

A Review on Perceived Quality of Life among Elderly in India

¹ P. Bhagyalaxmi, ² Prof. I.V. Lalithakumari

¹ Research Scholar Department of Social Work Sri Padmavathi Mahila Vishwavidhyalam Tirupati.
Email - pujaribhagya123@gmail.com

² Professor Department of Social Work Sri Padmavathi Mahila Vishwavidhyalayam, Tirupathi
Email - lalithakumariiv4@gmail.com

Abstract: India is experiencing a significant demographic transition with a rapidly growing elderly population, projected to comprise 20% of the total population by 2050. This shift necessitates a focused examination of the factors that influence the quality of life (QoL) of elderly individuals, particularly in the context of psychosocial issues. This research explores the perceived QoL of elderly individuals in India, with a specific focus on the Telangana region, through a systematic review of literature published between 2011 and 2024. The review identifies key factors impacting QoL, including physical health, mental well-being, social support, economic security, and gender dynamics. The findings highlight the disparities in QoL between urban and rural elderly populations, with urban elderly reporting better QoL due to improved healthcare access and social engagement. Gender differences were also significant, with elderly women facing greater challenges related to financial insecurity and social isolation. Psychological health, including the prevalence of depression and anxiety, was identified as a critical determinant of QoL. The review emphasizes the importance of strengthening social support systems, enhancing healthcare access, promoting physical activity, and implementing gender-sensitive policies to improve the QoL of elderly individuals. These insights provide valuable recommendations for policymakers to develop interventions that address the diverse needs of India's aging population and enhance their overall well-being.

Key Words: *psychosocial, perceived QoL, Psychological interventions.*

1. INTRODUCTION

India is witnessing a significant demographic transition, with a rapid increase in the elderly population. According to the United Nations, by 2050, approximately 20% of India's population will be aged 60 years and above, making it one of the largest elderly populations in the world (UN, 2019). This shift highlights the growing need to understand the factors that influence the quality of life (QoL) of elderly individuals. The concept of QoL is multidimensional, encompassing physical, psychological, social, and environmental aspects, and provides valuable insights into the well-being of the elderly (World Health Organization, 2012). Given the increase in the elderly population, examining QoL is crucial for developing effective interventions that can address their diverse needs and improve their overall well-being.

The incidence and prevalence of elderly individuals in India are rising at an alarming rate. As per the 2011 Census, 8.6% of India's total population is over the age of 60, and this figure is expected to more than double by 2050 (Rajan & Mishra, 2020). With this demographic shift, India faces a critical challenge of ensuring adequate healthcare, economic support, and social inclusion for its elderly population. This necessitates a focused examination of the factors that impact their quality of life and the specific challenges they encounter in a society that has traditionally emphasized intergenerational family bonds.

Among the key factors affecting the QoL of the elderly in India, psychosocial issues are particularly prominent. Elderly individuals often face numerous challenges, including physical decline, isolation, economic insecurity, and limited access to healthcare, which can significantly impact their mental health and social functioning. A significant psychosocial concern is the increasing prevalence of mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and cognitive decline. According to a study by Kumar et al. (2022), approximately 35-40% of elderly individuals in India experience

mental health issues, with depression being one of the most common conditions. These issues often go unnoticed, as mental health care for the elderly remains under-prioritized in India.

Moreover, family structures in India, which traditionally provided strong social support for the elderly, are evolving. Nuclear families and urban migration have led to increased isolation and a sense of neglect among elderly individuals, particularly in rural areas. The lack of a robust social support system is exacerbated by the cultural stigma surrounding mental health, which discourages the elderly from seeking help or even discussing their psychological difficulties (Iyer & Sinha, 2015). Additionally, the socio-economic conditions of the elderly in India also contribute to their overall QoL. Many elderly individuals face financial insecurity due to limited pension plans, low savings, and dependence on family members, which impacts their independence and self-worth. These socio-economic challenges are compounded by limited access to healthcare services, particularly in rural areas, where medical facilities may be scarce or difficult to access (Sharma & Singh, 2022).

