

Agewell Research & Advocacy Centre

AGEWELL STUDY ON CHANGING TRENDS OF OLD AGE (September 2010)



NATIONAL

Agewell Foundation

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CHANGING TRENDS OF OLD AGE - A national study

INTRODUCTION

In today's fast paced life, nothing is permanent but change. Change has become acceptable to population of all ages. Even older persons, who are known for famous adage - "*Old Habits Die Hard*" are talking about change, they are all set to change their old habits of adjusting or adapting themselves in whatever environment is given to them till few years back. In most of the societies, older persons usually lived a marginalized life, though with respect from society members. But today, in completely changed socio-economic scenario they also want to remain in mainstream of the society.

With fast changing socio-economic scenario, living conditions of the old people all across the country have changed dramatically. Older persons are forced to cope with new socio-economic settings. To get rid of social marginalization, loneliness, isolation and even negligence older persons are struggling to change their way of living and thinking.

Research & Advocacy Centre at Agewell Foundation (*a consortium of over 1500 NGOs and 6500 volunteers spread across 540 districts of India, committed to initiate better interaction between generations and extend a helping hand*) has recently carried out a nationwide survey to study changing trends of Old Age and changing needs of Older Persons.

Agewell volunteers' network spread across the country worked as interviewers for the survey. The interviews were conducted during the 2nd & 3rd week of September, 2010

OBJECTIVE

The study was carried out with the objective to identify changing and emerging needs of older Persons in modern society, while going through the impact of

changing needs of older persons on socio-economic health of society in particular and country in general.

The study was also designed to look out for the factors responsible for changing trends of old age.

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE DESIGN

Comprehensive interviews were under by managing time-bound schedules to collect information /impression/views from selected older persons from across the country

Under the survey a representative sample of 15000 older persons (approx. 7500 each from rural and urban areas) was interviewed spread across 135 districts of 25 states & Union Territories of India.

Sample Units

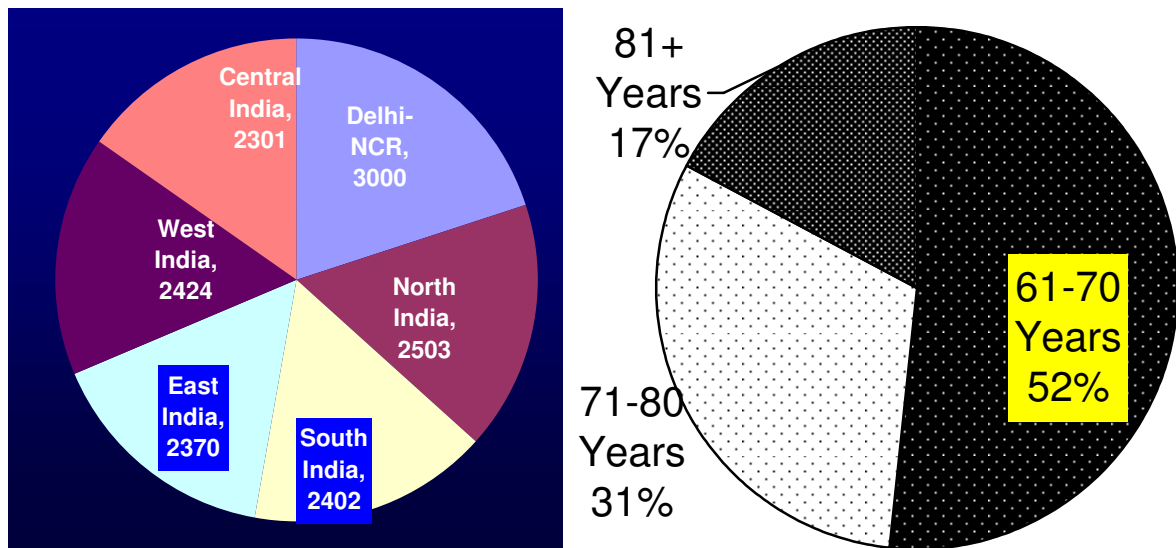
The sample units were selected based on random sampling but taken care to incorporate the representative views of the country from six divisions as per following;

<i>S. No</i>	<i>States/UTs</i>	<i>No of sample districts</i>	<i>No of respondents</i>
1.	Region 1 – Delhi & NCR Delhi & NCR	15	3000
2.	Region 2 – North India Rest Uttar Pradesh, Rest Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh & Uttarakhand	20	2503
3.	Region 3 – South India Andhra Pradesh , Tamilnadu, Kerala & Karnataka	25	2402
4.	Region 4 – East India West Bengal, Orissa, Assam, Mizoram, Tripura & Nagaland	25	2370
5.	Region 5 – West India Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat & Goa	25	2424
6.	Region 6 – Central India Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh	25	2301
	All India Total	135	15000

Age-group & gender wise classification of respondents

Respondents were further categorized in age groups & gender wise to understand the changing trends old age better.

