
The Status of Elderly People in Nepal

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Abstract

Elderly citizens are the sources of knowledge, experiences and collections of different ideas in every society or nation. If we use their ability, long experiences and their conscience, our society or nation will be benefitted to reform national development and prosperity. Ageing population is a global phenomenon and the number is rapidly increasing in developing countries as compared to developed countries. The government of Nepal has declared that people with 60 years or more are elderly citizens. The growth rate of the elderly population is faster than that of the total population in Nepal. The observation shows that the proportion of elderly population is high in mountain and hilly regions as compared to Terai. However, it is noted that female elderly population is the highest among three ecological regions. The growing numbers of ageing population is a major concern in most of the developing countries like Nepal. The social, economic and demographic impacts of ageing population possess both opportunities and challenges to every society. In this situation, the Government of Nepal should attempt to enhance the self-reliance and provide social security of its elderly people to facilitate their continuous participation in society. The Government of Nepal has introduced the universal old aged allowances program since 1994/95 as a non-contributing social assistance to elderly citizens with 70 years or more. The starting allowances are nominal. At present context, it is not a sufficient amount for the elderly citizens but they have little support to health care, medicine, entertainment and desired foods and fruits. Likewise, the Government should establish old age homes, day care and ageing centers and parks for entertainment.

Key words: Ageing, index of ageing, median age, projection & social security

1. Introduction

Ageing is a common, natural and continuous process. Ageing population is a worldwide phenomenon. As the number is rising faster in developing countries, there is less chances to regulate to the consequences of this demographic transition. In the developed countries, chronological time plays a great role. Socially constructed meanings of age are more significant such as the roles assigned to older people, in some cases; it is the loss of role accompanying physical declining. Most of the developed countries accept the age of 65 years as a definition of elderly but developing countries adopt less than that age. In the context of Nepal, age of 60 years or over is considered as an elderly citizen. Ageing

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population also presents social, economic and cultural opportunities and challenges to individuals, families, societies and the worldwide community.

Ageing has always been global issue and Nepal has also taken this issue as one of the priority of the government. On the other, fertility rate has been declining in recent years and the tempo is expected to be unexpectedly fast as the mortality is declining and the life expectancy is continuing to increase for both sexes in Nepal. It is important to understand the ageing issue in the proper demographic and national context. In a country like Nepal, a marginal increase in the proportion of older people possesses problems when the country is characterized by greater spatial inequalities, poverty, overly used land resources, stagnant economy, high illiteracy and poor health status. The increasing numbers of elderly citizens is a major concern in developing countries (Subedi, 1999).

Nepal has introduced a non-contributory social pension scheme since 1994/95 to ensure the social security to the elderly citizens. This system is unique to Asia being the primary universal pension scheme in the region and a model for other developing countries. The primary motive behind this scheme is to promote long established tradition of taking care of elderly by their family. All the Policy, Acts and Regulation for elderly have focused special attention on the promotion of the family support for the well-being of the older people. In some developed countries, state pensions ensure old-age income security for a significant proportion of the population, while in developing countries relatively few have access to retirement pensions. In countries with low rates of occupational or retirement pension coverage, other social policy instruments are functioning to ensure the access to cash the kind assistance for older persons. The social pension schemes which do not provide adequate income or coverage may need to be expanded for wider coverage (MoHP, 2010).

2. Objectives

The main objective of the study is to assess the status of elderly citizens in Nepal. The specific objectives of this study are to explain the general situation of ageing population, to analyze the socio-economic and demographic situation and to evaluate the social security of the elderly people in Nepal.

3. Data and Method

This study is based on secondary data collection which is taken from Central Bureau of Statistics from 1952/54 to 2011 censuses. In this study, existing literatures related to elderly people are extensively reviewed. The collective data and descriptive information are presented in different tables. The frequency tables and cross tables have been used to analyze the data.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

4.1 Index of ageing and median age

Population ageing is a shift in the distribution of a nation's population towards elder ages. It generally indicates to increase in the population's mean and median ages. Population ageing arises from two demographic effects i.e. increasing longevity and declining mortality. Both the index of ageing and median age is used as an indicator of ageing population. The index of ageing is calculated by dividing the number of the elderly persons (age 60 or over) by the number of children (age 0-14 years) and then multiplying by one hundred. It can be calculated by using the following relationship:

$$\text{Index of ageing} = \frac{\text{Number of persons aged 60 years or more}}{\text{Number of persons aged 0 - 14 years}} \times 100$$

Table 4.1: Ageing index and median age of population by sex, 1971-2011

Census Years	Ageing index (Percent)			Median age (Years)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1971	13.20	14.75	13.86	19.80	20.70	20.30
1981	14.08	13.51	13.81	19.50	20.30	19.90
1991	13.56	13.80	13.58	18.41	19.40	18.92
2001	16.51	16.32	16.70	19.00	20.00	20.00
2011	22.59	24.03	23.30	21.28	23.05	22.26

Source: Population Monograph of Nepal, 2003 & 2014.