Therefore, understanding and improving the quality of life of elderly individuals in India is critical not only from a public health perspective but also to ensure that they can lead fulfilling, dignified lives as they age. This research aims to explore the factors influencing the perceived QoL of elderly individuals in India, with a specific focus on psychosocial issues, and provide insights into potential interventions to enhance their overall well-being.

2. Methodology

To examine the perceived QoL of elderly individuals in India, a systematic review of recent literature was conducted. The primary focus of this review was on peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2011 and 2024 that investigated the factors affecting the QoL of the elderly in India, particularly in the Telangana region. The search strategy was designed to identify studies that explored the multidimensional aspects of QoL, including physical health, psychological well-being, social relationships, and environmental factors. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were as follows:

Inclusion Criteria:

1. Studies focused on the elderly population (60 years and above) in India.
2. Peer-reviewed articles published in English.
3. Open access research articles from 2014 to 2024.
4. Studies that addressed any aspect of perceived QoL, including but not limited to health, social support, mental well-being, and economic factors.

Exclusion Criteria:

1. Studies not related to the elderly population.
2. Non-peer-reviewed articles, case studies, or conference papers.
3. Articles not published in English or behind paywalls.

Databases:

- PubMed
- Scopus
- Web of Science
- Google Scholar
- Shodganga

The search was conducted using the following terms: (Perceived OR QoL) AND (Elderly) AND (Telangana OR India). The selected articles were then reviewed for methodology, sample size, results, and conclusions. Data was extracted from each study, including details such as the study design, sample characteristics, outcome measures, and findings related to the perceived QoL of elderly individuals.

3. Results

The studies reviewed provided valuable insights into the factors influencing the QoL of elderly individuals in India.

Table No 01 Summary of studies

Author & Year	Methodology	Results	Conclusion
Desai & Narayan (2014)	Cross-sectional, survey-based	Elderly men reported higher QoL due to better health and financial security.	Gender-sensitive policies are needed to address disparities in QoL.
Chatterjee et al. (2014)	Mixed-methods, surveys & focus groups	QoL shaped by health status, family relationships, and financial security.	Health services and family support are essential to improving elderly QoL.
Gupta & Kumar (2016)	Quantitative, survey-based	Positive mental health linked with higher QoL and reduced depression rates.	Psychological interventions can enhance elderly well-being and life satisfaction.
Iyer & Sinha (2015)	Cross-sectional, interviews	Elderly with high social engagement reported better QoL, especially in urban settings.	Social engagement is crucial in enhancing QoL and reducing isolation in elderly.
Varghese et al. (2018)	Cross-sectional, survey-based	Key determinants of QoL: physical health, financial status, family support.	Health and financial policies are necessary to improve elderly QoL.
McPake & Mahal (2017)	Experimental, physical activity intervention	Aligning financial incentives in a mixed public-private healthcare model improves elderly care.	The country should build alternatives to fee-for-service payment mechanisms for Universal Health Coverage.
Mehta & Patel (2020)	Mixed-methods, surveys & interviews	Social support from family and community greatly enhanced elderly QoL.	Strengthening social support systems can significantly improve elderly QoL in India.
Sharma & Singh (2022)	Cross-sectional, survey-based	Urban elderly reported better QoL due to better healthcare and social engagement.	Urbanization benefits elderly QoL, but mental health remains a concern.
Kumar et al. (2019)	Mixed-methods, surveys & interviews	Rural elderly have lower QoL due to limited healthcare and financial insecurity.	Enhancing infrastructure and healthcare in rural areas is crucial.
Institute for Competitiveness (2021)	National-level analysis	Disparities in QoL based on regions, with Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh scoring the highest.	Regional policies must address income security and healthcare gaps.

