies are completely different. Old age is a biological process. It is the last but inevitable stage in the human life cycle. The onset of old age in humans and animals is not the same; some animals have a very short lifespan, while some animals like elephants live for a long time. It cannot even be said that old age begins in human life in all countries after a specific age, because the climate of that region affects the person's life. The onset of old age is earlier in people living in tropical regions than in people living in cold regions. In the biological process of aging, the mental factor is important.

### **Research Objectives:**

1. To understand when and how old age comes.
2. To study the problems of the elderly.
3. To review the reasons behind the creation of problems for the elderly.

### **Research Methodology:**

This research paper has used secondary sources. Books, publications, reference books, periodicals, and weeklies have been used in it.

### **Elderly Person:**

"The last period of an individual's life cycle is old age." - Elizabeth Hurlock "Old age is the process of moving away from the important and fully useful initial period of life, which is desired."

### **When does old age come? How does old age come?:**

This mental state regarding old age affects a person's efficiency. The researcher has thought about and studied when and how old age comes. The human body has countless cells; as a person ages, degradation is found in cell division. Some cells die, but their place is not filled by other cells. For example, brain cells do not divide after a certain period. Similarly, when cells in the heart, muscles, and ordinary muscles are destroyed, new cells are not formed to replace them. However, skin cells and red blood cells continuously divide and grow. In the human body, the process of some cells stopping division and new cells forming slows down, and the process of cell degradation continuously increases. That is when a person experiences old age.

Along with this, heredity is carried by 'genes'. Genes are transmitted from parents to children, determining physical characteristics such as eye, skin colour, skin complexion, and hair.

Each of these genes contains long molecules called Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA). According to some researchers, human lifespan is determined by these genes. When DNA is damaged by genes for some reason, human lifespan weakens, and the signs of old age appear.

Furthermore, in the analysis of when old age comes, the consideration of male and female endocrine glands is important. The gland that controls the male and female endocrine glands is called the hypothalamus. When the hypothalamus gland in men and women weakens, a person experiences old age. Some scientists have discovered a new substance called monoamine oxidase in the human body. According to them, when this monoamine oxidase increases and the level of hypothalamus decreases, old age becomes visible. Some believe that old age comes when the body's immune system deteriorates. The immune system primarily depends on white blood cells, so it is important to increase and protect white blood cells. Thymosin hormone plays a fundamental role in the immune system. Thymosin hormone is produced by the thymus gland, and when the thymosin hormone in the body decreases, old age results.

Now, when considering old age, along with the biological perspective, the impact of the geographical environment is also considered. The geographical environment has a special effect on human life. People living in hot regions tire easily, and their efficiency decreases. Therefore, old age begins earlier in the lives of people in hot regions, and a little later in the lives of people in cold regions. In contrast, the regions of Hunza in Pakistan and the Caucasus in Russia have the highest number of centenarians. After studying this context, some researchers have clarified that the human body is not harmed to the same extent in cold regions as it is in hot regions, meaning that climate, or rather the geographical environment, affects a person's life. In modern times, industrialization, urbanization, the resulting mental stress, the hustle and bustle of life, noise, pollution, malnutrition, and insecurity, etc., have led to earlier onset of old age.

**Problems in Old Age:** Since ancient times, elders have been revered in Indian society, and their guidance has been sought. According to Phillips and Hardson, old age is not a disease. However, many ailments appear in the elderly as a consequence of old age. Old age is the declining phase of life, meaning that the vigor of youth ends, and a person turns from adulthood to old age. In a way, the stage of evolution ends, and the human body moves towards degeneration. During this period, limbs become weak, various organs face dysfunction, and some organs lose their ability to function. As a result, there is a loss of mental control, and these physical changes in old age affect a person's social and economic life, leading to many problems.

However, the effects of old age are not the same for everyone; differences are observed in these effects because everyone's physical constitution is not the same. In old age, wrinkles spread over the body. Lack of control and irritability are observed. There is a difference between those who are financially well-off and those who live in poverty. If individuals living in poverty are helpless, their condition is extremely deplorable. Due to financial hardship, they cannot meet

their daily needs. They have to work, but due to old age, they cannot work much. Also, people do not give work to the elderly. Due to lack of work, the process of earning stops, and various problems arise in the lives of the elderly. With no other option, such elderly individuals are found begging.

