

# THE ELDER STORY: GROUND REALITY DURING COVID 19

Impact & Challenges

NATIONWIDE SURVEY



A HelpAge India Report (June 2020)

**HelpAge India** | Fighting isolation,  
poverty, neglect

## INTRODUCTION

The cases of COVID 19 were first reported in India in the month of January 2020 and by March the situation had become so dire that a nationwide lockdown was imposed. WHO declared it as a pandemic (disease prevalent all over the country/world) and the governments all over the world started taking steps to mitigate the impact.

According to Government of India, there were 1,45,779 active cases, 1,54,329 cured/discharged, 8,884 deaths till 13th June 2020.

Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Gujarat and Rajasthan were the top five in the list of confirmed cases. The figure and list of states most affected by the pandemic is likely to change with internal migration taking place after easing of the lockdown and opening up of the commercial, production and other units. Though new facts are coming to light and the assumptions about the pandemic are changing over time. According to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare data in India released in May 2020, only 7.9 per one lakh population got affected by COVID 19 and recorded 0.2 deaths per one lakh population as compared to 62 per lakh and 4.2 per lakh respectively in the world.

Besides being a threat to the life of the elderly COVID 19 impacted their economic condition. Assuming that in a normal situation, more than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the elderly in India live below the poverty line and 1/3<sup>rd</sup> just above it, makes it a cause for concern. Most of the elderly in India work to make ends meet as there is no universal social security system. Most of them are in the unskilled, casual workers, who earn a meagre daily wage to survive. These people were hard hit by the lockdown for more than 3 months. Many of them did not have enough savings to sail them through and most of them were not credit worthy. The lockdown, consequent slow economic growth and broken production cycles, are likely to impact the elderly in more ways than one. They are expected to lose the opportunity for employment for three reasons: *fear of going out and contracting infection, increased pressure on job market and loss of employment of the main breadwinner of the family*. Such economic hardships are likely to impact the fulfilment of their basic needs of food, clothing, shelter and medical expenses.

The other related aspects of lives of older persons likely to get impacted, are social inclusion and mental wellbeing. The fact that they have been advised to minimise contact with the 'outside' world to stay safe, is also likely to impact their lives. Being confined to their homes, decreases their physical activity and also socialising, which makes them feel socially isolated.

To know how COVID 19 impacted the lives of older persons in India, a dip-stick survey was undertaken by HelpAge India in June 2020. The **survey covered 17 states and 4 Union Territories**. The survey was designed to assess, the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic & lockdown on the elderly *vis a vis* healthcare, livelihood, access to goods & services and assistance provided by various stakeholders.

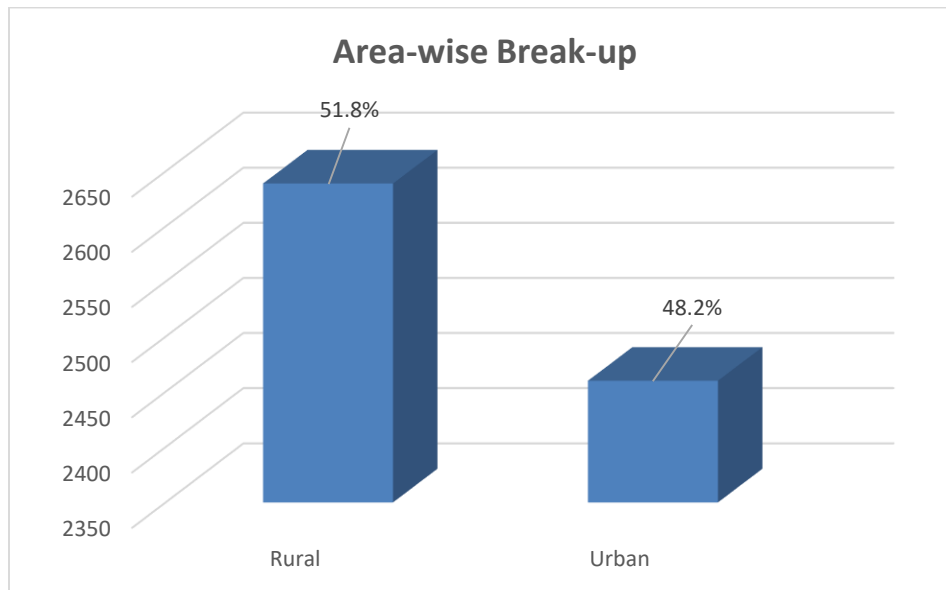
## Methodology

HelpAge India's team contacted elder beneficiaries listed with its Helpline and Mobile Healthcare Unit sites to select samples. The questionnaire was filled up by HelpAge team members over the telephone. The total sample size of the survey covered **5099 elder respondents** (Urban: 2639, Rural: 2460). The age groups covered were: 60 - 69 years (Young Old), 70 – 79 years (Old Old) and 80 years and above (Oldest Old). 57% respondents were Male and 43% respondents Female.