4. Discussion

The findings from the recent literature highlight the significant role that various factors play in determining the perceived QoL of elderly individuals in India. Social support, healthcare access, economic stability, and gender dynamics emerged as key themes influencing elderly well-being. The socio-cultural context of India, particularly in regions like Telangana, further complicates the interplay between these factors. One of the most striking patterns observed in the literature is the disparity in QoL between urban and rural elderly populations. Urban elderly individuals generally report better QoL, largely due to increased access to healthcare services, social engagement opportunities, and modern infrastructure (Sharma & Singh, 2022). In contrast, rural elderly populations face barriers such as inadequate healthcare facilities, limited social services, and economic vulnerability.

The lack of public health resources in rural areas is a recurring theme across studies, and it is evident that rural elderly individuals often suffer from lower QoL due to these systemic deficiencies (Reddy et al., 2021). Social support, particularly from family and community, plays a pivotal role in enhancing the QoL of the elderly in India. Studies by Mehta and Patel (2020) and Desai & Narayan (2013) emphasize that strong familial and community bonds are crucial for elderly well-being. In collectivist societies like India, where family is considered the primary unit of care, the support system can significantly alleviate challenges like loneliness, economic dependency, and social isolation. Elderly individuals with access to supportive family structures and community engagement tend to report higher levels of life satisfaction (Iyer & Sinha, 2015). Gender differences in perceived QoL have also been highlighted in the literature, with elderly women generally reporting lower QoL compared to men. These disparities are attributed to several factors, including health issues, limited financial independence, and greater social isolation (Desai & Narayan, 2013).

Women, especially in rural areas, often face compounded challenges due to patriarchal social norms and limited access to resources. This calls for the design of gender-sensitive interventions that address the specific needs of elderly women. Psychological well-being is another crucial determinant of QoL among the elderly. Studies show that mental health plays a significant role in shaping life satisfaction, with elderly individuals suffering from depression and anxiety reporting lower QoL (Gupta & Kumar, 2016). Psychological interventions, such as counseling and therapy, can therefore have a substantial impact on improving the quality of life for elderly individuals. Furthermore, promoting mental health and resilience through community programs could mitigate the negative effects of aging-related challenges. The role of physical activity in enhancing the QoL of the elderly is also well-documented in the literature. Regular physical activity not only improves physical health but also contributes to better mental health outcomes, which are essential for overall well-being (Thomas & George, 2017). Encouraging physical activity among elderly individuals, particularly in rural settings where mobility may be limited, should be a key component of interventions aimed at improving QoL.

In summary, the perceived QoL of elderly individuals in India is shaped by a combination of social, economic, psychological, and physical factors. Urban-rural disparities, gender differences, family and community support, and mental health all play significant roles in determining the overall life satisfaction of elderly individuals. Addressing these factors through comprehensive policy interventions will be crucial in enhancing the QoL of elderly populations in India.

Social Support and Healthcare Access

The significant role of social support in the well-being of elderly individuals aligns with findings from other studies, which suggest that familial and community support systems are essential for mitigating the negative effects of aging, particularly in collectivist societies like India. As highlighted by Mehta and Patel (2020) and Desai & Narayan (2013), elderly individuals who maintain strong familial connections and are embedded in supportive communities tend to experience higher life satisfaction. This resonates with global studies indicating that social networks and familial involvement are central to elderly well-being (Chou et al., 2011). However, the disparities between urban and rural settings, particularly in India, indicate that access to healthcare, infrastructure, and social services can drastically influence QoL. The urban-rural divide is a persistent issue, with urban elderly individuals benefiting from better healthcare access and social opportunities, which has been noted in international studies on aging, such as those by Bowling and Dieppe (2005). Rural elderly populations, on the other hand, often face systemic deficiencies in healthcare and social services, exacerbating their vulnerabilities. This gap calls for targeted interventions to address the resource disparities between urban and rural settings.

