

AGEWELL STUDY

**GENDER DISCRIMINATION  
AMONG OLDER WOMEN IN INDIA  
FEBRUARY 2015**

**SPECIAL REPORT ON  
DELHI**



**Agewell**

**Agewell Foundation**  
*(In Special Consultative Status with  
ECOSOC at United Nations since 2011)*

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**GENDER DISCRIMINATION  
AMONG OLDER WOMEN IN INDIA  
- A study by Agewell Foundation**

**DATA SEPARATELY ANALYZED FOR  
DELHI**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In many Indian societies women have been lagging behind in almost all walks of life. Due to limited social interaction women in Delhi are mostly unaware about their rights and powers. Barring exceptions they have never been independent socially, financially, physically or psychologically. They are always dependent on male members of the family for their basic needs, even for day-to-day requirements.

Older women have more critical problems than older men. Due to social and traditional family structure they are forced to live with many limitations. Hence they find themselves marginalized and isolated all the time. As women live longer than men, a larger number of older women have to live a life of a widow in their silver years. Social marginalization, loneliness, isolation and even negligence in old age lead to basic violation of their human rights too.

Ironically, in Delhi due to lack of awareness older women are not aware of their basic rights and legal powers. Since most of them remain within four-walls of their homes throughout their life, they remain vulnerable. Elderly women face not only age discrimination but also gender discrimination in Old Age.

As per 2011 Census there were approx. **6.5 Lakh elderly women in Delhi** (approx. 51% of total elderly population of Delhi).

### **Gender Discrimination in Old Age**

Gender inequality is prevalent in India for centuries, which is deep-rooted in almost all Indian communities and **Delhi** is no exception. Health, education, economic and political inequalities between men and women in Delhi is more common. Gender discrimination deprives women from availing benefits of development even in old age and marginalizes them from the mainstream.



## OVERVIEW

Agewell Research & Advocacy Centre has recently carried out a nationwide survey to study the issues related to gender discrimination in old age in India. Being a national capital territory, where people from all states & union territories live together, data collected from Delhi was also analyzed separately. Under the survey, it was attempted to identify responsible factors for widespread gender discrimination among older women in **Delhi**.

In view of lack of core policies on protection of rights of elderly women and fast increasing population of elderly women, study was also focused to suggest or recommend some specific points to policy makers, planners and decision makers so that rights of elderly women could be respected at all levels. Accordingly standard social, legal, policy framework could be developed to protect their rights and interests.

### Sample Size and Design

For the survey a **representative sample of 5000 older persons** (2750 from slums/unauthorized colonies areas and 2250 from planned colonies) were interviewed spread across **11 districts of Delhi**. Volunteers' network spread across Delhi worked as interviewers for the survey. The interviews were conducted during the months of December 2014 and January 2015.

Sl. No.	District	Nos. of Respondents
1	New Delhi	500
2	North Delhi	500
3	North West Delhi	400
4	West Delhi	500
5	South West Delhi	400
6	South Delhi	400
7	South East Delhi	500
8	Central Delhi	400
9	North East Delhi	500
10	Shahdra	400
11	East Delhi	500
	<b>Total</b>	<b>5000</b>

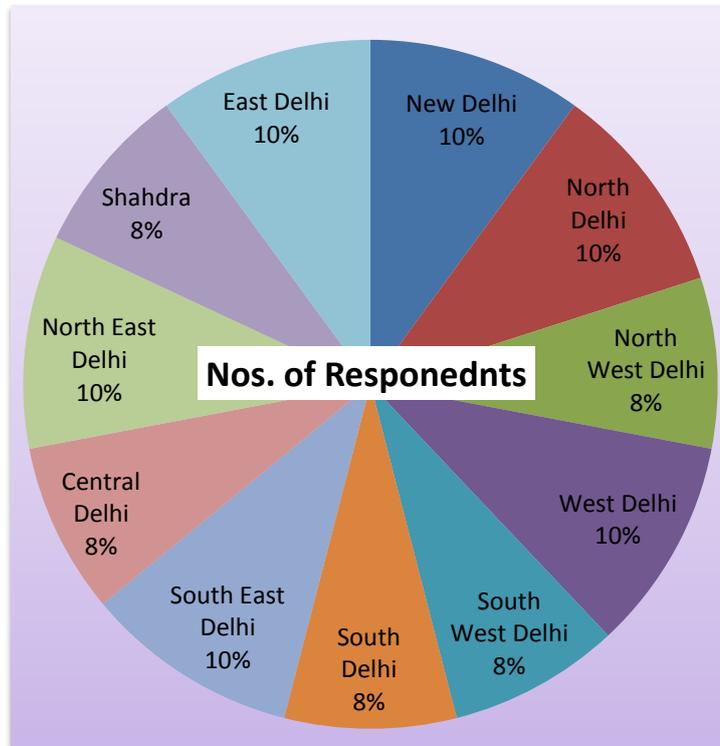
**Sample Units**

The sample units were selected based on random sampling but care was taken to incorporate the representative views from 11 districts of Delhi.