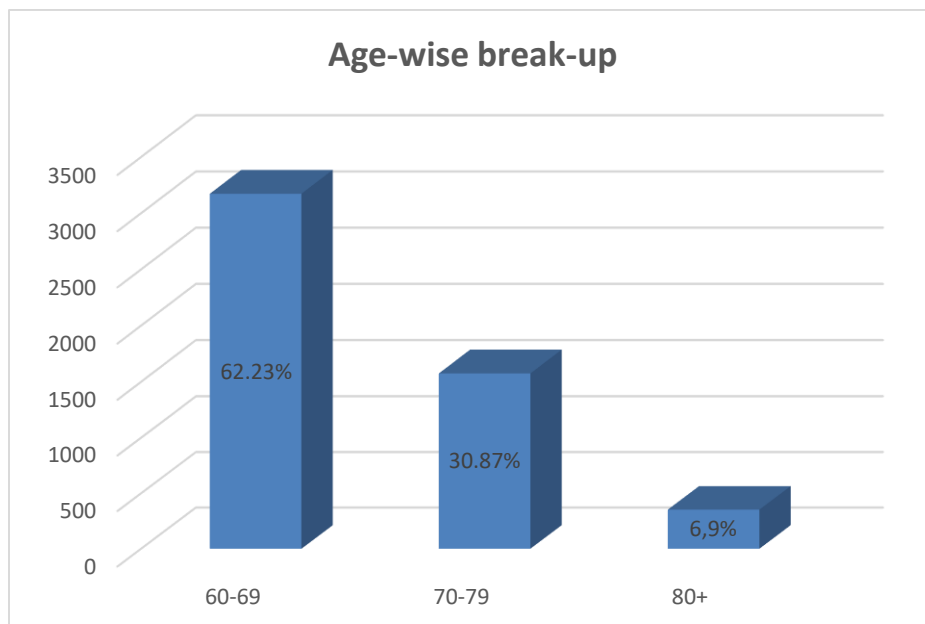
SURVEY SPREAD	
No.	STATES /UTs
1.	Andhra Pradesh
2.	Bihar
3.	Chhattisgarh
4.	Delhi
5.	Goa
6.	Gujarat
7.	Himachal Pradesh
8.	Jammu and Kashmir
9.	Karnataka
10.	Kerala
11.	Madhya Pradesh
12.	Maharashtra
13.	Orissa
14.	Puducherry
15.	Punjab
16.	Rajasthan
17.	Tamil Nadu
18.	Telangana
19.	Uttar Pradesh
20.	Uttarakhand
21.	West Bengal

## Sample Profile

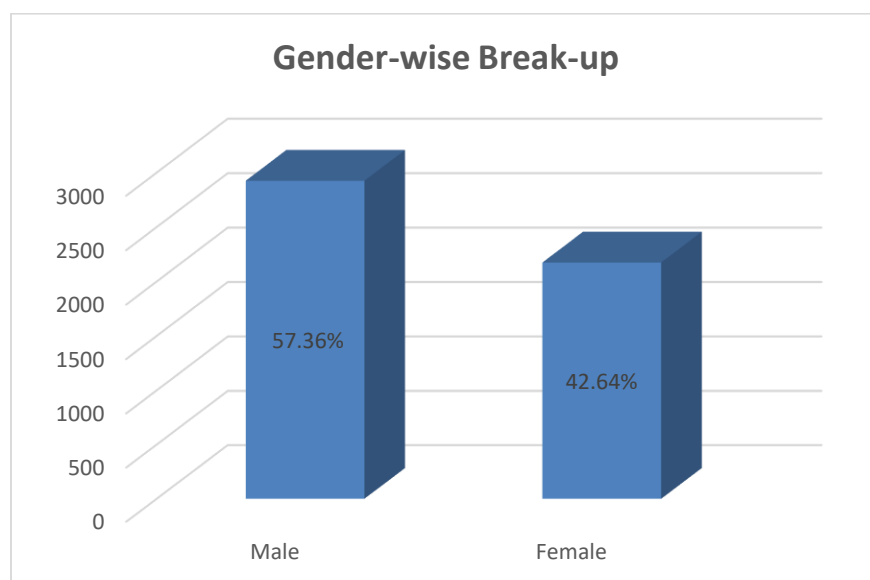
The sample was almost evenly divided between rural and urban, rural being slightly more than the urban 52% and 48% respectively.



62% of the respondents were young-old in the age group of 60-69 years, 31% in the old-old and 7% in the oldest old.



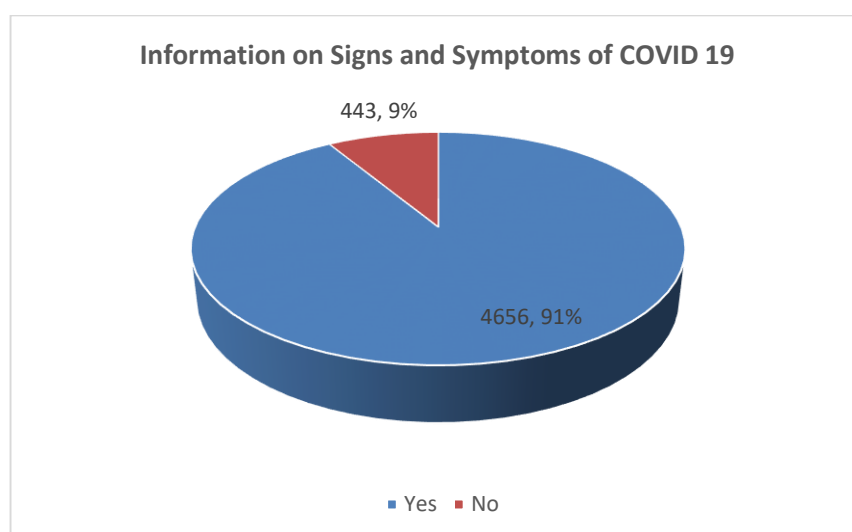
Males constituted 57% and females 43% of the respondents.



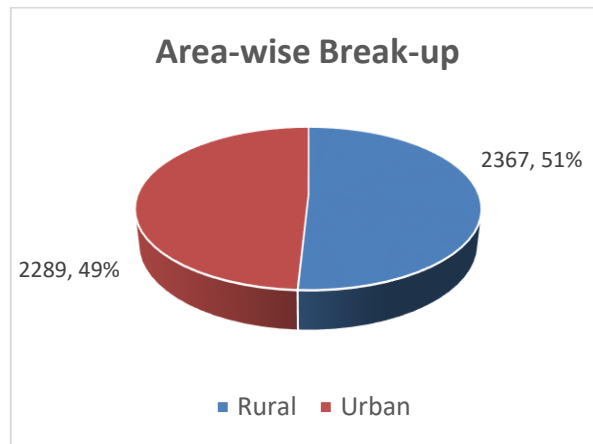
## **MAIN FINDINGS**

### **AWARENESS LEVELS AMONGST THE ELDERLY**

As awareness about the disease, leads to good preventive measures, the respondents were asked about their awareness levels on the same. 91% of the respondents were aware of the signs and symptoms of COVID 19.