Categories	61-70 Years	71-80 Years	81+ Years	Total
Rural-Older Men	1948	1108	624	3680
Rural-Older Women	1988	1148	684	3820
Urban-Older Men	1904	1204	617	3725
Urban-Older Women	1925	1211	639	3775
	7765	4671	2564	15000



Sample Respondents

The populace of 60+ years was randomly selected as per the 4 groups as given under;

Categories	Old Men	Old women	Total
Category I : Rural	3680	3820	7500
Category II : Urban	3725	3775	7500
Total	7405	7595	15000

In each group the target was to include every sections of the society, specifically

- Retired older persons
- Non-pensioners/self-employed
- Labourers/farmers
- Housewives
- Literate
- Illiterate
- Financially secure
- BPL family

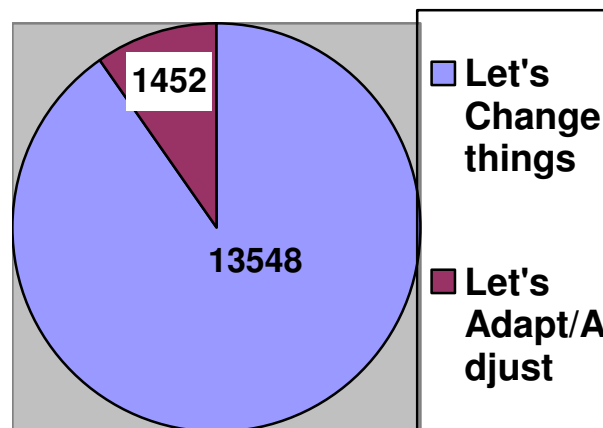
Major Findings

1. Changing Trends of Old Age

To assess the ever-changing trends of old age and needs of older persons, older persons were asked about their desire to change the things for better old age or adapt in the present environment or conditions.

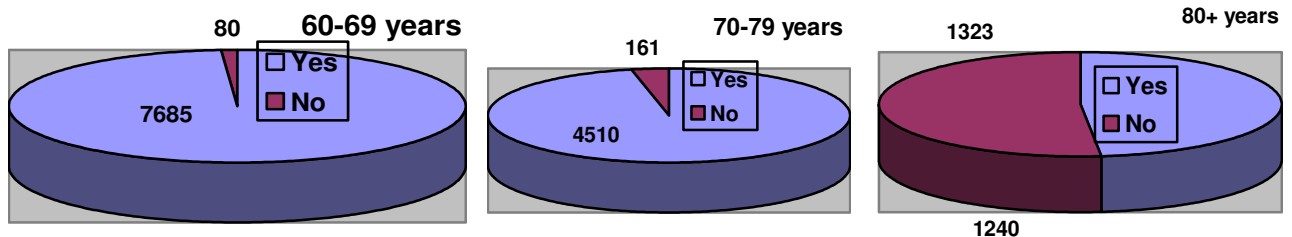
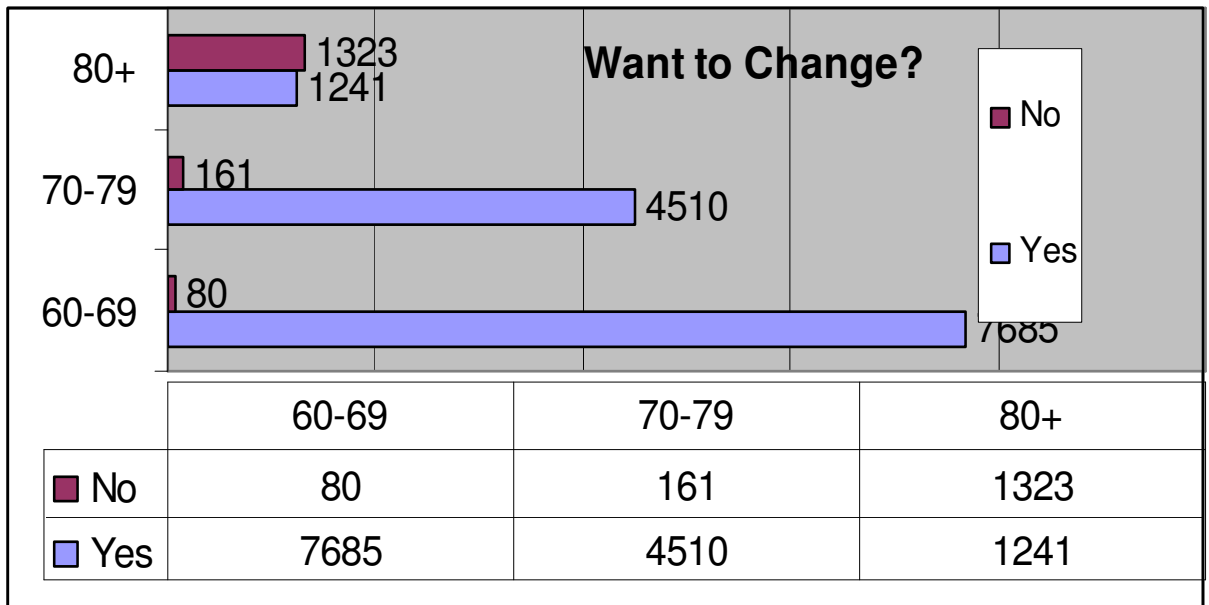
- **90.32 % older persons said that they want to change things accordingly, so that they can better their old age.** Out of total 15000 older persons interviewed, 13548 old people express their desire to change the present environment
- **Only 9.68% older persons were in favour of adjustment with present environment or conditions.** Out of 15000 older persons, only 1452 older persons were satisfied with current situations and happy with adaptation in present environment.

