

EXPLORING THE HEALTH STATUS AND QUALITY OF LIFE OF RURAL ELDERLY WOMEN IN TAMIL NADU: SOCIO-ECONOMIC INFLUENCES, NUTRITIONAL PRACTICES, AND HEALTHCARE ACCESS

Mr. T. SUBRAMANI, Ph.D., Research Scholar, Department of Economics, Thiruvalluvar University (A State University) Serkkadu, Vellore District, Tamil Nadu, India- 632 115.

Dr. G. YOGANANDHAM, Professor & Head, Department of Economics, Director- Centre for Knowledge, Thiruvalluvar University (A State University) Serkkadu, Vellore District, Tamil Nadu, India- 632 115.

Abstract

The health status and quality of life of elderly women in rural Tamil Nadu are influenced by a complex interplay of socio-economic factors, nutritional practices, and healthcare access. This study aims to explore the unique challenges faced by this demographic, with a focus on understanding the determinants of their health and well-being. Data were collected through structured discourse and surveys from a representative sample of rural elderly women across various districts. The study found that socio-economic factors such as income, education, and living conditions significantly impact health outcomes. Nutritional practices, influenced by traditional diets and food accessibility, were identified as crucial determinants of physical health. Additionally, the availability and utilization of healthcare services were found to be limited, exacerbating health issues among this population. The findings highlight the need for targeted interventions that address these socio-economic barriers, improve nutritional awareness, and enhance access to healthcare services. Improving these aspects can lead to better health outcomes and overall quality of life for elderly women in rural Tamil Nadu. This research article highlights the profound impact of inequality on society by examining the political, social, and economic consequences of income disparities.

Keywords: Elderly Women, Population, Health Status, Healthcare Services, Quality of

Life, Nutritional Practices, Food Accessibility and Living Conditions,

The theme of the article

The health and well-being of elderly populations have become increasingly significant as global demographics shift toward an aging society. In India, this trend is particularly noticeable, with a rapidly growing elderly population that is projected to reach 19.5% of the total population by 2050. In Tamil Nadu, a state known for its advanced demographic transition, the proportion of elderly people is already significant. Among this demographic, rural elderly women represent a particularly vulnerable group due to compounded socio-economic disadvantages and gender-specific challenges. Elderly women in rural areas often face a unique set of challenges that affect their health and quality of life. These challenges are intertwined with socio-economic factors such as poverty, lack of education, and limited access to resources. The traditional family structure, which historically provided support, is undergoing changes, leading to increased isolation and dependency among the elderly. Moreover, rural elderly women often have limited access to healthcare services, exacerbating their health issues. The lack of specialized geriatric care in rural areas further compounds these challenges, leaving many elderly women without adequate medical attention.

Nutritional practices also play a crucial role in determining the health status of rural elderly women. Malnutrition, both undernutrition and overnutrition, can lead to a range of health issues, including weakened immune systems, chronic diseases, and reduced physical and cognitive functioning. The dietary habits of rural elderly women are often influenced by cultural practices, economic constraints, and availability of food resources, which can lead to inadequate intake of essential nutrients. This study aims to explore the health status and quality of life of rural elderly women in Tamil Nadu, with a focus on understanding the impact of socio-economic factors, nutritional practices, and healthcare access. By examining these dimensions, the study seeks to provide insights into the specific needs and challenges faced by this population, and to inform policies and interventions that can improve their well-being. The findings will also contribute to the broader discourse on aging in rural India, highlighting the importance of targeted strategies to address the health disparities experienced by elderly women.

Statement of the problem

The elderly population in India is growing rapidly, with rural areas experiencing significant demographic shifts. In Tamil Nadu, elderly women, in particular, face unique challenges due to a combination of socio-economic disadvantages, inadequate healthcare access, and poor nutritional practices. These factors contribute to a deterioration in their health status and overall quality of life. Despite being a vulnerable group, elderly women in rural areas are often overlooked in public health initiatives and social support programs. The lack of comprehensive data on their health and socio-economic conditions further complicates efforts to address their needs. This study aims to investigate the interplay of socio-economic factors, nutritional practices, and healthcare access on the health status and quality of life of rural elderly women in Tamil Nadu, providing valuable insights to inform targeted interventions and policy-making.