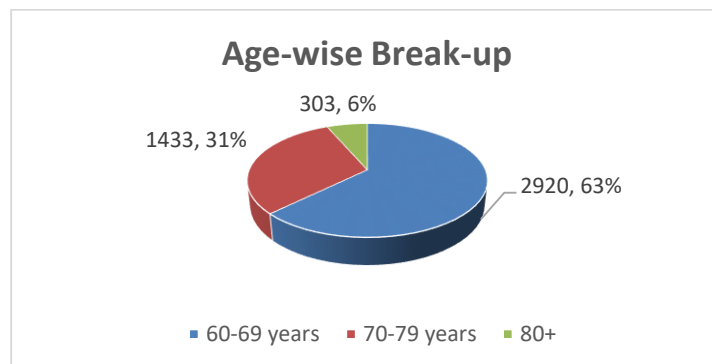
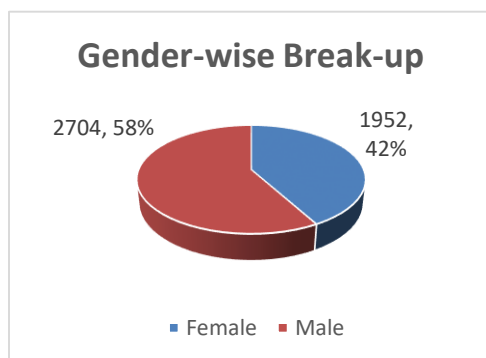


There was not much difference between the awareness levels in rural and urban elderly, more rural than urban elderly were aware of COVID 19.



More males than females were aware of the disease. There was substantial difference between the two. 58% males and 42% females were aware of it.

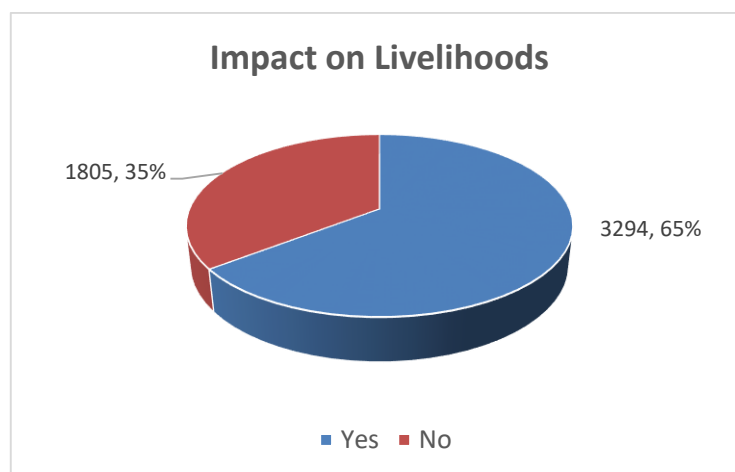
Awareness levels were much higher among the young-old at 63%. Those who were aware, out of them 31% were in the age group of 70-79 years and 6% in the oldest old age group.



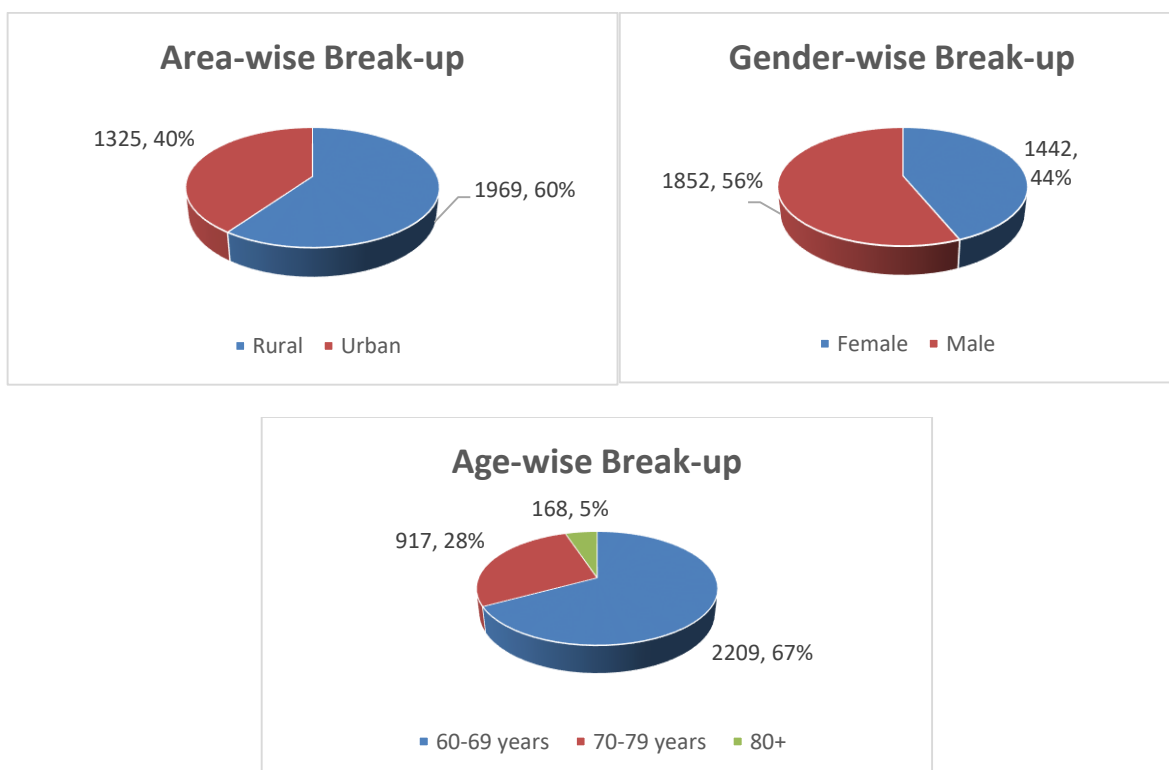
## LIVELIHOOD & INCOME IMPACT OF COVID 19 LOCKDOWN ON OLDER PERSONS

### Impact on Elderly Livelihood & Income during the COVID 19 Lockdown

The survey was designed to know the impact of COVID 19 on the important aspects of the lives of the older persons, the most important being livelihood & income of the elder respondent and the main breadwinner in the family, especially during the lockdown.