Change v/s Adaptaiton



2. Age-Group wise findings

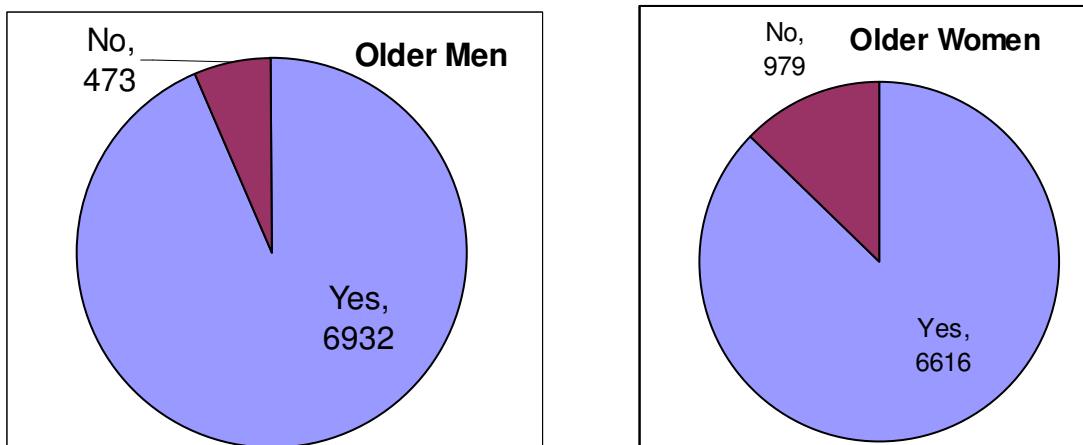
- In the age-group of 60-69 years 98.97% people i.e.7685 older persons out of total 7765 older persons in this age group, reportedly told that they want to change the environment where as only 1.03% i.e. 80 older persons seemed not happy with change.
- In the age-group of 70-79 years 96.55% people i.e.4510 older persons out of total 4671 older persons in this age group, said that they want to change the environment where as only 3.45% i.e. 161 older persons were not found in favour of change.
- In the age-group of 80+ years majority of older persons i.e. 51.6% people express their desire to remain happy with present situation they don't want express their desire to change. 48.4% older persons i.e. 1241 out of total 2564 older persons interviewed from this group were still looking for change in their life.



3. Gender wise findings

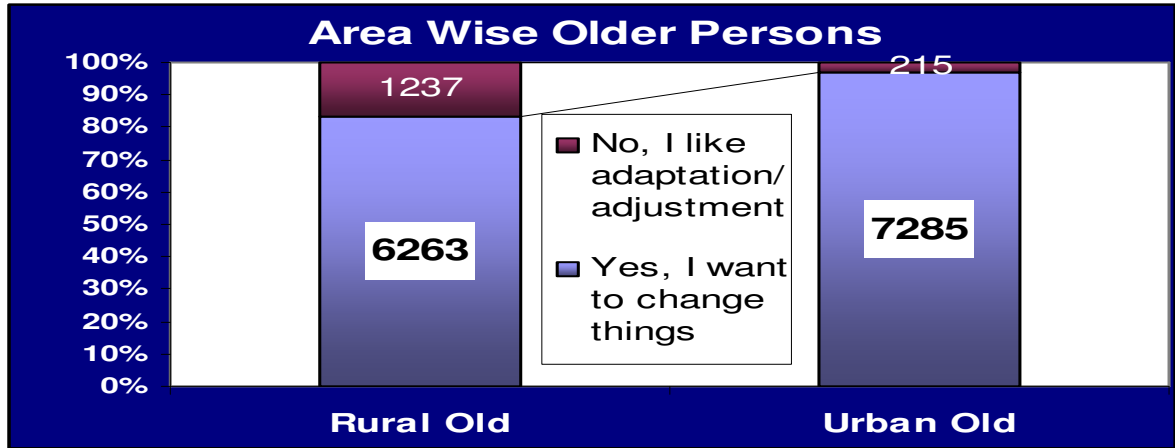
- Since in our society living conditions of elderly women and men are to some extent different, under the study it was also attempted to assess the genderwise changes.
- Older men were found more dissatisfied (93.61 %) in comparison to older women (87.11%). Out of 7405 older men contacted during the survey 6932 older men said that they need change and trying to change the things, where as 6616 out of 7595 older women also found in favour of change.

Want change? (Gender-Wise)