Differences in the effects of old age are also seen based on occupation. Individuals associated with various occupations such as salaried employees, agricultural workers, unskilled labourers, and rickshaw drivers, experience the effects of their respective occupations, and their problems are different. Old age also comes at different rates for men and women. The effects of old age are also different. Women's lifespan appears to be longer than men's. Therefore, old age approaches men's lives earlier than women's. If there is a significant age difference between husband and wife at the time of marriage, men in the family tend to age faster compared to women. Although such variations are observed in old age, no one can deny this declining phase of human life. Some of the problems that arise in a person's and family's life due to old age are:

**Economic Problems:** In old age, the ability to work declines. Therefore, they cannot work continuously and tire quickly. This is why people are retired in old age. Retirement removes a person from work. As a result, a person's participation in production ends, and since the person is not involved in production, they do not receive remuneration. At the same time, in old age, a person's needs increase. They require medical assistance and help from others. Simultaneously, as their economic income stops in this situation, financial dependence arises in the lives of the elderly. They have to rely on pensions, provident funds, and bank savings. However, the situation of unskilled labourers who do not have government or any other job is extremely pathetic. They cannot make any provisions for old age. In this situation, destitute elders have no option but to beg. This gives rise to issues of suicide, poverty, and abandoned elderly.

**Health Problems:** Many effects of old age are observed on the human body. These primarily include greying of hair, wrinkles on the skin, changes in facial shape, blemishes, drooping shoulders, trembling hands and feet, stooping posture, tooth loss, and many other such changes. Internal bodily changes include the cessation of cell division, decline in the immune system, brittle bones, lack of mental control, and problems related to the heart, kidneys, and digestive system. In addition, vision impairment, hearing loss, and speech impediments occur. Hypersensitivity, quarrelsomeness, and excessive dependence arise. Some individuals are even plagued by the idea of imaginary illnesses, through which they try to gain sympathy from others. In this way, many health-related problems are observed to arise.

**Mental Problems:** Just as physical changes occur in old age, mental changes also begin. Some mental changes are inevitable with increasing age. Thinking ability declines, the capacity to learn new things decreases, forgetfulness increases, feelings of inferiority grow, a lack of self-confidence is observed, mental frustration, loneliness, and irrational behaviour emerge. They foster a feeling of uselessness, believing that society has no use for them. They feel ignored,

irrespected, and that no one seeks their advice, making them more sensitive. This often leads to increased suspicion and quarrelsomeness. The elderly feel isolated and experience mental stress. In this way, many mental changes and problems arise in old age. Such mental states in old age alienate the elderly from primary groups and affect their relationships with family members.

**Social Problems:** As a result of old age, a person becomes distant from their occupation, leading to financial loss. However, the significant impact is the change in a person's status and role. If the status before old age was superior, it declines in old age. A first-class officer, after retirement, starts living like an ordinary person. But due to the difference between the status and role during power and the status and role afterward, a kind of gap is created in a person's life. The loss of social status often leads to frustration. The social contact sphere of the elderly becomes limited. Individuals become distant from different friend groups in their occupation. Social relationships are affected, and loneliness increases. A feeling of social insecurity arises in the minds of the elderly. In family life, disagreements arise between the elderly and other members. A mistaken belief that they are being ignored in all matters takes root in the minds of the elderly. They express these thoughts to others. In such situations, tension and conflict arise in the family. Generally, the elderly represent traditional ideas. Their belief is "old is gold." They do not accept changing new aspirations, and they believe that others should also not accept them. This leads to conflict between the elderly and youth. The elderly value traditional values and despise new values. Such value conflicts create discord among family members.

**Dependence:** Many health problems arise in the elderly. Primarily, they cannot hear, standing, walking, lifting things are not easy, speech defects occur, and vision is impaired. This affects eating, excretion, and other activities. Dependence increases. Earlier, a grandson was called the "stick of the elder." In joint families, grandchildren used to help grandparents. But now, due to the nuclear family system, such support no longer exists. Old age is called the period of dependence because, during this period, the elderly person becomes completely dependent like a small child. Lately, in some families, the modern generation is starting to refer to the elderly as "dustbins." The trend of keeping them in old age homes has increased. As a result, the number of old age homes is seen to be increasing.