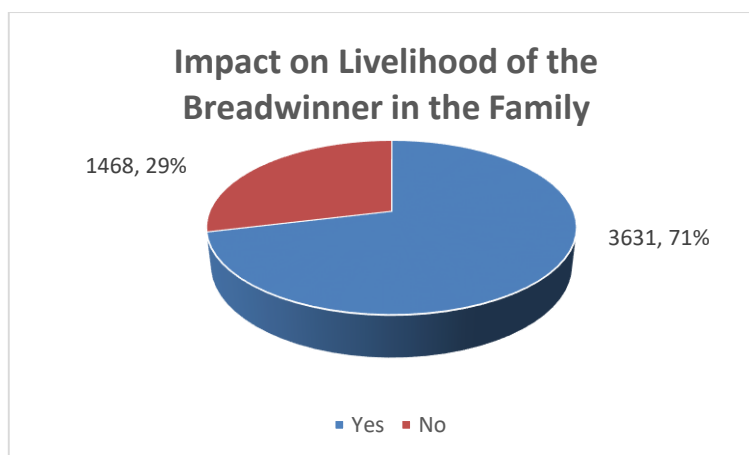


65% respondents stated, that COVID 19 impacted their livelihood. 60% of those who stated impact of COVID 19 on their livelihoods, were from rural areas while 40% were from urban areas. 56% were males, as compared to 44% females in this category. 67% were in the age segment of young-old 60-69, 28% in the old-old category and 5% in the oldest old age group.

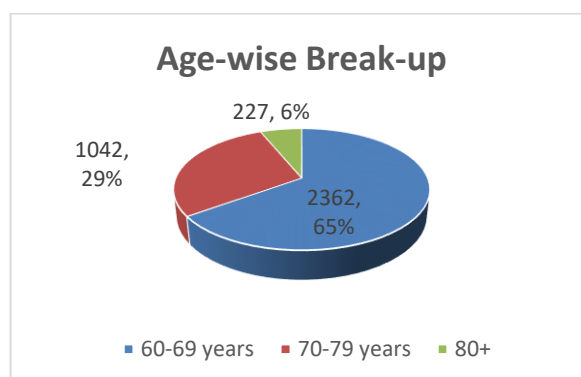
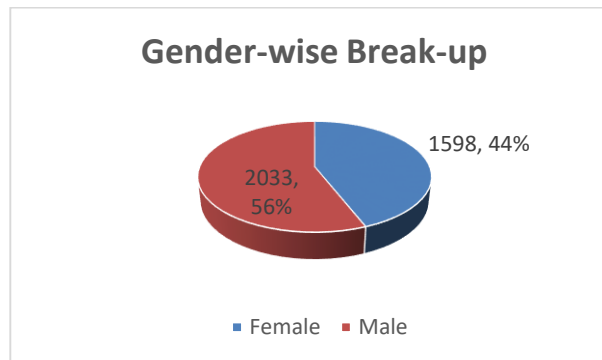
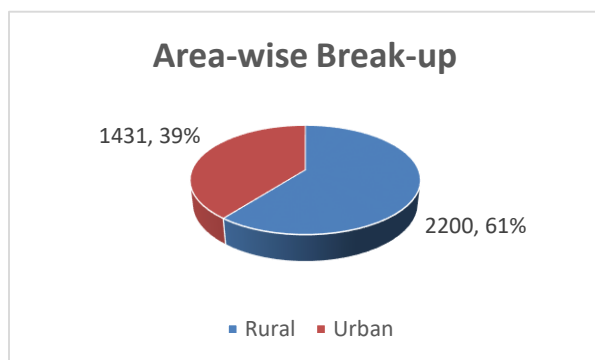


## **Impact on Livelihood & Income of the Breadwinner in the Elder's Family during the COVID 19 Lockdown**

It's not always that the elderly earn their own livelihood or are the main earner in the family. Many a times they are dependent on younger family members. Therefore, it's important to know about the impact of COVID on this aspect too. 71% respondents stated that the livelihood of the breadwinner of their family was impacted by the pandemic.



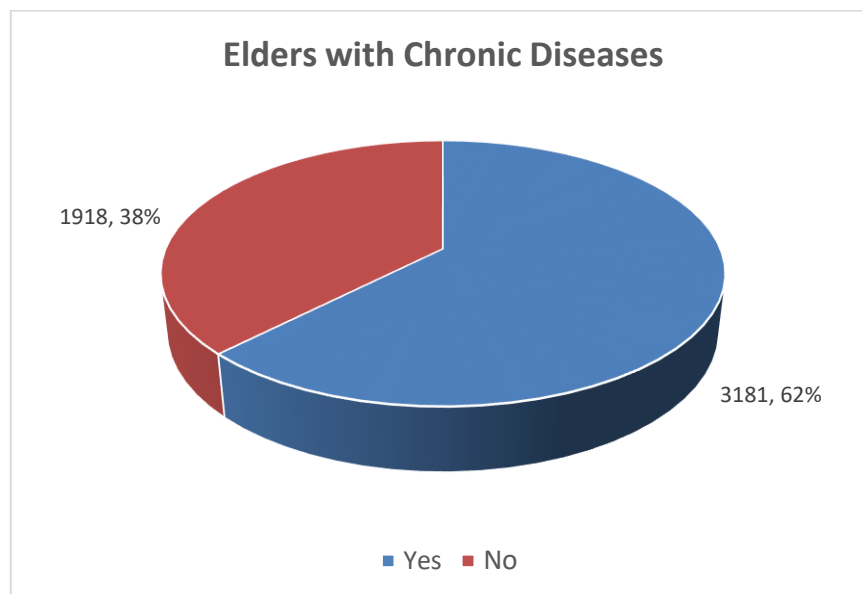
61% of those impacted in this way by COVID 19 were from the rural areas, 56% were males compared to 44% females. 65% were in the age group of 60-69 years, 29% in the age group of 70-79 years and 6% in the 80+ category.