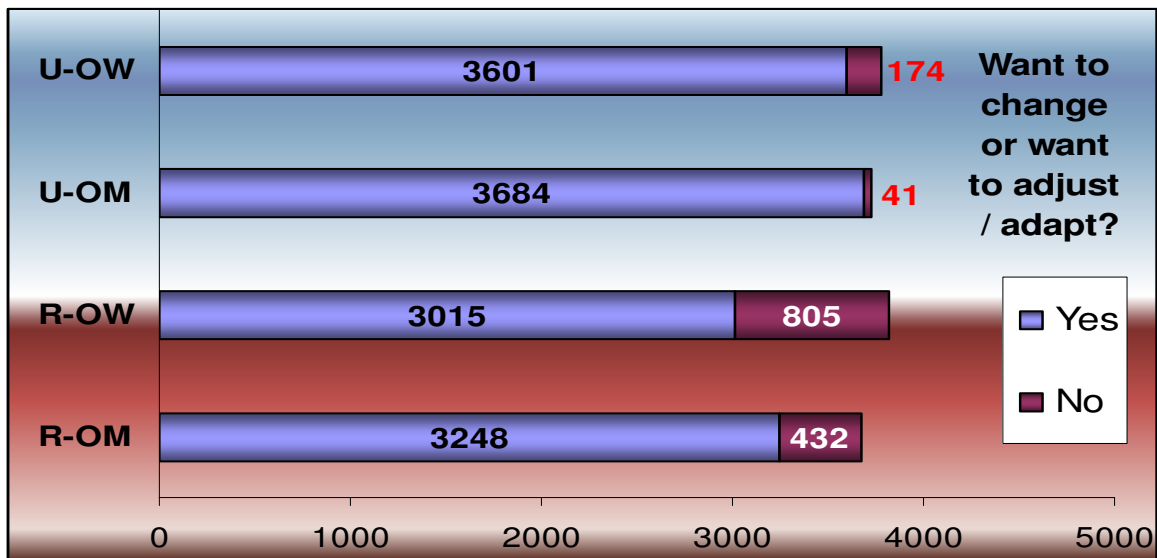


4. Area-wise

- Survey analysis suggests that in rural areas 83.51% older persons are expecting or working for change in their lives whereas in urban areas almost all older persons (97.13 %) told that they just want change, irrespective of kind of change.
- Even in rural areas more than ¾ older women (78.93%) were thinking of change in their lives. Out of 3820 rural elderly women 3015 complained about their miserable conditions due to various reasons, and wanted change.



- In urban areas 95.39% old women were not satisfied with present circumstances and voted for change, whereas this percentage in rural areas was comparatively very low (78.93).
- According to survey data, trend of change is quite popular in rural areas too.
- 88.26% Older men from rural areas were found struggling for bringing in a change.



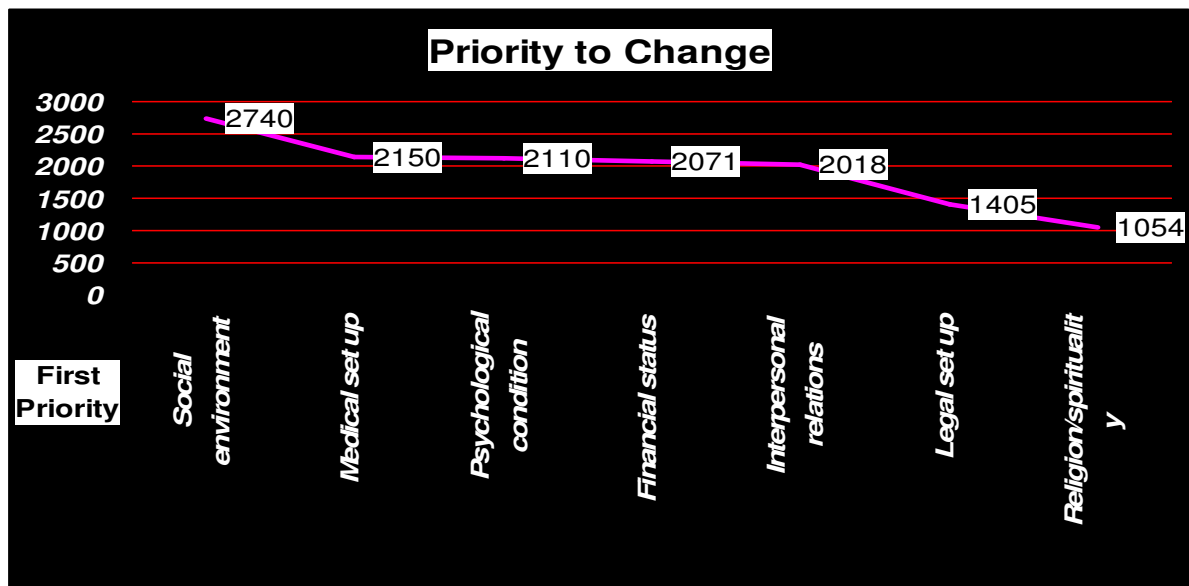
5. Changing Needs of Older Persons

To identify the factors responsible for fast changing trends of Old Age, Agewell volunteers working as survey team members were directed to collect detailed information from older persons regarding their views on old age.