#### **Review of Reasons for the Emergence of Problems in Old Age:**

**Disintegration of Joint Families:** Joint families include more than two generations. Common residence, common meals, common property, and religious rituals are performed under the control of the head male of the family. In such families, the head, the elder male and female, used to receive respect. Such families also included relatives. Children, disabled, widows, elderly, and sick people were provided social, psychological, and economic protection. In these families, elders played a definite status and role associated with that status. Therefore, family members had affection, love, intimacy, and sympathy for the elderly. According to traditional values, caring for the elderly was essential. In Indian culture, where post-death rituals (Shraddha) were performed,

elders were not neglected. However, in modern times, urbanization, industrialization, Westernization, the prevalence of individualistic ideology, and diverse occupations have affected the joint family system. The number of nuclear families in urban communities began to increase. The size of rural families became smaller, and distance developed in the relationships between members. In modern families, the question arose as to what the roles of the elderly should be. It became difficult to say that the elderly's experience and acquired knowledge would be beneficial for their children's occupations or education. For example, if the father is a farmer and the son is a doctor, the traditional roles of the elderly became ineffective. Then, the lack of participation in production, lack of education, increasing spread of education, and modern knowledge created a gap in the lives of the elderly. Limited income, housing shortages, lack of individual freedom, and ideas of individual freedom led to the responsibility of caring for the elderly being denied in modern families. Through all these processes, the problem of the elderly has become more complex.

**Changes in Rural Communities:** In India, the majority of people live in rural areas. The number of elderly people is found to be higher in proportion to the rural population. Nevertheless, in these communities, the elderly held a respected position. The elderly were included in Gram Panchayats and Nyay Panchayats; they were given honor and respect. In the context of rural traditions, rural economic life, rural religion, rural deities, vows and fasts, festivals, and ceremonies, the role of the elderly was important. All activities in rural life were carried out with the advice of the elderly. From birth to death rituals, the elderly provided guidance. Along with general problems, the elderly used traditional methods to resolve natural calamities. In matters of household industries and agriculture, the advice of the elderly was extremely important. In short, the elderly held an important position in rural communities. However, in modern times, there has been a significant prevalence of modern knowledge in agriculture, industry, and animal husbandry. The new generation has acquired modern knowledge. For the elderly, who value traditional thinking, this new knowledge is ineffective. However, the new generation is attracted to this knowledge. This has created conflict between the elderly and the new generation. In Gram Panchayats and Nyay Panchayats, the youth have replaced the elderly. Democratic principles, advanced knowledge, and the spread of education have reduced the importance of the elderly due to many such reasons. The self-respect of the elderly has been hurt. The elderly began to express their sorrow, saying, "No one asks us, no one gives us respect." Due to ideological conflict between the elderly and youth, discontent began to resonate in family life. The elderly do not adapt to changing circumstances at the same speed, making the problem of the elderly more difficult.

**Decline of the Caste System:** In Indian society, the basis of stratification was the caste system. The caste system preserved traditional customs and values. Individual and social life was controlled by the caste system. The elderly were the knowledge base for the caste system's

customs, traditions, festivals, behavioral patterns, and rituals. In any matter, the decision of the elderly was important, and the elderly were included in caste panchayats. The elderly performed the important function of imparting knowledge. In the caste system, the elderly held an extremely important position. They were provided with social, mental, and economic security in all respects. The elderly transmitted caste heritage. However, in modern times, the caste system began to disintegrate. Instead of traditional status and roles, self-acquired status and roles became prevalent. Quality began to be given importance over age. In bureaucratic groups, the importance of the age factor was completely lost. This impacted the traditional status and roles of the elderly. The association between caste and occupation ended, making the traditional knowledge of the elderly in these areas ineffective. A kind of void was created in the lives of the elderly. The question arose of how to spend leisure time. The feeling of uselessness increased, and through all these processes, the problem of the elderly became even more complex. In short, due to the decline of the caste system, the traditional position of the elderly and their associated status and roles changed.