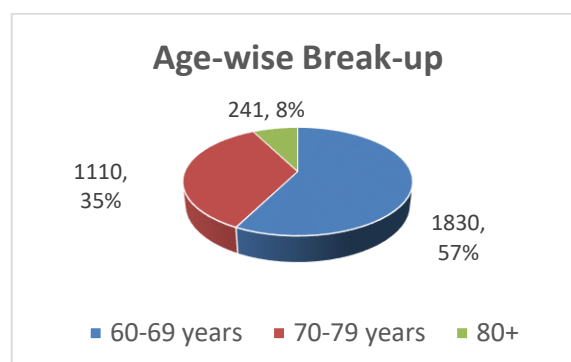
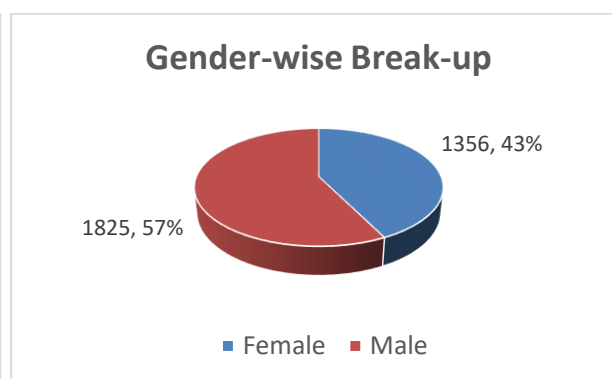
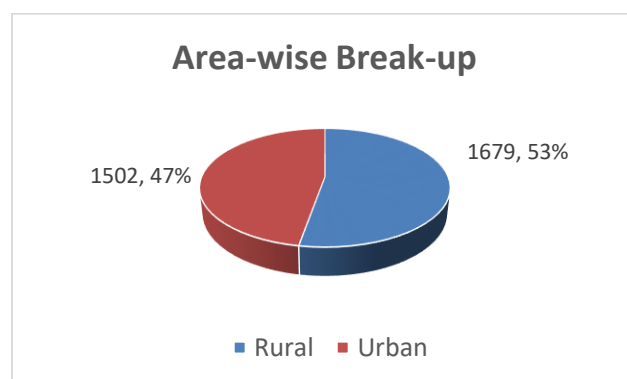


## IMPACT ON ELDER HEALTH DURING THE COVID 19 LOCKDOWN

Health in old age is an important aspect of life. Many of the older persons suffer from one or more chronic diseases that require management with specific protocols of medical consultations, tests and medication. Therefore, the impact of COVID 19 and the lockdown was assessed.

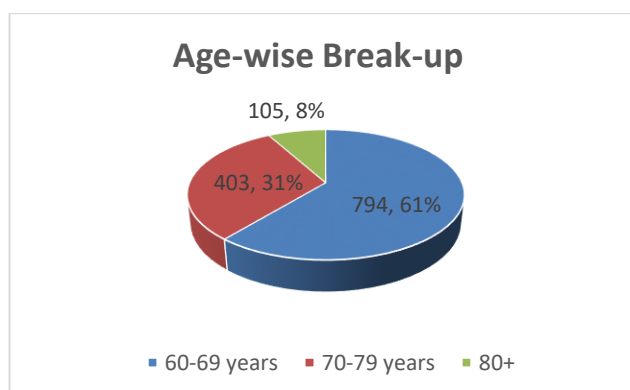
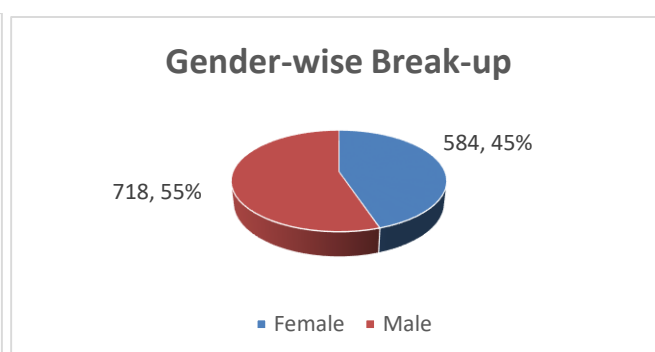
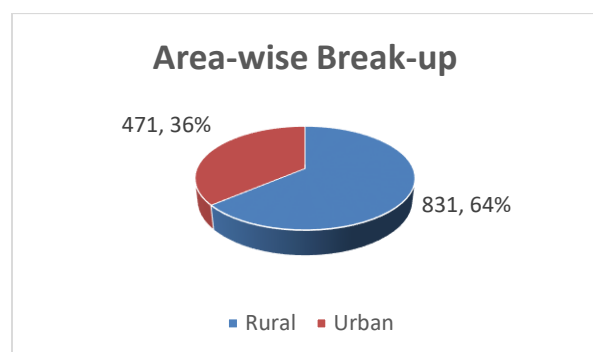
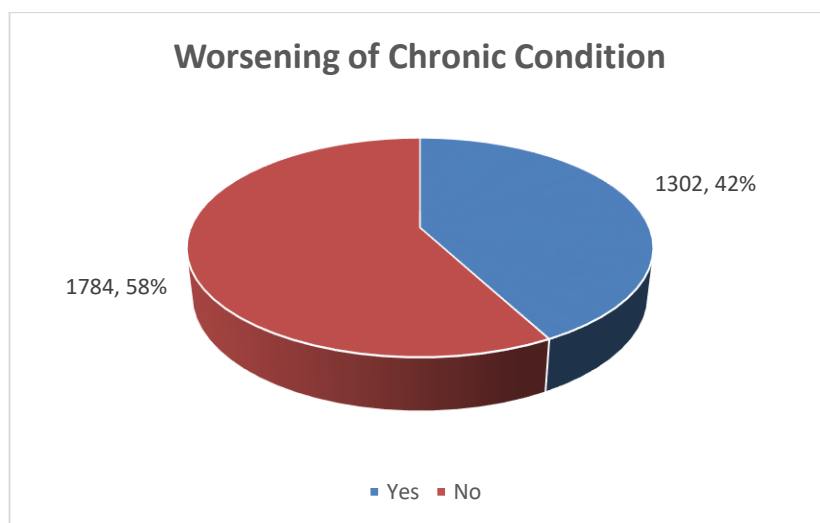


62% of the respondents were suffering from chronic diseases. 53% of these respondents were from the rural and 47% from urban areas, 57% males and 43% females. 57% were from young-old, 35% from old-old and 8% from the oldest old age group.