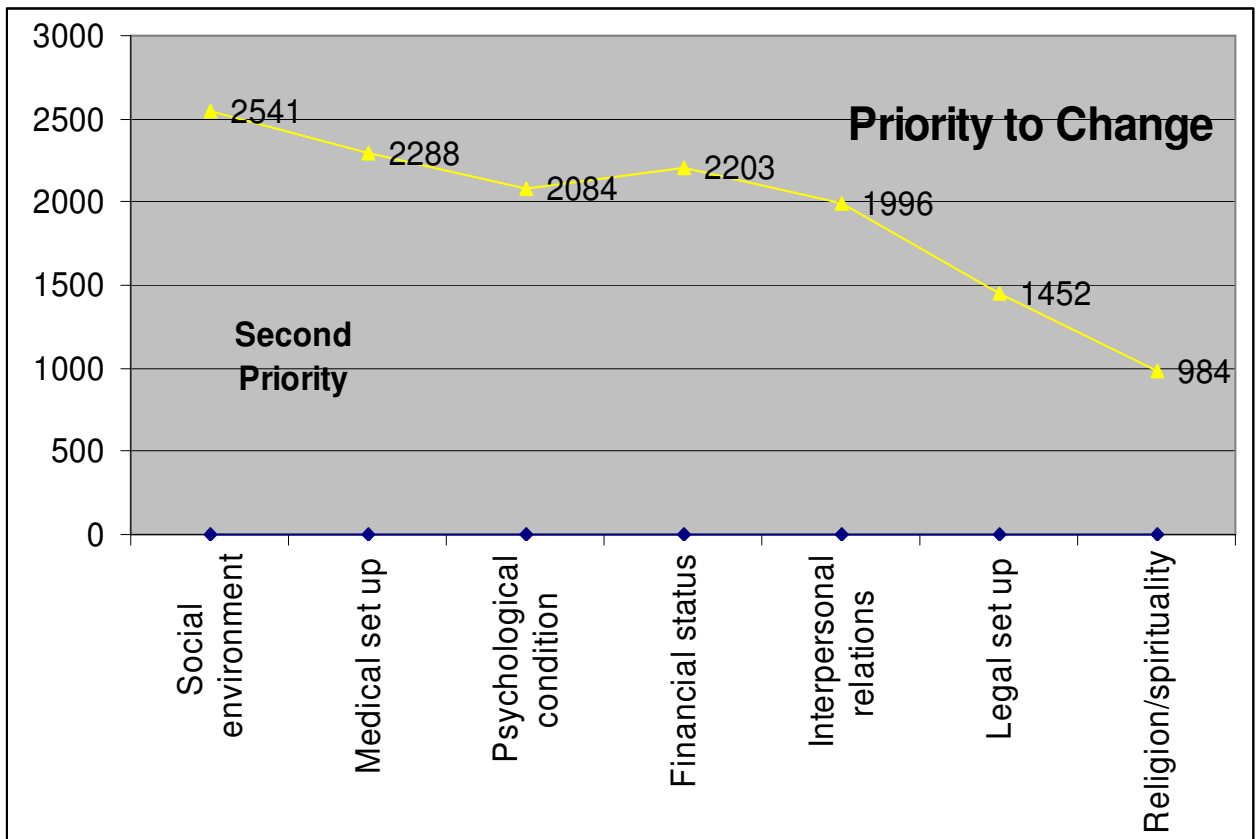
After analyzing the data including views, statement and other relevant information received from 15000 older persons, it was found that following were the major problematic areas in old age;

- Social environment
- Medical set up
- Legal set up
- Financial status
- Psychological condition
- Interpersonal relations
- Religion/spirituality

When older persons were asked to prioritize their changing and emerging needs, almost 1/5th older persons (20.22%) gave 1st priority to change the social environment. Out of 13548 old persons who wanted change in the present circumstances, 2740 older persons said that they feel their first need is to change social atmosphere. After that 15.87% older persons (2150 out of 13548 older persons) expressed their desire to change medical set up so that their life could be more comfortable.



- Again according to 2541 older persons said change in social environment was their second priority.
- After social environment and medical set up top-most 7 priority areas were found as psychological condition of older persons, financial status of older persons, interpersonal relationships, legal set up and religious/spirituality.



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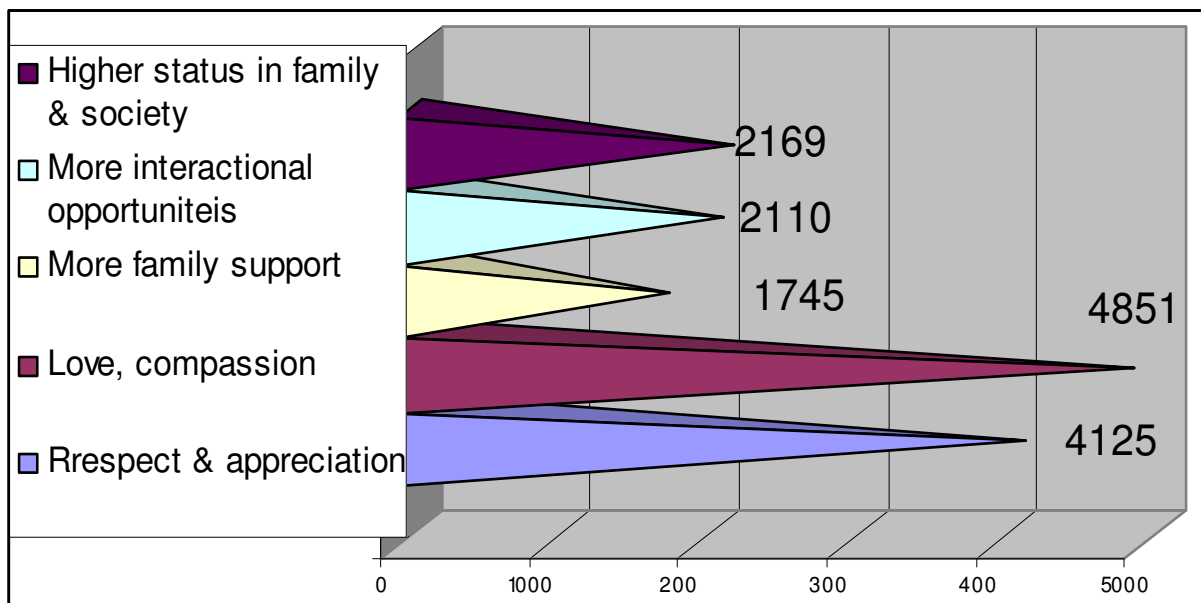
When reasons of changing needs of older persons were studied, many revealing facts came out of study, some are here:

Fast emerging Social Needs of Older Persons

Priority Social Needs of older persons were identified as under:-

- Respect & appreciation
- Love, compassion
- More family support
- More interactional opportunities
- Higher status in family & society

Out of 15000 older persons interviewed by Agewell Volunteers, 32.3% i.e. 4851 older persons mentioned lack of love and compassion in their life prominently. After that 27.5% older persons expressed respect and appreciation as their first desire.



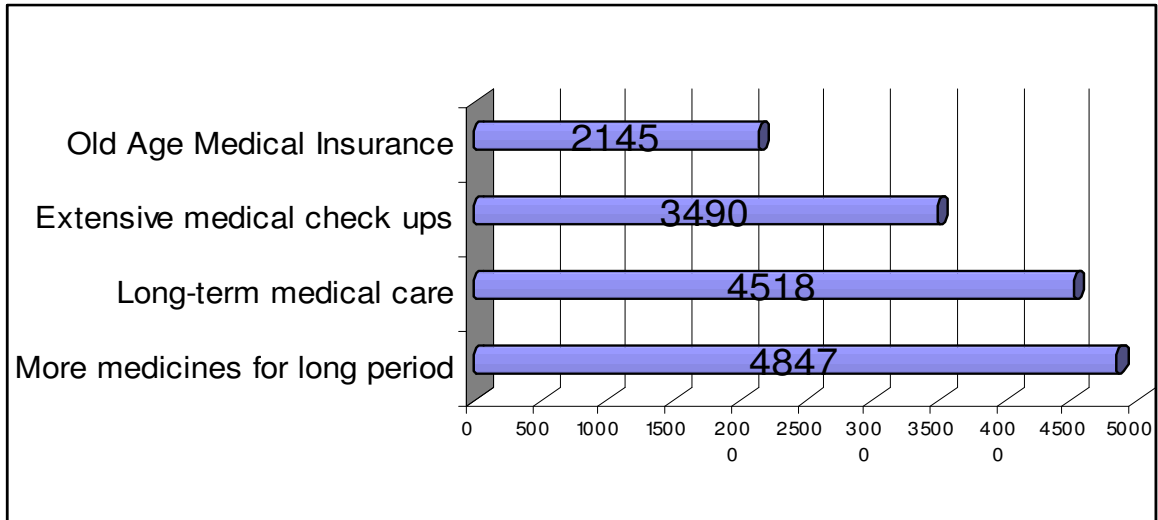
Comprehensive Medical Setup in Old Age

Older persons were also found more concerned about their health and raising their voice for more and better medical facilities in old age. Their major health-related concerns were as under

- More medicines for long period
- Long-term medical care
- Extensive medical check ups
- Old Age Medical Insurance

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So far as their changing medical needs are concerned, most of them, i.e. 32.3% (4847 older persons) wanted more medicines for their long old age. They want systematic change, so that their long term health care could be ensured.

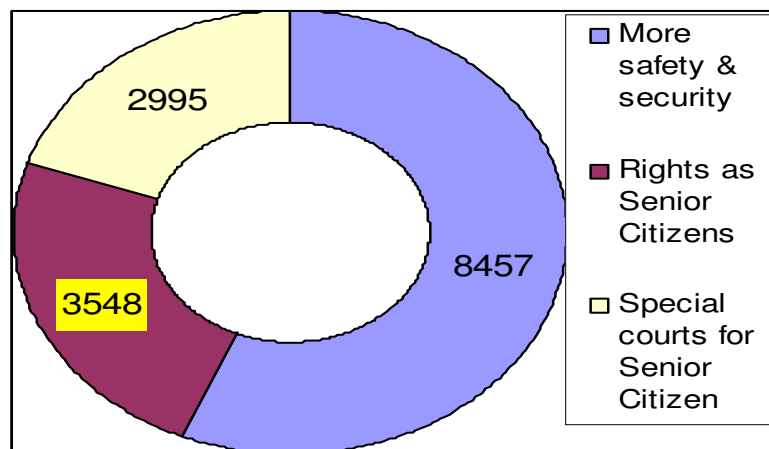


Need of Changed Legal Set up

Older persons expressed their angst country's legal system, which is know for its delayed justice, which is not less than fatal in old age. Following are classified as the major legal concerns of older persons;

- More safety & security
- Rights as Senior Citizens
- Special courts for Senior Citizen

Majority of older persons, 8457 older persons out of 15000 older persons (56.4%) told that they need more safety and security at this stage.