The increasing elderly population in India, especially in rural Tamil Nadu, faces challenges like higher life expectancy, with women experiencing a greater proportion compared to men. Socio-economic factors like low income, lack of education, and limited healthcare access can exacerbate health issues in elderly women. Cultural norms and gender roles also marginalize them. Poor nutritional practices, especially in rural areas, can lead to malnutrition and other health complications. The study discusses the challenges faced by elderly women in rural areas, including healthcare access, financial barriers, transportation issues, and lack of trained professionals. It also highlights the impact of these factors on their quality of life, emphasizing the need for social support systems. This article addresses a critical issue, shedding essential light on a topic with considerable social, political, and economic implications.

Objective of the article

The overall objective of an article is to assess the health status and quality of life of rural elderly women in Tamil Nadu, focusing on socio-economic factors, nutritional practices, and healthcare access. It will also examine the impact of income, education, family structure, and social support on health outcomes. The study will also identify challenges faced by these women, such as financial constraints and social isolation, and provide recommendations for policymakers, healthcare providers, and community organizations to improve their health and quality of life.

Methodology of the article

This research takes a descriptive and diagnostic approach, utilizing secondary sources and statistical data to provide insights into the topic. By applying theoretical frameworks, it examines relevant hypotheses and perspectives. The study's goal is to understand, describe, and analyze the dynamics and context of the subject, along with their implications. The methodology prioritizes the use of key sources for secondary data collection, focusing on only the most relevant materials. To gather information pertinent to the research, a broad range of publications is consulted, including both published and unpublished sources. This includes government reports from India and Tamil Nadu, books, journals, specialized media, websites, public records, and papers. Additionally, discussions with academics, experts, and professionals provide valuable data and statistics. Thorough investigation is conducted to collect data from these varied sources. The gathered information is then organized in alignment with the study's objectives and presented clearly, which is essential for forming conclusions and results about the topic.

Health Status of Elderly Women in Rural Tamil Nadu

The health status of elderly women in rural Tamil Nadu is influenced by a range of factors including socio-economic conditions, access to healthcare, and traditional practices. Rural elderly women often face challenges in accessing healthcare due to distance, transportation, and financial constraints, resulting in delays in treatment and chronic condition management. Elderly women often suffer from chronic illnesses like diabetes, hypertension, and arthritis, which can be worsened by inadequate healthcare services and limited disease management awareness. Poor nutrition, particularly among rural elderly women, can lead to health issues and negatively impact their overall well-being.

Social support systems are vital for elderly women's health, especially in rural areas where family and community support may be limited, affecting mental health and effective health management. Traditional practices in rural areas can delay modern medical treatment and may lead to inadequate management of serious health conditions. Lower education levels among elderly women can affect their health literacy and medical care access, necessitating the implementation of educational programs and awareness campaigns to enhance health outcomes. Government schemes like pension schemes and healthcare subsidies aim to improve elderly health and well-being, but their effectiveness can vary and implementation may face challenges at the grassroots level. The resolution of these issues often necessitates a

comprehensive strategy that includes enhanced healthcare infrastructure, enhanced service accessibility, enhanced community support, and enhanced education.

Understanding the Health Challenges Faced by Rural Elderly Women in Tamil Nadu

Rural elderly women in Tamil Nadu face health challenges due to socioeconomic status, healthcare access, and traditional practices. Rural areas often lack adequate healthcare facilities, causing elderly women to travel long distances to access health centers due to mobility issues or lack of transportation. Chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension, and arthritis are prevalent among the elderly, often worsened by inadequate access to regular medical care and medication. Malnutrition is prevalent in rural areas, particularly among elderly women who may struggle to obtain necessary nutrients due to financial constraints or traditional dietary practices. The lack of awareness about preventive health measures and available health services may result in late diagnoses and untreated conditions. Elderly women in rural areas may experience social isolation, affecting their mental health and overall well-being due to limited social support networks, particularly if their family members have migrated to urban areas.