Table 4.1 exhibits that index of ageing and median age in population of Nepal by sex from 1971 to 2011. This table also reveals that the index of ageing for male and female has increased from 13.20 percent and 14.75 percent in 1971 to 22.59 percent and 24.03 percent in 2011 respectively. Median age of the population is defined as that value which divides population into two equal numerical values. This table also shows that median age for male and female has also increased from 19.80 years and 20.70 years in 1971 to 21.28 years and 23.05 years in 2011 respectively. It is also found that the median age for both sexes has increased gradually since 1971 to 2011. This table also exhibits that the total median age of population of Nepal was around 20 years before 2001 census and it increased to 22.26 years in 2011 census. Moreover, this indicates that Nepalese population is growing to elderly ages and there are more elderly females than males. It can be concluded that the Nepalese

population is moving slightly from younger population to elder population due to the gradual increment of life expectancy at birth and decline in mortality.

4.2 Size and growth rate of elderly people

The growth rate of the elderly population is faster than the growth rate of the total population in Nepal. Census data of past three decades, 1970 and onwards of Nepal reveals that, there has been rise in the elderly population.

Table 4.2: Size and growth rate of elderly population, Nepal, 1952/54-2011

Census Years	Size of elderly population (60 years or more)		Growth Rate	
	Number	Percent	Elderly Population (Percent)	Total Population (Percent)
1952/54	4,09,761	5.0	-	-
1961	4,89,346	5.20	1.79	1.65
1971	6,21,597	5.40	2.42	2.07
1981	8,57,061	5.70	3.26	2.66
1991	10,71,234	5.80	2.26	2.10
2001	14,77,379	6.50	3.50	2.25
2011	21,54,410	8.13	3.77	1.35

Source: Population Monograph of Nepal, 2003 & 2014.

The table 4.2 reveals that the total elderly population of the country has increased from 4,09,761 in 1952/54 to 14,77,379 in 2001 and it has reached to 21,54,410 in 2011. This table also shows that the percentage of elderly population was found 5.0 percent in 1952/54 to 5.80 percent in 1991 and it reached to 8.13 percent in 2011 as compared to the total population. It might be the decline in fertility and increase in the life expectancy at birth in Nepal. This table also exhibits that the growth rate of the elderly people has always been found higher than that of the total population. The elderly citizens have been increasing both in terms of absolute number and as proportion of the total population in the context of Nepal.

4.3 Distribution of elderly population by residence

Table 4.3: Distribution of elderly population by residence, Nepal, 1952/54-2011

Census Years	Elderly population (Percent)		
	Rural	Urban	Total
1952/54	-	-	5.0
1961	5.22	5.23	5.20
1971	5.63	5.12	5.40
1981	5.74	5.11	5.70
1991	5.95	4.99	5.80
2001	6.60	5.70	6.50
2011	-	-	8.13

Source: Population Monograph of Nepal, 2003 & 2014

The table 4.3 exhibits that distribution of elderly population by residence from censuses of 1952/54 to 2011. This table also shows that the percentage of elderly population is found 5.0 percent in 1952/54 and 5.80 percent in 1991 and it reached to 8.13 percent in 2011 as compared to the total population. This table further compares the proportion of elderly population living in rural and urban areas. The percentage of elderly population aged 60 years or more is found to be slightly higher in rural areas than that of the urban areas.

4.4 Distribution of an elderly people by ecological regions

Nepal is divided in three ecological regions: Mountain, Hill and Terai. This table shows that the proportion of elderly population observed high in mountain and hill regions as compared to Terai region. However, it is noted that female elderly population is the highest among three ecological regions.

Table 4.4: Distribution of an elderly people by ecological regions, 1991-2001

SN	Age	Mountain		Hill		Terai	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1	60 years or over in 1991 (Percent)	6.6	6.0	6.4	6.1	5.4	5.4
2	60 years or over in 2001 (Percent)	7.2	7.1	7.1	6.9	6.0	9.9

Source: Population Monograph of Nepal, 2003.

This table also reveals that male and female elderly population was almost equal in mountain and hill regions on the basis of 2001 census. Following the data of the same year, the percentage of female elderly population in Terai region was found 9.9 percent and male elderly population was 6.0 percent which denotes that female elderly population is higher than male.

4.5 Projection of the elderly population

The term ‘projection’ refers to any careful constructed approximation to the future size and characteristics of the population of an area. Some projections are intended by the analyst to represent merely the consequences for population size, and characteristics of the application of a set of demographic or mathematical assumptions to population census figures or post census estimates. Many projections, however, are intended as forecasts or can reasonably be interpreted as forecasts-predictions of population numbers.