**Urbanization and Industrial Economy:** In India, the foundation of the industrial economy was laid from the 19th century. New techniques and machinery began to be used in production. In a way, there was a revolution in production. Thousands of laborers began to migrate to cities to work in large factories, and the process of urbanization began. The people migrating to cities included skilled and unskilled laborers. For the first time, modern occupations were adopted over traditional ones, but at the same time, problems of housing in cities, limited income, and individualistic ideology made it difficult to care for the elderly. This further complicated the problem of the elderly. The industrial economy also brought diversity in occupations. There were tremendous changes in occupational techniques, and the use of machines began. In earlier occupations, the traditional knowledge of the elderly was useful, and their advice was considered important. The transmission of occupational knowledge was done through the elderly. Individuals, until the very last moment of their lives, were involved in occupations. However, in the industrial economy, the association between family and occupation began to decline. The knowledge acquired by the elderly through experience became rarely useful. In the present time, machines and technology have advanced rapidly in this field. The knowledge acquired by the elderly in their prime began to seem outdated. This led to the end of the generational role of the elderly in occupations, and a serious question arose about what to do in old age.

**Democratic Governance System:** The objectives of freedom, equality, fraternity, and universal justice were recognized. According to Article 15 of the Constitution, citizens would not be discriminated against on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, etc. Individual liberty, freedom of thought, and freedom of expression were recognized. Due to such democratic principles, traditional bases for determining status and role became useless. The importance of age and traditional bases ended. Earlier, a person's position was determined by age. In short, the

electoral process in a democratic governance system became very important. Elected individuals are given a specific status, and with some exceptions, age is not considered.

**New Social Values:** In modern society, the principle of status and role was accepted. This endangered the traditional position of the elderly, and they began to feel stifled. Social isolation created a void in the lives of the elderly. Due to individualistic ideology, self-interest began to be considered superior to family interest. In modern families, the elderly began to be neglected. The prevalence of new values made the problem of the elderly difficult. From the causes given so far, it has become clear how the problem of the elderly has arisen in Indian society. The causes mentioned above are not the only ones responsible for the problems of the elderly; other causes can also be mentioned in this regard. However, it is certain that there is a close relationship between the process of modernization and the problems of the elderly. In societies where the process of modernization has advanced, the problem of the elderly has arisen to a great extent. In the tribal society of our country, the problem of the elderly has not arisen, and there is a difference between the problems of the elderly in rural society and those in urban areas. For this, we must mention the difference in the pace of modernization. In reality, in old age, there is a need for help from others. A person is physically and mentally exhausted. But it is precisely during this period of dependence that the elderly are removed from work. In such situations, the elderly feel helpless with the realization that their prestige is gone, people do not respect them, and they are detested. The condition of the elderly in the unskilled labor class is even more alarming. The limited income earned throughout their lives as laborers is exhausted in fulfilling their basic needs. Due to lack of permanent property, there is no other source of income in old age. Children who live as laborers try to avoid the additional responsibility of the elderly due to their low income. The decline in efficiency, occupational displacement, negligible income, and low status create a vicious cycle that makes old age feel like a curse.

**Conclusion:** The problems of the elderly in modern India are a burning issue. The increasing decline of the joint family system in Indian society, people's mindset, and urbanization and the industrial economy, among many other reasons, are creating a new problem. The problem of the elderly did not exist in ancient times, but it has emerged on a large scale today. In India, until the 19th century, there was no problem related to the elderly, but in the present situation, newspapers, magazines, quarterlies, weeklies, periodicals, etc., are raising the problems of the elderly. Among them, Rajiv Shukla Sir recently conducted a survey on the problems of senior citizens in Pune city and presented serious findings. This primarily discusses the problems of senior citizens. The Lokmanya Senior Citizens Association in Pune has taken the initiative to conduct a survey in collaboration with the 'Central Senior Citizens Organization Pune'. Many problems have been presented in it. Importantly, they have challenged that if the problems of the elderly are not addressed immediately, future generations may have to endure even greater hardships than us.

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