Gender Dynamics

Gender differences in QoL, particularly the lower life satisfaction reported by elderly women, is a key finding in this literature. Women, especially in rural areas, often face compounded challenges stemming from limited financial independence, health issues, and social isolation. These gendered disparities have been well-documented globally, with studies showing that elderly women generally report lower QoL compared to men due to factors like caregiving responsibilities and societal norms (Crawford & Gergen, 2007). The need for gender-sensitive interventions to address these challenges is clear, and several studies suggest that empowering elderly women through financial independence and community support can improve their QoL (Deeg et al., 2002). The literature on elderly women in India, however,

underscores the necessity of addressing these issues within the context of Indian societal norms, where patriarchal values can limit women's access to resources and opportunities.

Psychological Well-being

The findings also emphasize the importance of mental health in determining QoL, with elderly individuals suffering from depression and anxiety reporting lower QoL. This trend is consistent with studies worldwide that highlight the negative impact of mental health disorders on elderly well-being (Blazer, 2003). Psychological interventions, such as counseling and therapy, play a vital role in enhancing the life satisfaction of elderly individuals. In the Indian context, where mental health awareness and access to services are often limited, promoting mental health care through community-based programs can help alleviate some of the negative effects associated with aging.

Physical Activity and Well-being

The positive impact of physical activity on QoL is another key finding, with regular exercise being linked to improved physical and mental health. This finding aligns with global research showing that physical activity can reduce the risk of chronic diseases, enhance mobility, and improve mental health outcomes (Pahor et al., 2014). In rural India, however, where mobility can be limited and healthcare access is scarce, promoting physical activity through community programs and local resources becomes particularly important. This is a challenge noted in other developing countries, where rural elderly populations often face barriers to physical engagement due to lack of infrastructure or knowledge about its benefits.

The importance of these findings lies in their potential to inform policy and interventions aimed at improving the QoL of elderly individuals in India. Given that India has a rapidly aging population, understanding the factors that contribute to well-being can help address the specific needs of elderly populations. By focusing on urban-rural disparities, gendered challenges, and the promotion of mental and physical health, policymakers can design more equitable and effective interventions. Furthermore, these findings emphasize the need for a holistic approach that integrates healthcare, social support, mental health services, and physical activity programs.

In comparison to other studies, the findings in this literature highlight the unique socio-cultural factors influencing elderly well-being in India. While global studies tend to focus on individual health factors and healthcare access, the Indian context necessitates a deeper exploration of family dynamics, societal norms, and rural-urban disparities. The importance of community support and familial engagement is particularly pronounced in Indian society, where the family is traditionally seen as the primary source of care. Thus, interventions that focus on strengthening family and community ties, along with improving access to healthcare, can have a profound impact on enhancing the QoL of elderly individuals in India.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this review, the following recommendations are made to improve the QoL for elderly populations in India:

- **Enhance Healthcare Access:** Policymakers must prioritize improving healthcare infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, to address the disparities in healthcare access between urban and rural elderly populations.
- **Strengthen Social Support Systems:** Community-based interventions that strengthen family and community networks should be promoted to combat social isolation and enhance elderly well-being.
- **Promote Gender-Sensitive Policies:** Gender-specific interventions are needed to address the unique challenges faced by elderly women, including financial insecurity, health issues, and social isolation.
- **Encourage Physical Activity:** Regular physical activity should be encouraged among elderly individuals to improve their physical and mental health, thus enhancing their QoL.
- **Address Mental Health:** Psychological interventions aimed at reducing depression and promoting mental well-being should be integrated into healthcare programs for the elderly.

- **Comprehensive Policy Approach:** A holistic, multi-dimensional approach is needed to address the interconnected factors influencing the QoL of elderly individuals, ensuring a sustainable and inclusive approach to aging in India.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the perceived QoL among the elderly in India is shaped by several interconnected factors, including access to healthcare, social support, financial security, and gender-specific vulnerabilities. While urban elderly tend to report higher QoL due to better healthcare and social services, rural elderly often face significant challenges related to healthcare access and social isolation. The role of social support, particularly from family and community, is critical in enhancing QoL. Gender differences also play a vital role, with elderly women facing particular challenges. Furthermore, promoting physical activity and addressing mental health concerns can significantly improve both physical and psychological well-being.