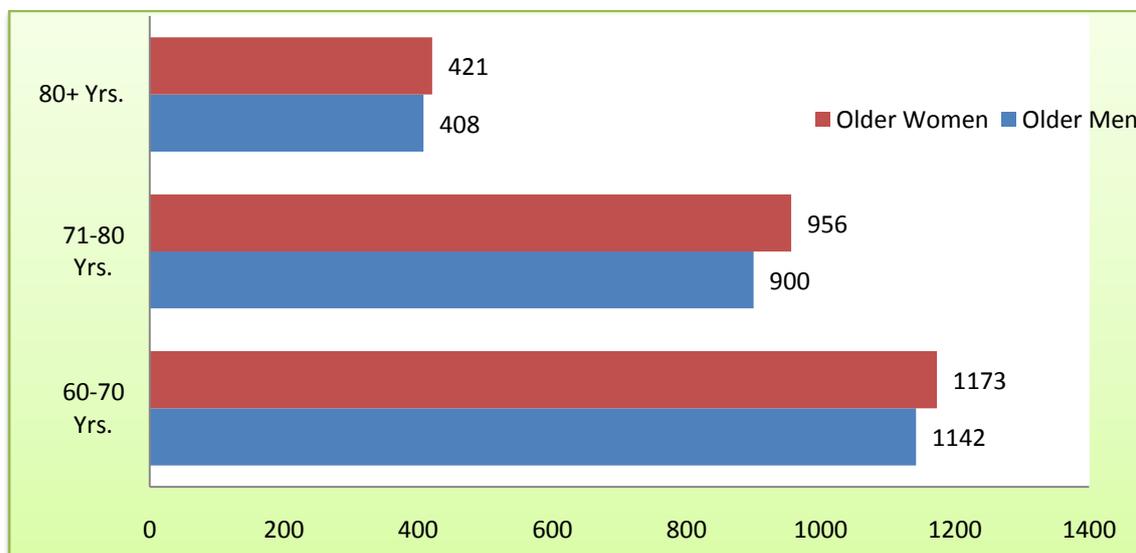
**Age-group & gender wise classification of respondents**

Since older persons have comparatively longer life span, under the survey older people were divided in three simple age-groups so that more realistic findings could be achieved out of the responses.

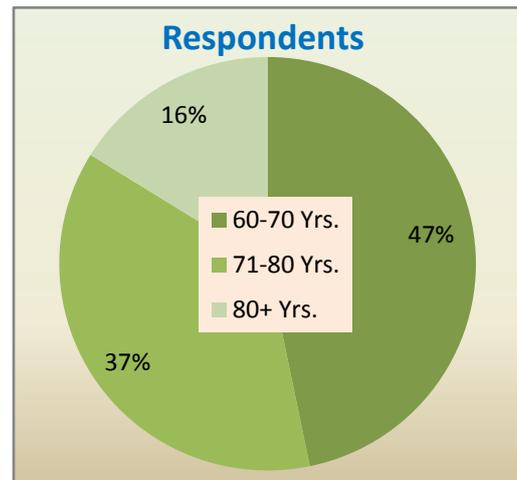
Respondents were further categorized in age & gender groups of understand the changing trends of old age better.



Categories	60-70 Years	71-80 Years	81+ Years	Total
Older Men	1142	900	408	2450
Older Women	1173	956	421	2550
<b>Total</b>	<b>2315</b>	<b>1856</b>	<b>829</b>	<b>5000</b>



- Approximately half of representative sample size (Approx. 47%) comprises of young older persons i.e. older persons in the age group of 60-70 years of age.
- In the age groups of 71-80 and 80+, 37% and 16% elderly respondents were contacted during the survey respectively.



### Sample Respondents

Delhi is second largest city of India, which is called as mini India because people from almost all states live here. Older persons (men & women both) lead a diverse lifestyle in city. Traditionally, most elderly women are still constrained within the rigidly controlled but regionally diverse family environment.

