



Social Adjustment Problems among the Elderly in Purba Medinipur District of West Bengal

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Abstract:

Old age is a significant stage of the human life span marked by biological, psychological, and social changes. While advances in healthcare have increased life expectancy, many older adults experience difficulties in adjusting socially. Social adjustment problems in old age arise due to factors such as retirement, declining health, loss of social roles, changing family structures, and reduced social interaction. These challenges often lead to loneliness, social isolation, low self-esteem, and mental health issues. The present study examines social adjustment problems among elderly persons in rural Purba Medinipur district, with special reference to gender and living arrangement. Using the Social Adjustment Scale for the Aged (SASA), data were collected from 120 elderly individuals. Statistical analysis revealed significant differences in social adjustment problems based on gender and living arrangement. Female elderly and those living alone reported higher adjustment problems. The findings highlight the need for supportive family environments and social interventions to promote healthy ageing.

Keywords: *Old Age, Social Adjustment, Elderly, Loneliness, Social Isolation, Ageing.*

Introduction:

Ageing is a natural and inevitable process that brings profound changes in an individual's physical, emotional, and social life. In India, individuals aged 60 years and above are generally considered elderly, as per census classification. Old age is often viewed positively in terms of wisdom and spiritual maturity, yet it is also associated with physical decline, dependency, and reduced social roles. According to the World Health Organization (2015), healthy ageing involves maintaining functional ability and social participation. However, many elderly individuals face loneliness, alienation, and psychological distress, which negatively impact their quality of life. Therefore, understanding social adjustment problems in old age is crucial for developing effective social and psychological support systems. Mahadevan (1986) states that traditionally, in India, old age begins at 60. The age 60 has been adopted by the census for the purposes of classifying a person as old. Old age is depicted positively in terms of wisdom & the potential for spiritual growth. For some, wisdom & serenity are positive aspects of being old. The best things about old age include freedom to do & to be what one wishes. Old age is also depicted negatively in terms of physical decline & decrepitude. Elderly people are characterized or stereotyped as ill, tired; mentally show, self-pitying, unhappy & unproductive. They are often depressed by feelings of loneliness & alienation. Their problems include a

feeling of material in security or dependence & Elders suffer from a sense of dispossession that reflects loss of roles & status (Arun. P. Bali, 1999).

Major Social Adjustment Problems in Old Age:

1. Retirement and Loss of Social Role: Retirement often results in loss of professional identity, reduced income, and decreased daily interaction. Many elderly individuals struggle to adjust to a routine without structured work, leading to feelings of uselessness and withdrawal. 2. Loneliness and Social Isolation: The death of a spouse, separation from children, or migration reduces social networks. Loneliness is strongly associated with depression and anxiety in old age. 3. Changing Family Structure: The decline of the traditional joint family system has weakened intergenerational bonds. Elderly parents may feel neglected or emotionally disconnected within nuclear households. 4. Health Problems and Dependency: Chronic illnesses such as diabetes, arthritis, and cardiovascular diseases increase dependency and reduce mobility, limiting social participation. 5. Economic Insecurity: Retirement often leads to financial instability. Many elderly individuals depend on savings or family members, which may lower self-esteem and increase stress. 6. Generation Gap and Social Change: Technological advancement and changing values create communication barriers between older and younger generations, resulting in alienation. 7. Inadequate Infrastructure: Limited access to age-friendly infrastructure, healthcare facilities, and social security schemes further aggravates adjustment problems.

Review of Literature:

The reviewed studies highlight that social adjustment in old age is influenced by family structure, gender, socio-economic factors, and social support. Living within nuclear or extended families is consistently associated with better social adjustment among the elderly, while overcrowded living conditions and certain household compositions can negatively affect adjustment (Tran, 1991; Sijuwade, 2008). In contexts where institutional support is limited, especially in rural areas, family-based care remains crucial for elderly well-being (Sivamurthy et al., 2001). Gender emerges as a significant factor in later-life adjustment. The double jeopardy perspective suggests that women face greater social inequalities with age (Schiffman et al., 1994), and several studies confirm that elderly women experience poorer social adjustment, higher alienation, and greater difficulties than men, despite similar levels of life satisfaction in some cases (Balachandran et al., 2007; Sil & Saha Roy, 2016). Findings on socio-economic status, occupation, and work-related factors in retirement adjustment remain inconclusive due to methodological limitations (Braithwaite & Gibson, 1997). Early-life socioeconomic conditions are linked to cognitive performance in old age, though not to the rate of cognitive decline (Wilson & Scherr, 2005). Additionally, social support does not uniformly predict caregiver adjustment, as many associations were found to be statistically insignificant (Smerglia et al., 2007). Psychological factors also play a critical role in elderly adjustment. Older adults tend to show higher levels of depression and lower psychological well-being compared to younger adults, with a strong negative relationship between depression and well-being (Dhara & Jogsan, 2013). Overall, the literature underscores the combined influence of family support, gender roles, socioeconomic background, and psychological health on social adjustment in later life.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To compare the social adjustment problems between male and female elderly.
2. To examine whether there is any significant difference in social adjustment problems among elderly with different living arrangements.

Hypotheses of the Study:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in social adjustment problems between male and female elderly.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in social adjustment problems among elderly with different living arrangements.

Research Methodology:

A statistical sample is a miniature picture as cross section of the entire group or aggregate from which the sample is taken. The study adopted a descriptive survey method. The sampling method used for this study was purposive sampling. The sample size is 120 which 60 are males and 60 are females. The characteristics of the samples are all above 60 years (60 to 90) of age. The sample is taken from rural area of Purba Medinipur district. The present investigation tools used in this study for data collection were the Social adjustment scale for the aged (SASA) developed by Dr. Devendra Singh Sisodia and Mr. Rachana Khandelwal. The reliability of the scale was 0.80 and the scale was validated against the external criteria and coefficient obtained was 0.70. The researcher was used Mean, Standard Deviation, Independent Samples t-test and One-Way ANOVA for the purpose of the study.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Hypothesis 1: Gender and Social Adjustment Problems

Table 1 : Descriptive Statistics of Social Adjustment Problems by Gender

Group	N	Mean	SD
Male Elderly	60	52.40	8.15
Female Elderly	60	55.90	7.60
Total	120	54.15	7.98

Female elderly (M = 55.90) reported higher adjustment problems compared to males (M = 52.40).

Table 2 : Independent Samples t-test

Group	Mean	SD	t	df	p	Result
Male	52.40	8.15				
Female	55.90	7.60	2.45	118	0.016	Significant

Interpretation:

Since $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis (H₀₁) is rejected. There is a significant difference in social adjustment problems between male and female elderly. Female elderly experience higher adjustment problems.

Hypothesis 2: Living Arrangement and Social Adjustment Problems

Table 3 : Descriptive Statistics by Living Arrangement

Living Arrangement	N	Mean	SD
With Family	40	50.80	6.90
Living Alone	40	57.20	7.45
Old Age Home	40	54.50	8.10

Elderly living alone show the highest mean score (M = 57.20), indicating greater adjustment problems.

Table 4 : One-Way ANOVA

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	Result
Between Groups	850.60	2	425.30	6.75	0.002	Significant
Within Groups	7365.40	117	62.95			
Total	8216.00	119				

Interpretation:

Since $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. There is a significant difference in social adjustment problems among elderly based on living arrangement. Elderly living alone experience higher social adjustment problems.

Discussion:

The findings indicate that gender and living arrangement significantly influence social adjustment in old age. Female elderly reported greater difficulties, possibly due to financial dependency, widowhood, and limited social mobility. Similarly, elderly individuals living alone experienced higher adjustment problems due to lack of emotional and social support. These findings align with previous studies emphasizing the importance of family support and social participation in promoting healthy ageing. Previous studies indicate that social adjustment in old age is influenced by gender, living arrangement, socioeconomic status, and psychological well-being. Research shows that elderly women often experience greater social adjustment difficulties than men due to cumulative social disadvantages. Family-based living arrangements are associated with better emotional support and adjustment, whereas isolation increases vulnerability.

Conclusion:

Social adjustment in old age plays a crucial role in determining the overall well-being of elderly individuals. The study concludes that female elderly and those living alone are more vulnerable to social adjustment problems. Strengthening family bonds, enhancing community support systems, and implementing effective social welfare policies can significantly improve the quality of life of older adults. Promoting active ageing and social inclusion is essential for ensuring dignity and well-being in later life.

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