Rural living often involves physical labor, but elderly women may be less active due to health issues, resulting in muscle weakness and poor mobility. Poor sanitation and hygiene can lead to health issues, particularly in rural areas where proper facilities are lacking, negatively impacting overall health. Traditional health practices and beliefs can potentially delay or replace modern medical treatments, affecting health outcomes. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, including improving healthcare infrastructure, increasing awareness and education, and providing better social support systems for elderly women in rural areas.

Socio-Economic Influences on the Well-Being of Elderly Women in Rural Areas

The well-being of elderly women in rural areas is influenced by various socio-economic factors, including key aspects. Rural elderly women often rely on pensions, family support, or informal economic activities, which can limit their access to healthcare, quality nutrition, and overall well-being. Rural areas often lack access to healthcare services, particularly for elderly women, who may face barriers like distance, transportation, and inadequate facilities, hindering timely and effective medical care. Social networks and family support are vital for elderly women's well-being, especially in rural areas, but changes in family dynamics and migration

patterns can impact this system. Poor housing and living conditions, including inadequate sanitation, inadequate infrastructure, and poor living conditions, can significantly impact health and overall quality of life.

Lack of education about health issues, rights, and services can negatively impact elderly women's well-being, as it limits their knowledge about preventive health measures and available resources. Gender norms and discrimination can impact elderly women's access to resources and services, and cultural attitudes can influence their treatment and support opportunities. The nature of work and economic contributions can significantly impact the financial stability and social status of those who continue to work or engage in economic activities. The legal and policy framework of government, particularly in pensions, healthcare, and social welfare, significantly impacts the support provided to elderly women, thereby enhancing their overall well-being. To tackle socio-economic factors, a comprehensive approach is needed, encompassing improved healthcare access, enhanced social support systems, and policies tailored to the unique needs of elderly women in rural areas.

Impact of Income, Education, Family Structure, and Social Support on Health Outcomes Among Rural Elderly Women in Tamil Nadu

The health outcomes of rural elderly women in Tamil Nadu can be significantly influenced by several factors, including income, education, family structure, and social support. Factors such as income significantly impact their health, with higher income often leading to better access to healthcare services like preventive care, treatment, and medications. Adequate income is essential for maintaining good nutrition, which is vital for maintaining health in old age. Improved income can enhance living conditions, potentially influencing health outcomes by reducing exposure to environmental hazards. Higher education levels are linked to improved health literacy, enabling individuals to make informed health decisions and comprehend medical advice. Educated individuals often adopt healthier lifestyles and preventive measures, leading to improved overall health. They are also more likely to seek medical care and follow treatment regimens.

Family structure plays a crucial role in providing emotional and practical support, especially for elderly women with mobility or health issues. Families can offer financial assistance during times of need, which can impact access to healthcare and other essentials. Strong social networks and support systems can significantly improve the mental health of elderly individuals by reducing feelings of loneliness

and depression. Social support networks offer practical assistance for daily tasks and community engagement, enhancing overall well-being and fostering a sense of belonging among individuals. Addressing these factors through targeted policies and programs can significantly improve the health outcomes of rural elderly women in Tamil Nadu.

The Impact of Nutritional Practices on the Health of Elderly Women

The nutritional practices of elderly women can have a significant impact on their overall health and well-being. Proper nutrition is crucial for maintaining health in later years, as it helps in preventing chronic diseases, maintaining a healthy weight, and supporting overall bodily functions. A balanced diet, containing fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats, is crucial for managing chronic conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease. Calcium and vitamin D intake are crucial for bone health, especially in older adults who are at a higher risk for osteoporosis and fractures. Protein is crucial for muscle maintenance and repair, especially for elderly women who need more to maintain muscle mass and strength. Proper hydration is crucial for older adults, as they may experience decreased thirst, which supports kidney function and prevents urinary tract infections. High-fiber foods can aid in digestion and prevent constipation, a common issue among the elderly.