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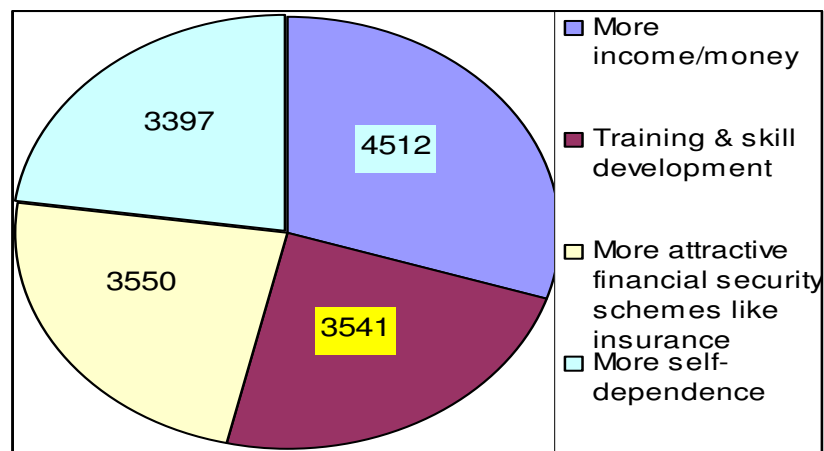
Changing Financial Status in Old Age

Due to dramatic changes in the country's economy over the years, majority of older persons are facing acute financial crisis in their life. Their changing financial needs are identified as under:-

- More income/money
- Training & skill development
- More attractive financial security schemes like insurance
- More self-dependence

30.1% of older persons contacted during the survey said that they need more money or income opportunities to meet their requirements.

Approximately ¼ older persons expressed their desire to get training and skill development in modern technologies especially computer & internet application and other modern technologies. Young older persons (60-69 years) were found more interested in these as they wanted to keep themselves up-to-date.



Psychological Needs in Old Age

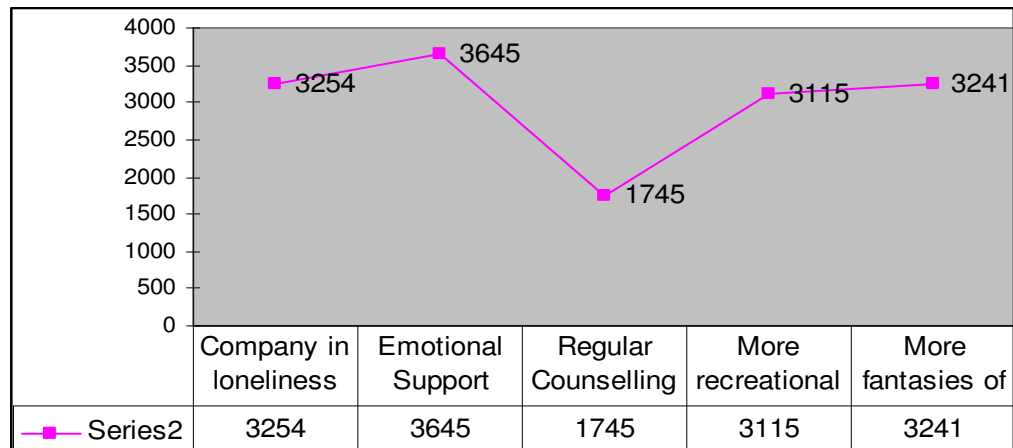
With popularity of nuclear family system and fast paced all-round development, majority of older persons are forced to live alone, virtually without any kind of family support. Psychologically, older persons are not as strong as their predecessors were.

- Company in loneliness
- Emotional Support

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- Regular Counselling
- More recreational opportunities
- More fantasies of old age

According to 1/4th older people (24.3%) they need emotional support. To keep themselves busy they wanted more recreational opportunities in old age, like music, religious meetings, satsang, etc. Interestingly every fifth old person enjoys fantasies, which keep him/her happy and healthy.

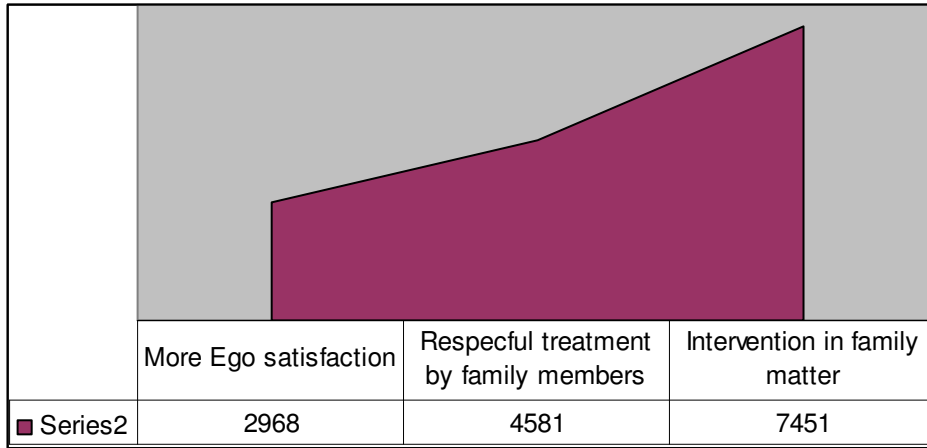


Interpersonal relations

In today’s society older persons living with their children, are also not satisfied with their life. They too want change and always try to mould things according to themselves. They told that following are their major problems with their families

- More Ego satisfaction
- Respectful treatment by family members
- Intervention in family matter

Almost half of the elderly people wanted centre stage in their respective families not a corner. They were of view that their interference in family matter should be tolerated and appreciated as well.