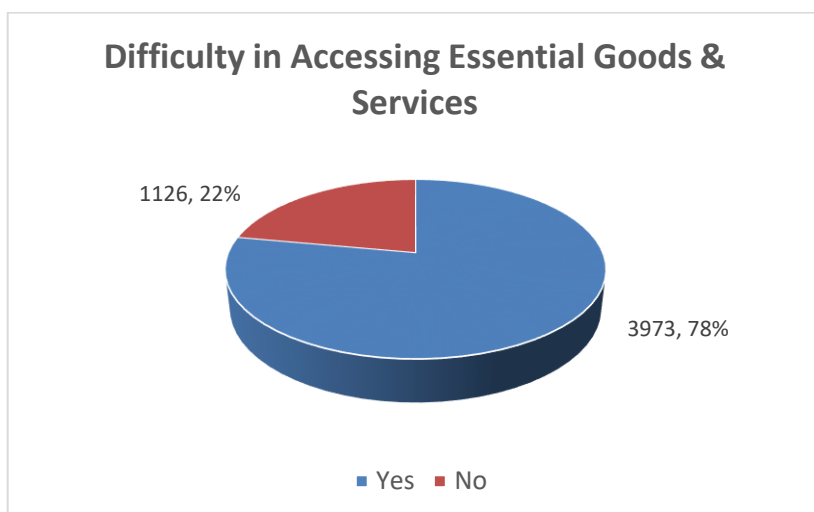
## **Worsening of Elder Health during the Lockdown**

42% respondents reported worsening of health condition during the lockdown. Of these, 64% were from the rural areas as compared to 36% from urban areas; 55% were males and 45% females. 61% were young-old, 31% old-old and 8% oldest old.

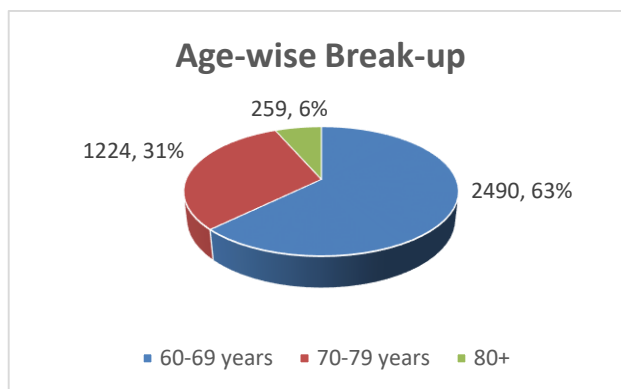
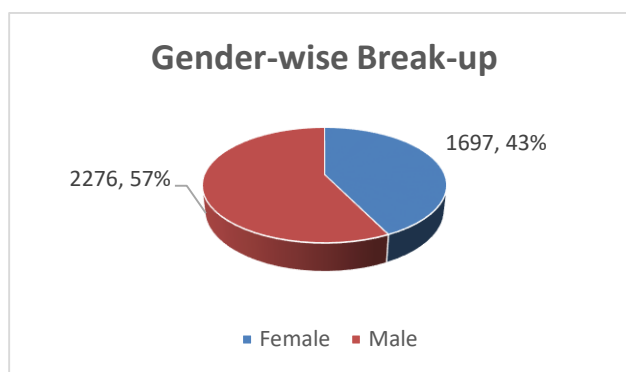
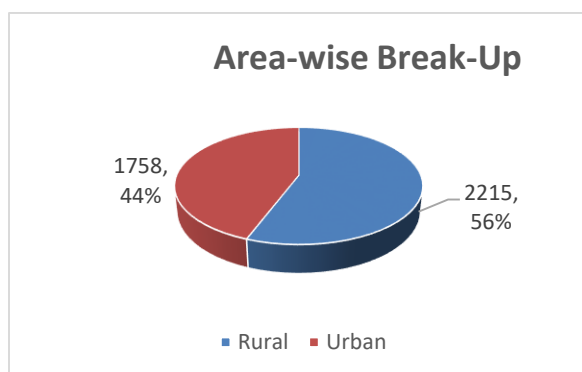


## DIFFICULTY IN ACCESSING GOODS & SERVICES DURING THE LOCKDOWN

In view of the lockdown and higher risk of getting infected by Novel Corona virus, the elderly had some difficulties in accessing essential goods and services.

