

MEDIA RELEASE

India's Older Women face the brunt of Exclusion: Social, Financial & Digital with rise in Dependency and Abuse, reveals HelpAge India Report

New Delhi, June 14, 2023.

HelpAge India, today on the eve of UN recognized 'World Elder Abuse Awareness Day' (June 15) released its **national 2023 report - "Women & Ageing: Invisible or Empowered?"** at the India International Centre.

A first of its kind report focusing only on older women, who are often the lost and the last in line, where their needs and rights are concerned. It exploring the aspects of elder abuse and discrimination, access and ownership of older women to financial resources, employment and employability, health care, social and digital inclusion, safety and security, awareness and use of redressal mechanisms and others. The survey was conducted by a professional research agency - Ipsos Research Private Limited.

The report was spread across the length and breadth of the country covering both rural & urban India across 20 states, 2 UTs and 5 metro cities, with a **sample size of 7911**, covering **SEC B, C & D** categories.

As per the 2020 'Population Projections for India and States report' and the demographic shifts, there is a distinct '**feminization of ageing**' that is taking place due to rapid rise in ageing population and women living longer. While the gender ratio for overall population is 948 females for 1000 males, the ratio in elderly is 1065 (more females in elderly population) which further increases with age.

"It is a stark reality that women, as they become older, tend to become neglected and are often invisible. Women aged 60 plus comprise 11% of the total women population (7 crore of 66 crore) in 2021 and it will become 14% by 2031 (10 crore of 72 crore). The report highlights the gender inequality gap and the vulnerability elderly women face. It throws up some hard facts such as 54% are illiterate, 44% are widowed, 16% face abuse, 73% do not have any savings, 69% of older women don't own assets and many feel financial insecure. Most are defined by the traditional roles they play in their families and communities, which are often taken for granted. Their needs are often overlooked and contributions go unrecognized. Some areas for urgent response are raising awareness about government welfare schemes, greater priority in pension, healthcare and economic participation programs, special schemes for elderly women and recourse to redressal mechanisms for elder abuse" says **Rohit Prasad, CEO, HelpAge India.**

The HelpAge report brings out the 'unpreparedness and dependency' of older women starkly, with high illiteracy levels, low financial security, lack of awareness on redressal mechanisms and schemes beneficial for them, lack of employment opportunities and medical cover, it leaves them open and vulnerable to abuse.

The report revealed an alarming trend regarding abuse against older women, which seemed to be on the rise at a disturbing 16%. The abuse was mostly in the form of disrespect (46%) followed by physical abuse (43%) and emotional/ psychological abuse (40%). The main perpetrators of abuse were the Son (40%), followed by other relatives (31%) which is troubling, as it denotes that the abuse extends beyond the immediate family circle, this was followed by the daughter-in-law (27%).

Despite facing the abuse most older women did not report it due to 'fear of retaliation or further abuse' (18%) being the top reason, followed by 16% who seemed to have no awareness on available resources, while 13% think their concerns would not be taken seriously.

60% older women lacked awareness on redressal mechanisms available for abuse, with only 16% being aware of the Maintenance & Welfare of Parents & Senior Citizens Act and 80% older women are not aware of any government welfare schemes.

Their social status only further added to their woes, with 17% of older women stating to have faced discrimination due to their gender, 60% faced social discrimination due to their marital status i.e. widowed.

On the economic front, 53% of the older women do not feel financially secure. Of the 47% who 'do' feel secure, 80% are dependent on their children for finances. 66% older women in India don't own any assets, 73% older women do not have any savings.

Where digital inclusion is concerned older women are far behind, with 60% older women have never used digital devices, 59% older women not owning smartphones.

A significant 48% of older women have at least one chronic condition, yet 64% older women have reported not having any health insurance.

67% older women still undertake caregiving roles in their families, while 31% older women are not able to manage the burden of caregiving.

"Females are at social, economic and educational disadvantage from an early age, this impacts their lives in old age in unimaginable ways. They seldom make choices about their lives and despite all the good intent they remain secondary in almost all aspects of life. 51% of the older women have reported being 'never' employed, while 32% older women want work till as long as possible, but where are the opportunities? This can be interpreted to mean low or no social security in old age. Not much is done by way of creating an enabling environment for them. Nearly 70% of the older women have reported a lack of adequate and accessible employment opportunities. If technology is the future, where do we see these hapless women today's digital world? 59% older women don't even own smartphone. In this day and age 71% older women said they can't take decisions for themselves. We need to rethink on how we can enable and encourage these women to be self-reliant after all they will outlive their partners who have been taking decisions for them," says **Anupama Datta, Head – Policy & Research, HelpAge India.**

47% of the older women who are working, said that they do not find their environment at home friendly towards work, while 36% of the older women who are working, say the same for their environment at their workplace.

43% Elderly women worry of getting physically hurt, with 76% saying its due to 'fear of falling' and 46% stating due to weak eyesight.

Suggested measures to improve the quality of life for older women, in India, so they can live with dignity:

- Need raise awareness around the importance of gainful employment and undertake capacity building efforts. Promote elder friendly working environments.
- Raise awareness on the importance of physical and mental health amongst older women and their families.
- Promote a culture of empathy, understanding and respect through educational platforms.
- Implement digital training workshops for older women.
- Raise awareness on elder abuse and promote redressal mechanisms through door-to-door volunteers, television, radio and digital platforms.
- Raise awareness amongst older women regarding their rights and entitlements.
- Simplify procedures and processes to apply for government welfare schemes for older women.

About HelpAge India

HelpAge India is a leading charitable organization working with and for older people in India for the past 45 years. It runs healthcare, agecare, livelihood, disaster response and digital empowerment programs throughout the country & advocates strongly for the elder cause. It became the first and only Indian organization to be honoured with the 'UN Population Award 2020' for its exemplary work in the field of ageing, recognition of the organization's outstanding contribution to population issues and efforts in the realization of older persons rights in India.

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