

# Elderly Women and Fulfillment of Basic Needs

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### Abstract

Food, clothes, bedding and accommodation are bare minimum needs of every human being including old women. Mankind has endeavored to satisfy these basic needs before venturing into satisfaction of various kinds of other needs. The present study was conducted in Hamirpur district of Himachal Pradesh with the objective to find out whether basic needs of elderly women are fulfilled and to know about the tier reaction on neglect to fulfill basic needs. It is discernible from the data that three fifth of the respondents get good quality food, almost three fourth have adequate clothes and rest of the one fourth had inadequate clothes with them. Half of the informants claimed to have good quality of bedding whereas the rest of the informants regretted to inform that they had to sleep on substandard bedding.

It was unearthed that more than two third of the elderly women have sufficient accommodation. But a little less than one third do not have sufficient accommodation which does not allow them to maintain privacy. Well above one third of the subjects were found to be assertive seeking better satisfaction of their basic needs. Substantial proportion of the informants was found to be meek and docile who humbly accepted maltreatment. Almost one fifth of the subjects each resorted to criticism of the family members on poor quality and less number of clothes, sub-standard bedding and under-nourishment.

**Keywords:** Elderly Women, Basic Needs, Assertive.

### Introduction

The 'basic need' approach was introduced by the International Labor Organization's World Employment Conference in 1976.<sup>1</sup> Food, shelter and clothing are main constituents of the traditional list of 'basic need'.<sup>2</sup> In the present scenario food, clothes, bedding and accommodation are bare minimum needs of every human being particularly the old women. Mankind has endeavored to satisfy these basic needs before venturing into satisfaction of various kinds of other needs. Lack of fulfillment of any or all of these may lead to starvation. Food is necessary for survival. Its quality is determined by necessity, availability and affordability. Society in general and family in particular keep striving to arrange and manage appropriate food for its members. But do all the members of a family get same type and quality of food? Perhaps not. Quality of food is likely to differ on the basis of age and sex even within a family. Besides, while living alone or away from the family one may have good or bad quality of food. Similarly clothes and bedding are necessary for living. But many a time provision of sufficient and quality clothes and bedding poses a challenge. It becomes a problem by itself. Old women are more vulnerable to such a problem as they are often frail and dependent.

### Objectives of Study

This study was conducted with the following objectives;

1. To find out whether basic needs of elderly women are fulfilled;
2. To know about the reaction on neglect to fulfill basic needs

### Methodology

#### Research Problem

First decade of third millennium has witnessed emergence of a feminist awareness of old age and, in particular, a growing awareness of what has come to be seen as "the problems of old women." Old women, it has been consistently demonstrated, are disadvantaged in a variety of ways in relation to old men. They are poorer, not properly fed, have not quality bedding; they have less adequate housing and less access to private transport; they are more likely to experience widowhood. Declining participation in activities, shrinkage in old relations, disengagement from earlier roles, utter need but lack of companionship, abuse and neglect by family members and decline in authority land the elderly women in new but strange situations. Adaptability to changed conditions necessitates

shedding of old norms, values and behavioural patterns. Coping up with new situations poses a challenge before the older women in their sun set years. Striking a balance in their changing role and prevailing familial and societal expectations becomes a rather more delicate issue. The net effect of this scenario is that elderly women find themselves being in disadvantageous position even in the fulfillment of their basic needs.

**Research Design**

Main purpose of this study was to know about fulfillment of basic needs of women during old age. Therefore, necessary information about quality of food, adequacy of clothes and quality of bedding was collected. Although for understanding of certain aspects of fulfillment of basic needs of the elderly women exploratory research design was followed, yet overall orientation of the investigation remained descriptive in nature. For the purpose of analysis, background characteristics of the informants viz. age, marital status, family type, residence and household income were treated as independent variables and abuse of the women as dependent variable.

**Universe**

Conducting study in all the twelve districts of hill state of Himachal Pradesh spreading into tens thousands of kilometers and interviewing large samples to collect information is a gigantic task to be performed by single researcher owing to limitation of time, money and resources. Difficulties are compounded by tough hill terrains, rocky lawnd mass and dense forested areas. Therefore, Hamirpur district of the state of, nestled in the Western Himalayas was chosen for the study. All the elderly women inhabiting in the district constituted universe of the study.

**Sample**

A sample of 285 respondents was taken in the study.

**Tools and Techniques of Data Collection**

The data for the present study was elicited from primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected from the elderly women inhabiting Hamirpur district with the help of an interview schedule and several Focused Group Discussions. Secondary information was collected from various census reports, journals, magazines, books and also retrieved from different websites.