Lowering sodium intake can help manage blood pressure and decrease the risk of cardiovascular diseases. Social interactions and cultural practices can influence dietary habits, with meals shared with family or community potentially enhancing nutrition and mental well-being. Personalized nutritional plans should take into account individual health conditions, medications, and personal preferences when determining nutritional practices. Regular health check-ups and dietary assessments are crucial for making necessary adjustments to maintain optimal health. In short, proper nutritional practices are crucial for the health of elderly women, and personalized approaches that consider their specific needs and preferences can lead to better health outcomes.

Examining Healthcare Access and Its Effect on Rural Elderly Women

The research focuses attention to the substantial obstacles that elderly women living in rural areas have when trying to get healthcare, which might have a negative effect on their wellbeing. Rural areas often lack healthcare facilities, posing significant challenges for elderly women with mobility issues or limited transportation options. Healthcare costs can be high, especially for those with fixed or low incomes,

especially rural elderly women who may struggle with out-of-pocket expenses or lack adequate insurance coverage. Rural areas often lack adequate healthcare infrastructure, leading to subpar care and less frequent medical attention, particularly for elderly women, resulting in poorer health outcomes. Rural communities' cultural attitudes towards healthcare, family structures, and social norms can influence elderly women's willingness to seek medical help.

Rural areas may lack emphasis on preventive care and health education, leading to delayed diagnoses and more severe health issues. Telemedicine and mobile health services can improve healthcare access for rural populations, but require reliable internet access and technological literacy, which may not always be available. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach, including improving infrastructure, increasing financial support, enhancing cultural competence among healthcare providers, and leveraging technology to reach underserved populations.

Nexus Socio-Economic Factors to Quality of Life in Tamil Nadu's Elderly Women

The quality of life of elderly women in Tamil Nadu is influenced by socioeconomic factors, with an emphasis on the interrelated aspects that impact their overall health. Pension schemes in Tamil Nadu significantly impact the quality of life for elderly women, who often rely on state or family support. Income stability and adequacy in the informal sector can significantly impact the quality of life of those still working or engaging in such activities. The availability and affordability of healthcare services, including both government and private options, are crucial for overall health care access. The prevalence and effective management of chronic diseases are significantly influenced by their medical care and lifestyle changes. The living arrangements of elderly women, whether they live with family, independently, or in care facilities, significantly influence their emotional and physical well-being. Strong family ties and social support systems offer emotional and practical assistance.

Education significantly impacts access to information, economic opportunities, and the ability to navigate health and social services. Poor housing quality can lead to health issues and lower quality of life, while access to clean water, sanitation, and electricity also significantly impacts well-being. Government policies and programs, such as social welfare programs and legal protections, are crucial in ensuring the security and well-being of the elderly. Traditional views on the role of elderly women in society can significantly impact their status and the support they receive. Participation in community activities or religious groups can foster a sense of purpose

and social inclusion. Further research is available upon request. An understanding of these characteristics facilitates the formulation of interventions and policies aimed at enhancing the quality of life for elderly women in Tamil Nadu.

Nutritional Practices and Their Role in Shaping Health Outcomes for Rural Elderly Women

Nutrition significantly impacts rural elderly women's health outcomes, disease prevention, and quality of life, with their diet playing a crucial role in their overall well-being. Elderly adults require nutrient adequacy due to metabolic changes, decreased appetite, and chronic illnesses, requiring adequate protein, calcium, vitamin D, and fiber for bone health and muscle mass. Proper nutrition, rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, can help manage and prevent chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular diseases by controlling blood pressure. Elderly individuals are at higher risk of dehydration due to reduced thirst perception and kidney function changes, so ensuring adequate fluid intake is crucial for preventing complications and maintaining cognitive function. Rural elderly women's cultural and regional dietary practices can impact their nutritional intake, potentially reducing variety and essential nutrients if not balanced properly. Rural areas face limited access to diverse foods due to economic constraints, transportation issues, and seasonal availability. Community-based interventions like local food programs can improve food security.

