

**Agewell Research & Advocacy Centre**

**AGEWELL DEMOCRACY STUDY**

**STUDY OF ROLE OF OLDER PERSONS  
IN DEMOCRATIC PROCESS**

**March 2009**

**Agewell Foundation**

M-8A, Lajpat Nagar-II, New Delhi-110024 Ph.: 011-29836486, 29840484  
e-mail : [agewellfoundation@gmail.com](mailto:agewellfoundation@gmail.com) Website: [agewellfoundation.org](http://agewellfoundation.org)

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## ROLE OF OLDER PERSONS IN DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

### INTRODUCTION

Agewell is 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.

Research & Advocacy Centre at Agewell Foundation recently carried out a nationwide survey to study and identify /understand the difference between myth and reality about the role of older persons in Democratic society.

### METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE DESIGN

Direct in depth interviews were conducted by administering semi-structured schedules to collect information /impression from older persons.

For the survey a representative sample of 2000 older persons (approx. 1000 each from rural and urban areas) were interviewed spread across 20 states.

#### Sample Units

The sample units were selected based on purposive random sampling but taken care to incorporate the representative views of the country from five divisions.

S. No	Type of sample			
	State	No of sample districts	No of sample blocks*	No of respondents
	<b>Region 1 – North India</b>			
1	Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Delhi	10 (Approx.)	20	431

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	<b>Region 2 – South India</b>			
2	Andra Pradesh Tamilnadu Kerala, Karnataka	10 (Approx.)	20	395
<b>Region 3 – East India</b>				
3	West Bengal, Orissa, Assam	10 (Approx.)	20	376
<b>Region 4 – West India</b>				
4	Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat	10 (Approx.)	20	404
<b>Region 5 – Central India</b>				
5	Madhya Pradesh, Bihar Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh	10 (Approx.)	20	394
	<b>All India Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2000</b>

\* 2 blocks were selected from each district for the study randomly, one from a block headquarters and the other from rural area.

### **Sample Respondents**

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

- Category 1 : Rural older persons
  1. Rural older women
  2. Rural older men
  
- Category 2 : Urban Older Persons
  1. Urban older women
  2. Urban Older Men

A total of 500 respondents were selected from each group. In each group the target was to include every sections of the society, specifically –

- Retired older persons
- Non-pensioners/labourer farmers
- Literate
- Illiterate
- Financially secure
- BPL family

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Volunteers' network spread across the country worked as interviewers for the survey. The interviews were conducted during the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of March 2009.

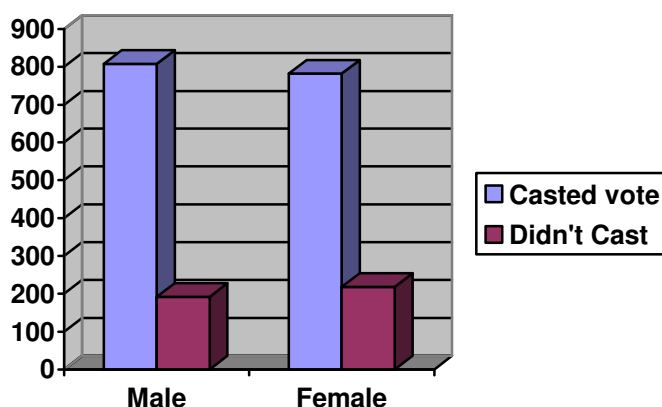
## MAJOR FINDINGS

Study shows that a majority of respondents (79.6%) had cast their votes during last general elections. According to the study older persons constitute almost 21.5% of the actual voters during elections.

- More than 8% of the total Indian population today consists of older persons (60+).
- Presently there are approx. 74 crores voters in India. Therefore the older persons automatically constitute approx. **12.5% of the voters**.
- It is a well-known fact that the older persons have far more faith in democratic system and almost of 79.6% of older persons assert themselves by casting their votes.
- Statistics prove that the average number of total votes cast during any election is only 55 to 60 %. It is quite obvious that the so-called minority amongst the voters (i.e. older persons) constitute **20-22% of the actual voters**.