**Quality of Food**

Dietary intake among elderly women may vary from individual to individual cases.<sup>3</sup> The data reveal that 22.81 per cent of the respondents have claimed of having nutritious diet whereas 37.19 per cent get good food. Thus three fifth (60%) of the respondents get good quality food and they do not have a problem of malnutrition as such. Two fifth (40%) of the total subjects have to take substandard food. It could be because members of younger generation rather than old women are fed better. Thus the latter might be an ignored and discriminated lot. Low income might be one of the reasons as more than two third of the respondents fall in the lowest income group. Overall quality of food being taken by all the family members including the informants could be poor. The studies carried on by Ushasree & Basha (1999) in Andhra Pradesh and by Sharma (1999) in

Rajasthan are in full agreement to the observations in this study. Besides, Observations of Radhkar & Kaulagekar (2006) at all India level partly correspond to the findings of this study.

**Adequacy of Proper Clothes**

Proper clothes are not only necessary to protect from the vagaries of climate but also culturally desirable. Today we have reached a stage when all kind of sufficient clothes are produced within the country. But a million dollar question is that do the elderly women have sufficient clothes? It is discernible from the data that almost three fourth (74.74%) of the respondents reported to have adequate clothes with them. Rest one fourth (25.26%) of the total informants opined that they had inadequate clothes. They complained of inadequacy of proper clothes.

**Table- 1**  
**Quality and Sufficiency of Food, Clothes and Bedding**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Quality of food</b>		
Good	171	60.00
Substandard	114	40.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Adequacy of proper clothes</b>		
Have adequate clothes	213	74.74
Do not have adequate clothes	72	25.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Quality of bedding</b>		
Good	143	50.18
Substandard	142	49.82
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Accommodation</b>		
Have sufficient accommodation	196	68.77
Do not sufficient accommodation	89	31.23
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Here proper clothes to means the ones worth bearing according to occasion. Society expects one to put on clothes according to situation(s) viz. while carrying on household chores, pursuing agricultural activities, attending function at home or outside, and going to relatives etc. Owing to the impact of materialism, subjects may feel like having more clothes so that they could adorn according to the occasion. Sufficiency or insufficiency of proper clothes is a relative and not an absolute phenomenon. The respondents may see their state of clothes in comparison to other family members. The respondents may genuinely have lesser variety and lower quality of clothes. They might not be in a position to afford more and better due to certain constraints and limiting factors. Clothing needs of other members of family may get priority over the elderly women as they have to go outside home to pursue education, discharge occupational duties and other responsibilities. Results of the findings from the studies conducted by Devi (2009) in Kerala, Jain (2008) in Rajasthan, Kohli et al. (2006) in Punjab substantially support the results of study in hand.

**Quality of Bedding**

As regards bedding, half of the informants (50.18%) claimed to have good quality of bedding and they had no complaint whatsoever on this account. The other half of the (49.82%) regretted to inform that they had to sleep on substandard bedding. It merits mention here that during the course of interaction with

the informants it was endeavored to know about certain specific features, particularly of the substandard bedding. It constitutes more or less of damaged or partly broken old cot, dirty and torn bed cover and bed sheet. Several subjects came forward complaining that not to talk of sound sleep, they had to bear bad odor of the dirty bedding and hanging portions of the bed. There could be many reasons for malnutritious diet, insufficiency of proper clothes and substandard bedding of substantial proportion of the respondents. Let us turn by turn try to explore possible causes of this realism. Inclusion of modern bedding in the dwelling unit on the one hand and continuation using the old bedding by the old women on the other hand may develop a feeling among the respondents that they have to use substandard bedding. Bedding could be such area of daily life which might not have drawn attention of the family. Resultant lack of improvement in it may have developed notion of using substandard bedding among the old women. They would have poor bedding due to non-affordability.

#### **Sufficiency of Accommodation**

Accommodation is one of the economic variables reflecting economic condition of the person(s) housing it. Having sufficient accommodation here means separate bedroom, kitchen, washroom and sitting area. Separate kitchen allows one to have privacy of keeping utensils, edible items and cooking. There is an old adage '*Dhaki pleti preena kane paraone age progat*' in vogue in the area under study. It literally means 'Prepare (meals) in a complete secrecy and present it to the guest'. It signifies the importance of secrecy in the matters of cooking. Elderly women are practitioners and propagators of this norm. Having imbibed this value since childhood they make earnest efforts to live with it. Lack of separate kitchen does not allow them to practice this value. Similarly having separate wash area has a special significance in the study area. It is believed that this is an area where one bathes and washes dirty clothes. It is endeavoured to perform both of these activities particularly the latter one in unexposed area. Importance of separate bedroom lies in the fact that after having performed arduous assignments, whether in the fields or at other places, one feels like taking undisturbed rest. Even while being at home one does not feel like being at home while relaxing, laying down on the bed or taking nap in the presence of non-family members- neighbors, guests and acquainted. Thus adequate accommodation helps not only in keeping veil and secrecy but also gives a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment to its occupants.