Economic hardships and social isolation can impact dietary choices and practices, affecting elderly women's health. Access to affordable, nutritious food and social support can improve their health. Promoting nutrition education and healthy eating habits can empower rural elderly women, with community workshops, local health workers, and traditional leaders playing key roles. Targeted health interventions and community support can significantly enhance the nutritional status and overall health of elderly women in rural areas.

Barriers to Healthcare Access for Elderly Women in Tamil Nadu's Rural Communities

In Tamil Nadu's rural communities, elderly women often face several barriers to accessing healthcare. Rural areas often lack sufficient healthcare facilities, including hospitals and clinics, which can make it challenging for elderly women to access necessary services. Poor transportation infrastructure can hinder elderly women's access to healthcare facilities, particularly if they reside far from town centers. Elderly women often face significant financial constraints, including the high

cost of healthcare services and medications, which can impact their ability to afford treatment. The lack of awareness about healthcare services and preventive care among elderly women may result in delayed treatment and poorer health outcomes.

Traditional beliefs, social norms, family dynamics, and gender roles can discourage elderly women from seeking medical help, affecting their autonomy in healthcare decisions. Low health literacy can hinder elderly women's comprehension and utilization of healthcare services, thereby affecting their ability to navigate the system effectively. The elderly women may be lacking in essential support services like home healthcare and counseling that are tailored to their specific needs. A comprehensive plan that includes strengthening the infrastructure for healthcare, boosting financial assistance, expanding health awareness, and improving transportation is required to solve these challenges.

Addressing Financial and Social Obstacles for Elderly Women: Policy and Community Recommendations

The holistic approach that addresses the financial and social issues encountered by older women by changing policies and enlisting community support. The policy recommends expanding pension schemes to provide adequate support to elderly women, implementing universal basic pensions or targeted increases for low-income seniors. The initiative aims to ensure healthcare accessibility and affordability for elderly women, including regular check-ups, chronic disease management, and mental health support, especially in rural and remote areas. Strengthen laws against elder abuse, ensure access to legal protection for elderly women, promote awareness of their rights, and provide free legal assistance when necessary. Economic Empowerment Programs aim to provide skill development and employment opportunities for elderly women, promoting small-scale entrepreneurship and microfinance initiatives. The initiative aims to create affordable housing and shelter options for elderly women, ensuring their safety, accessibility, and provision of necessary services. Implement policies addressing the unique needs of elderly women, including gender, disability, and socio-economic status, and promote gender equality in all social protection programs.

Community-based support networks should be established to provide elderly women with social activities, health services, and counseling, while also encouraging volunteer programs for companionship and assistance. Run community awareness campaigns to combat ageism and promote the value of elderly women, educate the

public about their challenges and the importance of supporting them. Implementing intergenerational programs can foster social interaction between younger and older generations, thereby reducing social isolation and fostering mutual understanding and support. Support and fund local advocacy groups focusing on elderly women's rights and needs, as they can identify issues and advocate for community-level changes. Encourage elderly women to engage in volunteering and mentorship programs to foster a sense of purpose and community connection. Promoting family support systems and education on caregiving is crucial, encouraging families to actively support elderly relatives and access available resources. The integration of policy and community strategies can effectively foster a more supportive environment for elderly women, addressing their financial and social challenges.

Supporting Rural Elderly Women: Addressing Financial, Social, and Policy Challenges

It is necessary for an all-encompassing strategy to address the issues that rural older women confront, such as budgetary limitations, social isolation, and policy suggestions. The lack of consistent and sufficient pension schemes for elderly women in rural areas can be alleviated by expanding eligibility and ensuring timely disbursement. The National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) should be expanded to include all citizens, taking into account inflationary pressures and rising living costs. Support for small-scale, age-appropriate income-generating activities, such as training in traditional crafts or micro-enterprises, can help elderly women maintain financial independence. The provision of banking services, including financial literacy programs, to rural elderly women can significantly enhance their financial management.