With objective to assess the status of older persons living in varied social set ups the populace of 60+ years was randomly selected as per the 4 groups as under;

- Elderly men living in slums/unauthorized colonies
- Elderly women living in slums/unauthorized colonies
- Elderly men living in planned colonies
- Elderly women in planned colonies

Categories	Old Men	Old women	Total
Unplanned	1350	1400	2750
Planned	1100	1150	2250
<b>Total</b>	<b>2450</b>	<b>2550</b>	<b>5000</b>

In each group the target was to include every section of the society, specifically

- Retired older persons
- Non-pensioners/self-employed
- Labourers
- Housewives
- Widows
- Professionals/ businessmen
- Literate / Illiterate
- Financially secure
- BPL (below poverty line) Family

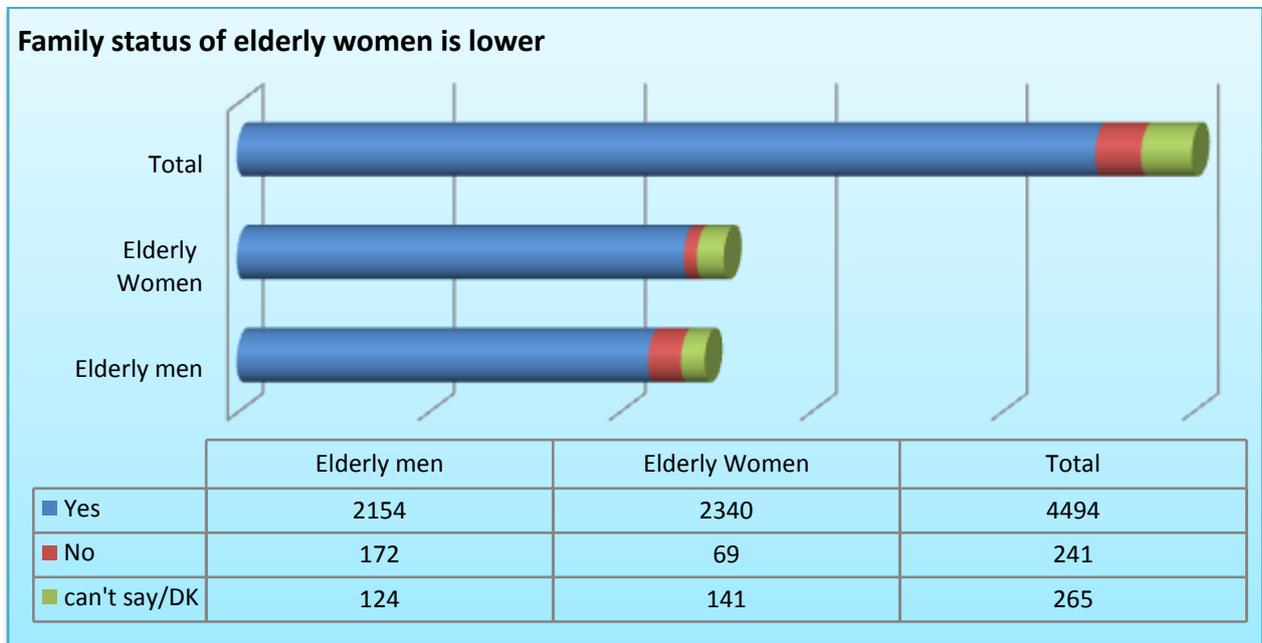


**MAJOR FINDINGS**

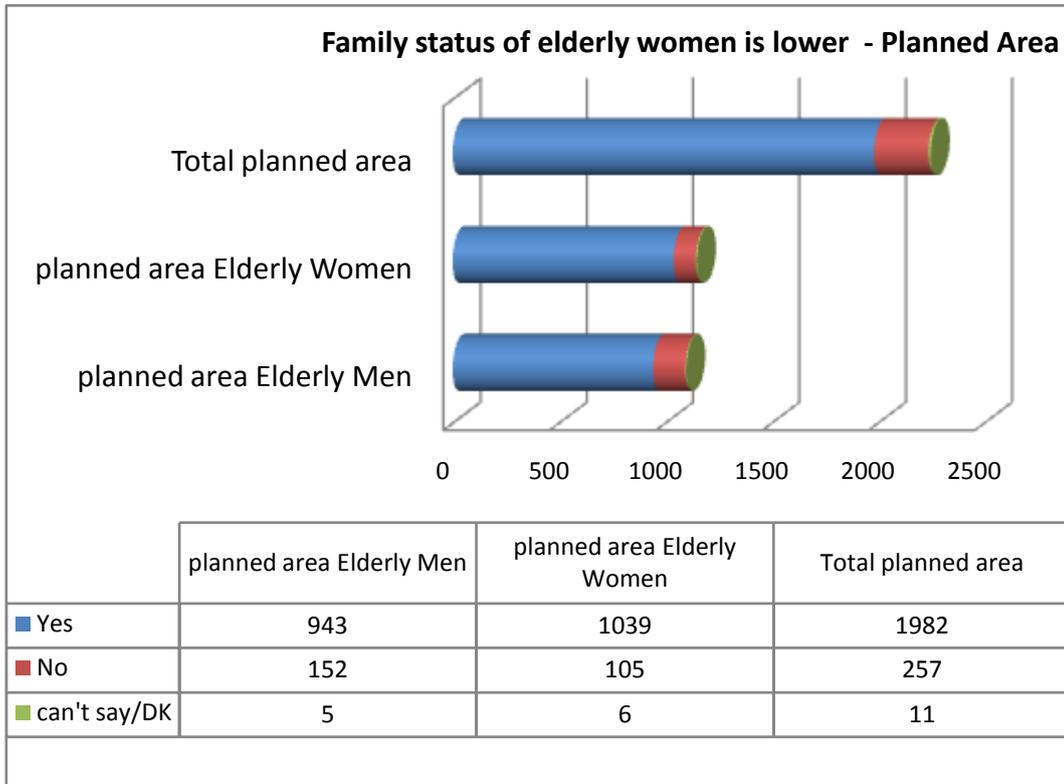