The data indicates that 68.77 per cent of the respondents claimed to have sufficient accommodation. But almost every fifth (31.23%) informant regretted to inform that they had to adjust themselves in insufficient accommodation. It is discernible that more than two third of the elderly women have sufficient accommodation. But a little less than one third do not have sufficient accommodation. This state of affairs is a problem in itself as does not allow the respondents to maintain privacy. It interferes with their freedom and adversely affects their dignity. Interestingly, every tenth subject could not be sure whether their accommodation was

sufficient or not. The elderly women may like to keep certain secrets in the matter of cooking, bathing, washing. It does not allow the old women to keep privacy in the matters of worship and taking rest. The elderly women are forced to live within insufficient accommodation cutting short of their needs. It ultimately results in the development of inferiority complex in them. Results of the study of Radhkar & Kaulagekar (2006) at all India level are in substantial agreement with the study in hand.

In fact quality of food & bedding and sufficiency of clothes and accommodation is interplay between necessity, availability and affordability (NAA). The NAA keeps on changing. Availability and affordability of either one or all of these three things create desire and feeling of necessity of having these utility items. When such needs are not fulfilled, the elderly women may complain of having substandard meals, clothes and bedding. It emerges that three fourth of the elderly women enjoy good quality of food and have adequate clothes. Two thirds have sufficient accommodation and a half have good quality of bedding.

#### **Reaction on Neglect to Fulfill Basic Needs**

Human beings tend to react differently to the different situations. Elderly women are also not exception to it. The respondents were asked to articulate their reactions on not getting proper food, clothes and bedding. The information so obtained and depicted in table 6.35. It revealed that subjects have reacted to neglect differently in different situations. More food with more nutrition value (39.47%), more range and good quality of clothes (43.06%) and better bedding (34.51%) and more accommodation (37.08%) was demanded by the informants. Thus well above one third of the respondents were found to be assertive seeking better satisfaction of their basic needs. Such respondents could have sufficient resources under their control. Or they would be wielding authority to be assertive enough demanding better treatment to them. On the other hand family members might be receptive to the demands the aged women.

Substantial proportion of the informants was found to be meek and docile who humbly accepted maltreatment. They might have a feeling of the futility of being assertive in ongoing last face of their lives. They may not have other way out but to accept ill-treatment. They may hold the opinion that demanding better treatment or being critical of family members could aggravate the situation. They might be the believer of the rule that silence is golden.

Still there was other group of subjects who resorted to criticism of the family members on poor quality and less number of clothes (19.44%) substandard bedding (20.42%) and under-nourishment (23.69%). They reported to be critical about not catering to the bare minimum needs in and outside home. They would either initiate talk about maltreatment being meted to them or would air their feelings and sentiments on being instigated by others. They complained that critical articulation of family's treatment often proved to be counterproductive. There can be many reasons of respondents' being critical of family for ill-treatment. Such treatment could be far below their expectation and they may not be able to

tolerate it. They might hold the notion that criticism could change the situation to their advantage. They may know the art of using criticism as a tool to put

pressure on the family members to make them mend their ways.

**Table-2**  
**Reaction on Neglect to Fulfill Basic Needs**

Not Getting Good Food/ Clothes/ Bedding	Reaction			Total*
	Demand Better Treatment	Accept Maltreatment	Criticize Family Members for Maltreatment	
Food	45 (39.47%)	42 (36.84%)	27 (23.69%)	114 (100.00%)
Clothes	31 (43.06%)	27 (37.50%)	14 (19.44%)	72 (100.00%)
Bedding	49 (34.51%)	64 (45.07%)	29 (20.42%)	142 (100.00%)
Accommodation	33 (37.08%)	47 (52.81%)	9 (10.11%)	89 (100.00%)

Thus well above one third of the respondents were found to be assertive seeking better satisfaction of their basic needs. Substantial proportion of the informants was found to be meek and docile who humbly accepted maltreatment. Almost one fifth of the subjects each resorted to criticism of the family members on poor quality and less number of clothes, sub-standard bedding and under-nourishment.

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