Population projections are essential tools in national and government planning, local community planning, and business planning. Population projection is needed by agencies and organizations engaged in private activities as well as public activities, and for small areas. Projection of the total population and its age-sex distribution underline all types of government, social, and business planning at every geographical levels (Siegel, 2002).

Table 4.5: Projected elderly population of Nepal, 2016-2031

SN	Aged	Years			
		2016	2021	2026	2031
1	Projected population aged 60+ years	2417508	2712736	3044017	3415755
2	Projected population aged 65+ years	1593395	1816641	2071166	2361352
3	Projected population aged 70+ years	958994	1090775	1240665	1411152
4	Projected population aged 75+ years	516176	594751	685288	789607

Source: Population Monograph of Nepal Vol. II (Social Demography) 2014.

Table 4.5 reveals that projected population aged 60 years or more reached 24.17 thousand in 2016 and it will increase to 27.12 thousand in 2021, 30.44 thousand in 2026 and 34.15 thousand in 2031. This table also exhibits that projected population aged 65 years or more increased 15.93 thousand in 2016 and it will reach to 18.16 thousand in 2021, 20.71 thousand in 2026 and 23.61 thousand 2031. Similarly, projected population aged 70 years or more reached 9.58 in 2016 and it will increase to 10.90 in 2021, 12.40 thousand in 2026 and 14.11 thousands in 2031. This table also shows that projected population aged 75 years or more elderly population reached 5.16 thousand in 2016 and it will reach to 5.94 thousand in 2021, 6.85 thousand in 2026 and 7.89 thousand in 2031 of Nepal. It may be due to the decline in mortality and improvement in health facilities and increasing in life expectancy at birth.

4.6 Old aged allowances

The Government of Nepal has introduced the universal old aged allowances program since 1994/95. It is a non-contributing social assistance to the all Nepali elderly citizens. In the context of Nepal, old aged allowances at starting point was Rs. 100 and increased to Rs. 500, Rs. 1000, 1500 and Rs. 2000 and now Rs. 3000 to all elderly citizens, with 70 years or more.

Table 4.6: Distribution of old aged allowances in Nepal, 2070/071 to 2074/075

Years	2070/071	2071/072	2072/073	2073/074	2074/075*
Total number of elderly citizens who received allowances	9,29,180	9,51,419	10,49,819	10,83,243	12,31,586

*Source: Economic Survey, 2075/76. *First eight months.*

Table 4.6 exhibits that distribution of old age allowances by the Government of Nepal from 2070/071 to 2074/075 Fiscal Year (FY). This table also shows that 9,29,180 elderly citizens were reported to receive old age allowances in 2070/071 FY; 9,51,419 elderly citizens received in 2071/072 FY; 10,49,819 in 2072/073; 10,83,243 in 2073/074 and it increased to 12,31,586 elderly persons received old aged allowances in 2074/075. Though the Government of Nepal's economic burden has been sharply increasing to bear social security but the distributed old aged allowances is not sufficient amount for the elderly citizen in Nepal.

5. Conclusion

The research attempts to analyze the status of elderly population in Nepal. Ageing has always been global issue and Nepal has also taken this issue as one of the priorities of the government. The observation reveals that elderly citizens are suffering from different problems i.e. social, economic, psychological and emotional. The elderly people have been continuously rising both in absolute number and as a proportion of total population. The median age of elderly population is found 22.26 years and index of ageing is 23.30 percent in Nepal. It can be concluded that the Nepalese population is moving slightly from younger population to elder due to the gradual increment of life expectancy at birth and decline in mortality. People aged 60 and older make up 8.1 percent of the total population of Nepal. The observation shows that projected population aged 60 years or more reached 24.17 thousand in 2016 and it will reach to 34.15 thousand in 2031 if the growth rate of elderly population remains same up to that period.

The Government of Nepal has been providing financial assistance to senior citizens since 1994/1995. The starting was nominal allowances i.e. Rs. 100 and recently it has been increased to Rs. 3000. In the current FY, 2017/18, monthly allowances have been distributed to elderly citizens' total of Rs.12.31 thousands. The economic burden to the government has been slightly increasing to bear social security but the distributed old aged allowances are not sufficient amount for the elderly citizen in Nepal. Though, the government facilities i.e. old aged allowances, establishment of ageing care centers, senior citizen welfare fund, mobilizations of INGOs, NGOs and civil societies for welfare of senior citizens and strong commitments of plan on ageing and other international declarations; many elderly citizens are still not receiving well rearing and caring, social security and health services in Nepali societies due to their improper management, poverty, illiteracy, lack of proper data and so on. The results also highlights the position of elderly citizens are not satisfactory in our societies.

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