Establishing community centers for elderly women can reduce social isolation by providing a space for socialization, recreational activities, and educational workshops. Reliable and affordable transport services can help elderly women stay connected to community events and essential services. Volunteering programs can foster a supportive network among elderly women, helping to combat loneliness. The training program aims to provide basic digital technology skills to elderly women, enabling them to stay connected with family members and access online services. The policy recommends the creation of integrated care models that combine healthcare, social services, and financial assistance to offer a comprehensive support system for elderly women. The initiative involves involving village councils in the planning and execution of support programs to ensure they are tailored to the specific needs of rural

communities. The implementation of regular monitoring and evaluation systems is crucial for assessing the impact of policies and programs and making necessary adjustments. Run awareness campaigns in rural communities to educate about elderly women's rights and services, reducing stigma and improving support uptake. Collaboration between government, NGOs, and local communities is crucial for improving the quality of life for rural elderly women by implementing targeted financial support and effective policies.

Challenges and Opportunities in Health Status and Quality of Life among Rural Elderly Women in Tamil Nadu

The health status and quality of life of elderly women in rural Tamil Nadu face several challenges, but there are also opportunities to improve their situation. It is occasionally difficult for older women to get frequent, specialized care in rural locations due to a lack of suitable healthcare facilities and inadequate transportation. Rural elderly women often face economic constraints, such as limited income and dependency on family members, which can hinder their ability to access timely medical care. Elderly women often suffer from chronic diseases like arthritis, diabetes, and hypertension, often unmanaged due to resource scarcity, and poor diet and malnutrition can exacerbate these issues. Rural elderly women may face social isolation, negatively impacting their mental health, and traditional gender roles and societal norms may limit their access to healthcare services and resources. Low health literacy and limited education can lead to poor health outcomes, hindering individuals' ability to navigate the healthcare system and adhere to treatment plans.

Government schemes like Ayushman Bharat and IOPP offer financial support for medical expenses and various services for elderly persons. Community-based programs like health camps and awareness campaigns can provide essential medical services and screenings in rural areas, promoting health awareness and preventive care. Telemedicine and mobile apps are revolutionizing healthcare by providing remote consultations and aiding in chronic condition tracking and management. Local resources like self-help groups and NGOs can offer support networks for elderly women, while training local volunteers and caregivers can enhance home-based care quality. Improved transportation infrastructure can enhance healthcare access, while rural healthcare centers can offer regular and specialized care. Targeted interventions and opportunities can significantly improve the health status and quality of life for elderly women in rural Tamil Nadu.

Conclusion

The health status and quality of life of rural elderly women in Tamil Nadu are profoundly influenced by a combination of socio-economic factors, nutritional practices, and access to healthcare services. The socio-economic conditions of elderly women in rural Tamil Nadu often include limited financial resources, lower educational levels, and inadequate housing. These factors contribute to poor health outcomes and diminished quality of life. Economic instability, coupled with traditional gender roles, restricts their ability to seek and afford healthcare services, exacerbating their health issues. Nutritional deficiencies are prevalent among rural elderly women due to inadequate dietary intake and lack of access to diverse and nutritious food. Traditional diets may be insufficient in essential nutrients, leading to various health problems such as malnutrition, anemia, and chronic diseases. Improving nutritional education and access to better food sources is crucial for enhancing their health and well-being.

Access to healthcare services is often limited by geographical barriers, inadequate healthcare infrastructure, and financial constraints. Rural elderly women frequently face challenges in reaching medical facilities and affording treatments, which results in delayed diagnosis and treatment of health conditions. Strengthening healthcare delivery systems, including mobile health services and community-based care models, can significantly improve their health outcomes. Access to healthcare services is often limited by geographical barriers, inadequate healthcare infrastructure, and financial constraints. Rural elderly women frequently face challenges in reaching medical facilities and affording treatments, which results in delayed diagnosis and treatment of health conditions. Strengthening healthcare delivery systems, including mobile health services and community-based care models, can significantly improve their health outcomes.

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