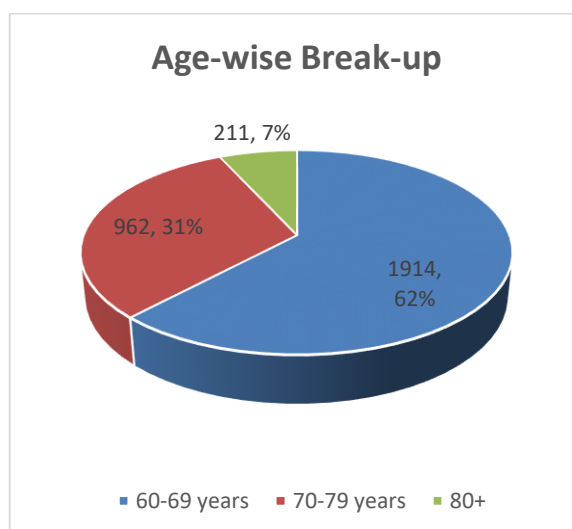
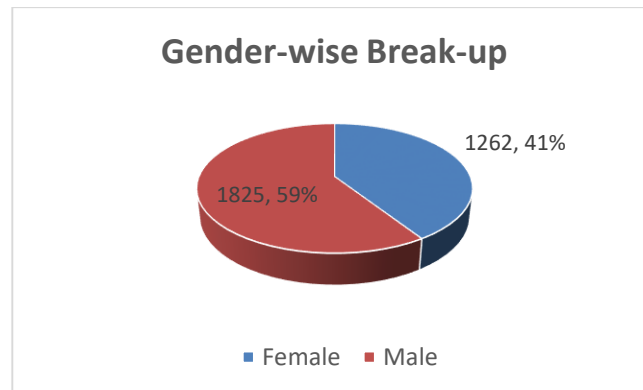
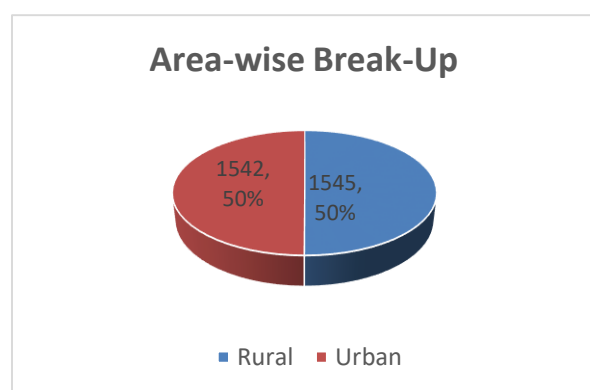
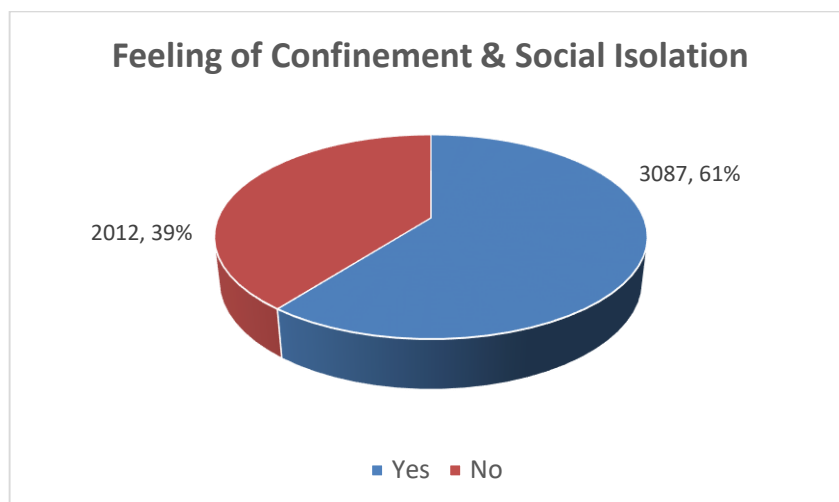


78% respondents faced difficulties in accessing essential goods and services. Of these, 56% were living in the rural areas and 44% in urban areas. 57% males and 43% females; 63% were young-old, 31% old-old and 6% oldest old.



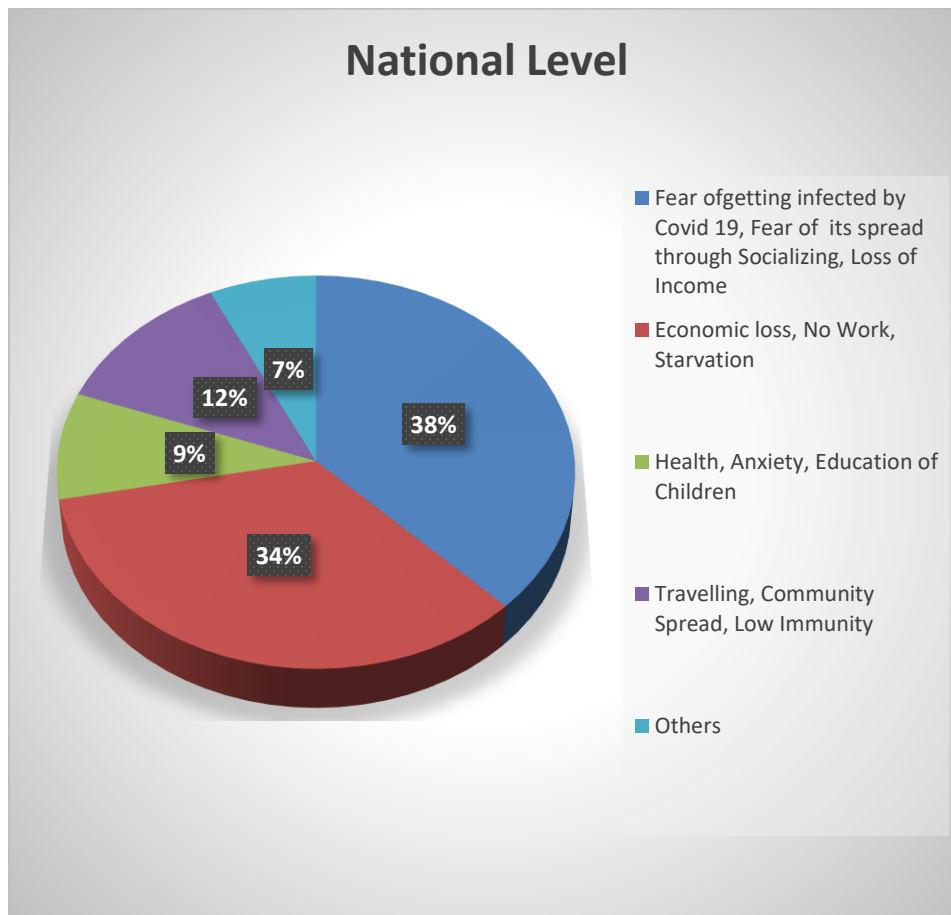
## ELDERS FEELING CONFINED AT HOME & SOCIALLY ISOLATED DURING THE LOCKDOWN

During the lockdown there was strict restriction on movement outside the house more so for the elderly. 61% respondents were feeling confined & socially isolated in their homes during the lockdown. This was equally distributed between rural & urban areas. 59% males and 41% females; 62% of young-old, 31% old-old and 7% oldest old were confined to their homes.