→ **79.6% of the older person respondents (80.8% male and 78.2% females) casted their votes during last general elections.**

Polling Trend of Older Persons (Sex-wise)



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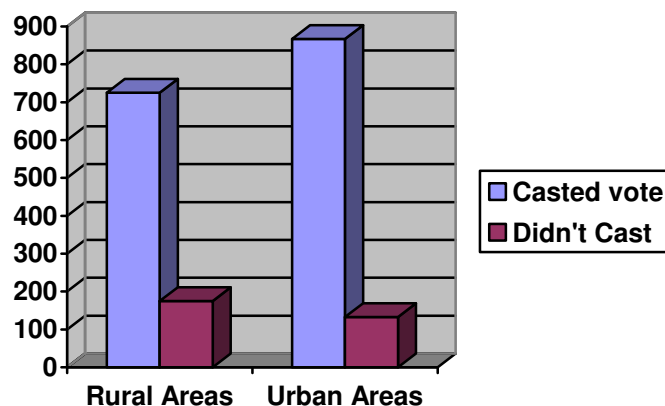
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## Salient observations

- It was observed that irrespective of economic, cultural or educational background or gender divide most of the older persons are opined about politics and believe that their age has given them enough experience (also referred as *samajh* or understanding) of all political maneuverings.
- They have very little say in day to day lives of their children or grandchildren but most of them believe that they have a major responsibility towards the country and their opinion matters. Voting in urban areas by older persons was found to be marginally higher 86.7% and in the rural areas 72.5%. In both the cases it is much higher than the actual voter percentage.

→ **Voting by older persons in urban areas (86.7%) was much higher than in rural areas, where only 72.5% of older persons had cast their votes.**

Polling Trend of Older Persons (Area-wise)



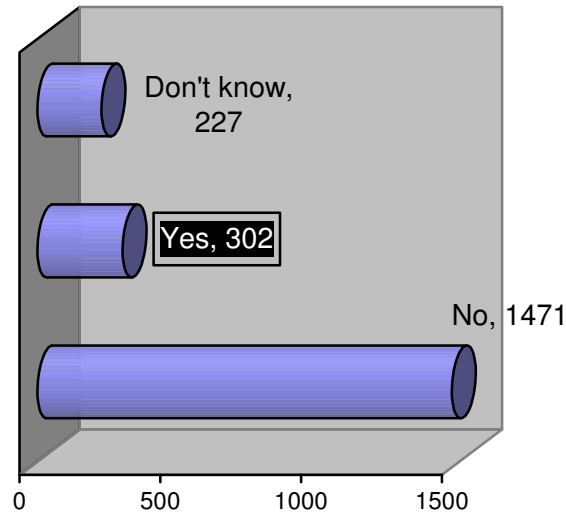
→ **Almost 73.5% older persons feel that while the number of 60+ parliamentarians is constantly increasing in each election but they do not represent the interests of older persons.**

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(Politicians (60+) represent interests of older persons)



### Salient observations

- Most of the respondents were found to be rather disillusioned by lack of facilities or policies for older persons.

*“Politicians have no sensitivity towards older persons. Even when they themselves become old, they don’t want to extend a helping hand towards other older persons, because they do not consider them as important voters.”*

*“Although older people regularly vote and their numbers are also very high but they are not considered a vote bank because they are not looked at as a group.”*

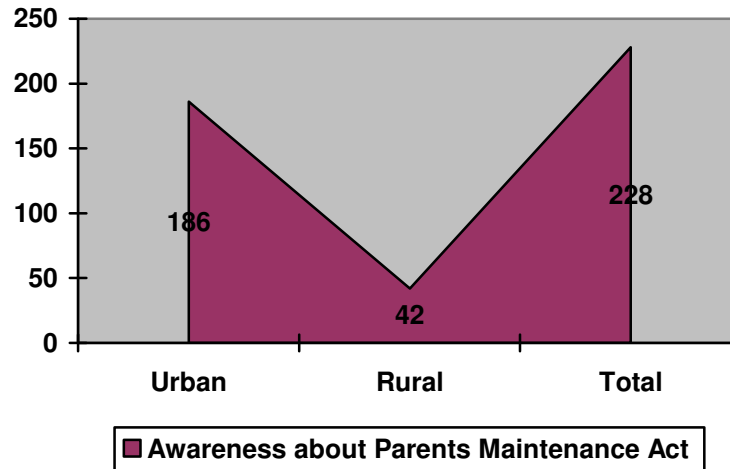
*“Who has ever heard any politician ever talking about old people in the parliament?”*

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→ Only 11.4% of the older persons (18.6% urban and 4.2% rural) have knowledge of latest act i.e. Parents Maintenance Act. Out of them 70.5% of respondents wanted to know if their children have no sufficient income and job security, how can this Act work.



### Salient observations

- Policy makers do not keep the realities of life in mind. Almost all of them are not old as yet and look for easier options. Although we are a country where Old Age is respected socially and culturally but we do not have any provisions to provide for food, shelter, health or legal support for older persons.
- Less than 50% are aware of Old Age Pension scheme and just about 9.6 % old people are aware of Parents Maintenance Act.