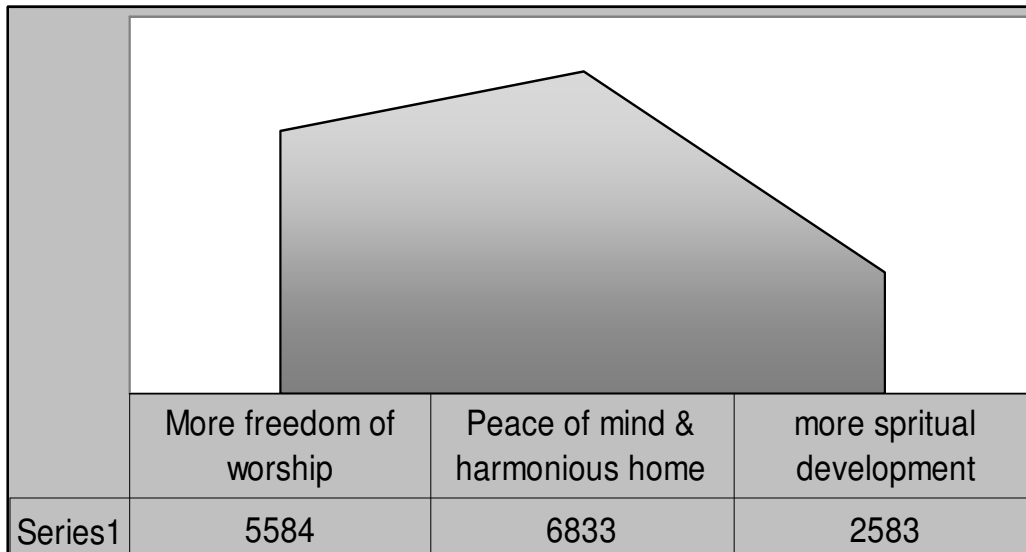


Changing Religious/spiritual Needs of Older Persons

After playing an active life for a long period many older persons preferred to live with peace of mind, hence they wanted more religious/ spiritual freedom in old age. Their most talked about religious concerns were as under:-

- More freedom of worship
- Peace of mind & harmonious home atmosphere
- more spiritual development

When asked about their religious /spiritual life, 45.6% older persons said that they prefer Peace of mind instead of more freedom of workshop or more spiritual development in old age.



Observations

Older persons no longer want to be marginalized from society or family. They want to remain in the mainstream of the society as they were before their retirement i.e. before their 60's. They seemed to be desperate to remain in center stage and never ready to accept corner of the house or being isolated by family/society members.

Young older persons (60-69 years) are more vigorous and enthusiastic towards their strengths and capabilities. They hate the word "old man" when they are called by this name. They want to change general perception about old age and need appreciation and opportunities to do something in stead of sympathy from society.

Majority of older persons termed Old Age as New Lease of life. They understand that due to old age and changed socio-economic scenario, their needs have also changed and they can not depend on others to address their changed needs.

Older Persons opined that they have enough knowledge, experience and capabilities to change things for the betterment of their life in Old Age.

In short, Older Persons don't want be marginalized any more, instead they want centre stage.

Representative statements from older persons

“Why should I tolerate ill-treatment from my daughter-in-law? After all I am also getting a good pension and living in my own house. If she doesn’t mind herself, I can live on my own with my wife”

- Harish Chandra Verma, 71-year-old person, Saket, New Delhi

“My children & grand-children are settled abroad, they send money to me but, I always miss their company. In my opinion, no one replace emotional support which we get from family members. I spend some of time with my friends as there are hardly any opportunities for social interaction in my locality. I want more social interaction to beat my loneliness.”

- Veena Pathak, 65-year-old women living alone in Mumbai

“When people call me old retired man, it hurts me. I never feel that I am old, as I find myself as active and healthy as people in their 50’s. I am looking for suitable job to prove this.”

- Ravi Prasad Sharma, 62-year-old retired engineer, Chandigarh

“I worked as an agriculture labour throughout my life. My children migrated to big cities in search of better jobs, but I never wanted to leave my village. Now I am unable to work hard, but I need food and medicines. Government should take care of people like me”.

Rukmani Devi, 80-year-old widow, Balasore, Orissa

“What our country is today, our senior citizens made it. How can you marginalize them socially, emotionally & financially and even politically? Senior Citizens should always be in the mainstream of any society or family.”

Ashish Kumar Tripathi, 67-year-old social activist, Jaipur

Conclusion

Earlier older persons tried to adapt themselves according to environment. But today, older persons do not want to compromise with circumstances and struggle for change in their lives. Majority of older persons feel that they have desired energy, strength, resources and capabilities to change circumstances according to their changed needs and requirements.

Older persons are desperately looking for new opportunities, avenues and possibilities, through which they can utilize their energy, knowledge and capabilities & can bring a perceptual change in society about Old Age.

Society in general and opinion leaders & policy makers in particular needs to understand fast changing needs of older persons due to fast changing socio-economic & demographic scenario of the country, so that older persons could be given ample opportunities to keep themselves active and to play an important role in society. It will definitely ensure more respectful & compassionate environment for older persons in the country.