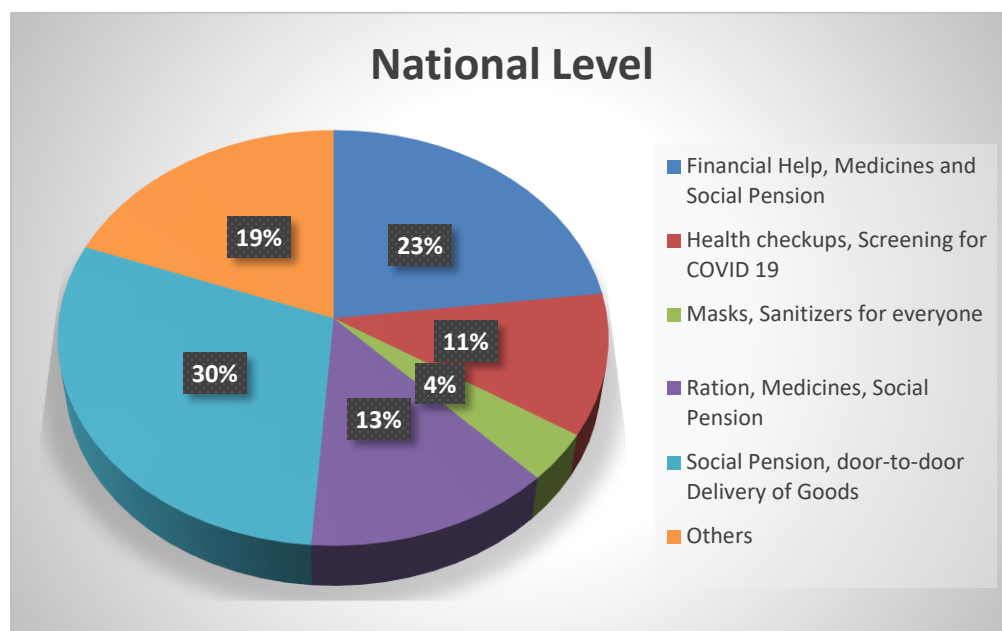
## MAJOR FEARS OF THE ELDERLY

The onset of the virus brought about the vulnerabilities and fears of the elderly. The top major fears elders had during the pandemic & lockdown, were broadly clustered in 3 categories: 38 % had the Fear of getting infected by COVID 19, Fear of its spread through Socializing & Loss of Income, 34% feared Economic loss, fear of Starvation & No Work, and 12% had fear of Travelling, fear of Community Spread and their Low Immunity levels.



## SUGGESTIONS BY THE ELDERLY TO THE GOVERNMENT

In major suggestions for the Government, more than 60% elder respondents mentioned Social Pension as their top need, while 50% wanted Medicines & Healthcare needs to be addressed.



## SYNOPSIS

COVID 19 has impacted the lives of older persons in many fundamental ways, the most important being, income, health, mobility and social isolation. The dip stick survey brings out the negative impact on the livelihoods of the elderly and their main supporter in about 65%, rural elderly being more impacted than urban elderly. In the likelihood of limited mobility due to higher risk, lack of digital literacy, the opportunities of earning a decent wage for the elderly is likely to shrink. Those elderly whose family member has been infected, are likely to face double jeopardy. During disasters HelpAge has witnessed that older persons become the most vulnerable, leaving them to be the last in line to access any relief or aid. Fearing the worst, the respondents in the survey have put financial help in any form, including social pension, as the most important demand to live a life of dignity and independence.

In addition, most of those suffering from one or more chronic diseases, require constant supervisions and management, articulated the demand for affordable and accessible healthcare services. When faced with financial difficulty elderly, particularly women give up on their regular monitoring and treatment of diseases, like hypertension and diabetes, just because they/ their family cannot afford it. Another most voiced demand, was the increase in doorstep delivery of essential goods and services, particularly food and medicines. This is particularly relevant as there are many older people who live alone or with spouse only or may have mobility issues. Steps need to be taken for a special and coordinated action plan for elderly by the government, supported by the community and family.

## QUESTIONNAIRE

### **BASIC INFO**

1. **Name**
2. **Gender** M/ F
3. **Age** 60- 69; 70-79, 80+
4. **Area:** Urban/ Rural

### **Awareness about Covid19**

1. Do you know about signs & symptoms of Corona Virus? Y/N
  - If Yes list 3
2. How did you come to know about it?
  - Friends and neighbours
  - TV/ Radio
  - public service messages
  - Govt. Health Worker
  - SCA
  - NGO
  - Any other (please specify)

### **Poverty:**

3. Has it impacted your livelihood? Y/N
4. If yes how:
  - Lower wages
  - No work
  - Any Other (mention)
5. Has it impacted livelihood of the earning member of your family? Y/N
6. If yes how:
  - Lower wages
  - No work
  - Any Other (mention)

### **Access:**

7. Was access to goods / services / benefits difficult during the lockdown? Y/N
8. If yes, which goods / services / benefits was difficult to access?
  - Food / groceries
  - Medicines
  - Domestic help / Household maid
  - Caregivers
  - Physiotherapy services
  - Pension
  - Access to ATM / banking services

- Online banking
- Health services / doctor's consultation
- Market
- Savings & credits
- Any Other (mention)

9. Did someone help you in availing the above goods / services / benefits? Y/N

- If yes, who helped?
  - Police
  - Neighbour
  - Family
  - SCA
  - HelpAge Helpline
  - eSHG
  - Panchayat
  - Federation
  - volunteers
  - Others

#### Isolation:

10. Are you feeling confined / constrained / no one to talk to / locked at one place? Y/N

- If yes, how do you deal with it?
  - Talk on phone
  - Go for walk sometimes
  - Want to learn ways of talking through smart phones / tabs / computers
  - Any Other

11. Did you receive any support from your family during this time? Y/N

12. What are your three most important fears if the situation of Covid19 continues?

#### Health:

13. Are you suffering from chronic disease (Diabetes, Hypertension, Cancer, Arthritis, Asthma etc.)? Y/N

- If yes, did your condition get aggravated / worsen during the lockdown? Y/N
- If yes, what did you do?
  - Consulted a doctor
  - Went to a hospital
  - Self-medication
  - Did nothing
  - Any other (please specify)

14. What are your 3 important suggestions to the government to make elderly's life easy during Covid19 & lockdown? (please specify)

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**HelpAge India** | Fighting isolation, poverty, neglect

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