*“If my children have no job or sufficient income, do you think we will let our grandchildren suffer because we need maintenance?”*

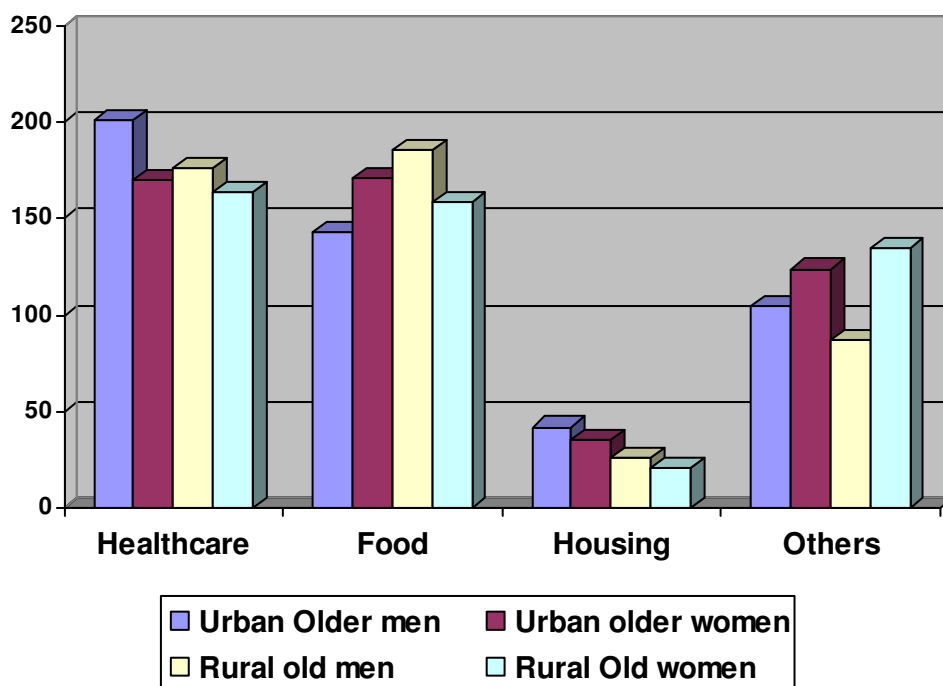
*“Which Indian would ever force his daughter or son-in-law to provide for him?” we won’t even have a drop of water in our married daughter’s house, how can we force them to provide for us?” what kind of law is this & for whom?*

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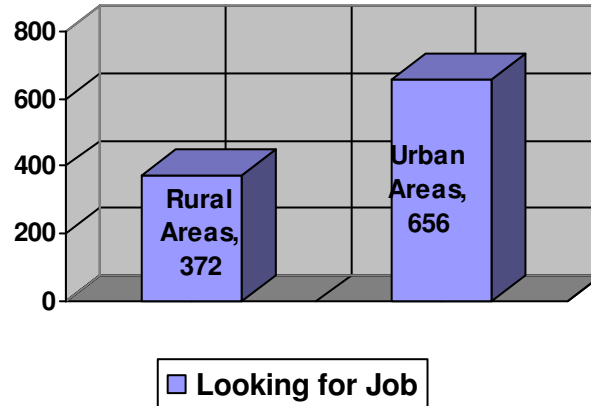
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→ 67% of all the older persons from urban areas (73% men & 61% women) say that health care needs are their primary need in Old Age. Whereas in rural areas 55% of older persons (57% men & 53% women) said that their most important need was food (*bharpet khana*).



→ Almost 65.6% of the older persons from urban areas are in search of income opportunities so that they can earn money to meet their medical, housing and food related needs. Whereas in rural areas 37.2% older persons were found in search of any kind of income avenue.





### Salient observations

- Almost 10% older persons in urban areas are still working where as surprisingly 15.4% are still found to be doing manual labour in rural areas. May be because of the younger people more out or urban areas in search of better opportunities.
- Study shows that availability of casual work in rural areas is quite higher in comparison to urban areas. That's why urban older people are suffering much than rural older people.

### Conclusion

Older persons of India have an important role in democratic process. They not only constitute larger chunk of actual voters but also form bigger set of elected representatives. Their opinions and decisions are purely based on their vast experience of life and their surroundings. Higher voting pattern of older persons shows that they are sincere voters and tend to assert their right to vote. Due to their sense of *Tyaag* and *Paropkar* they hardly raise issues pertaining to their old age. Resultantly, there are not many schemes and policies for the welfare of older persons in India.

**Ironically, though older people represent both the ends of democracy (as voters and leaders) there is hardly any focus on them.**

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