REFERENCES:

1. United Nations. World Population Ageing 2019. New York: United Nations; 2019. Available from: <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/theme/ageing>
2. World Health Organization. Ageing and health. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2012. Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health>
3. Rajan I, Mishra U. The elderly population in India: Issues and concerns. *Demography India*. 2020;49(1):31-45.
4. Kumar S, Verma S, Thakur S, et al. Mental health issues among elderly in India: A review of literature. *Indian J Psychiatry*. 2022;64(3):265-272. doi:10.4103/psychiatry.IndianJPsychiatry_306_22
5. Iyer S, Sinha S. Challenges in providing mental health care to elderly in India. *J Geriatr Ment Health*. 2015;2(1):9-13. doi:10.4103/2348-9995.150622
6. Sharma S, Singh M. Factors affecting quality of life in the elderly population: A rural-urban comparison. *J Aging Soc Policy*. 2022;34(4):505-522. doi:10.1080/08959420.2021.1994625
7. Gupta P, Kumar S. Mental health and quality of life among the elderly in India. *Indian J Geriatr Psychiatry*. 2016;3(1):4-9.
8. Desai G, Narayan A. Gender differences in the quality of life of elderly people in India. *J Women Aging*. 2014;26(4):305-319. doi:10.1080/08952841.2014.890291
9. Chatterjee A, Saha S, Das M, et al. Exploring the role of family relationships in quality of life of elderly: Evidence from India. *Indian J Psychol Med*. 2014;36(3):289-296. doi:10.4103/0253-7176.142248
10. Varghese J, Mishra D, Rath V, et al. Economic status and physical health as determinants of quality of life among the elderly in India. *J Aging Health*. 2018;30(6):927-944. doi:10.1177/0898264318755349
11. McPake B, Mahal A. Improving elderly care in India: Evidence from a mixed public-private health system. *Lancet Public Health*. 2017;2(12):e561-570. doi:10.1016/S2468-2667(17)30276-5
12. Mehta R, Patel A. Social support and quality of life among elderly individuals in urban India. *Indian J Soc Psychiatry*. 2020;36(1):72-80. doi:10.4103/ijsp.ijsp_36_20
13. Kumar S, Sharma A, Gupta A, et al. Rural elderly in India: Health issues and challenges. *J Rural Health*. 2019;35(4):477-485. doi:10.1111/jrh.12319
14. Institute for Competitiveness. India's elderly population and the regional quality of life disparities: A national report. 2021. Available from: https://www.compete.in/elderly_population
15. Thomas C, George A. Impact of physical activity on the quality of life of elderly individuals in India: A systematic review. *Int J Geriatr Phys Ther*. 2017;10(3):142-150. doi:10.1159/000477559
16. Blazer D. Depression and aging: Epidemiology and clinical issues. *J Clin Psychiatry*. 2003;64(Suppl 18):6-9. doi:10.4088/JCP.v64n1804
17. Pahor M, Guralnik JM, Ambrosius WT, et al. Effect of physical activity on the quality of life of older adults. *J Aging Phys Act*. 2014;22(4):419-429. doi:10.1123/japa.2014-0093
18. Bowling A, Dieppe P. What do older people want from health care? A review of the literature. *Health Soc Care Community*. 2005;13(1):3-13. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2524.2005.00529.x
19. Crawford M, Gergen M. Women and aging: The social context. In: *International Perspectives on Aging*. Springer; 2007. p. 235-248.
20. Deeg DJ, Kriegsman D, Li G, et al. Gender and aging: Determinants of quality of life in elderly women. *J Women Aging*. 2002;14(3):47-58. doi:10.1300/J074v14n03_05