**SOCIAL**

**Family status of elderly women**

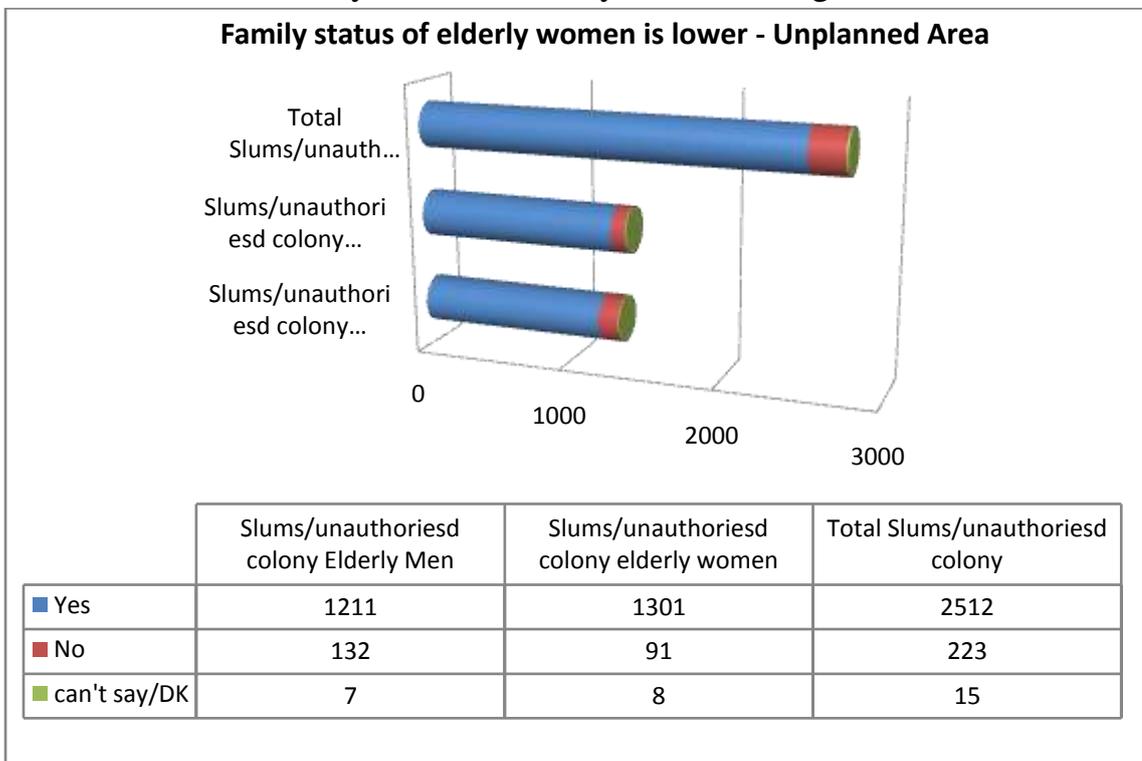
- As per 89.38% elderly respondents (4494 respondents out of 5000) said that status of elderly women within their families is lower than male counterparts because of their gender.



- Elderly women more strongly opined that their status is lower. 90.75% elderly women accepted that they have lower family status, whereas 87.95% elderly men were found with them to be in agreement.
- In slums/unauthorized colonies 91.64 % elderly respondents and in planned areas 86.6% respondents said that elderly women have lower family status.
- Overall, only 5.24% elderly respondents (261 out of 5000 respondents) opined that family status of elderly women is not lower within their family set up.



- 8.55% elderly from planned colonies and 2.53% elderly living in unplanned colonies said that family status of elderly women is higher



### Why gender discrimination?

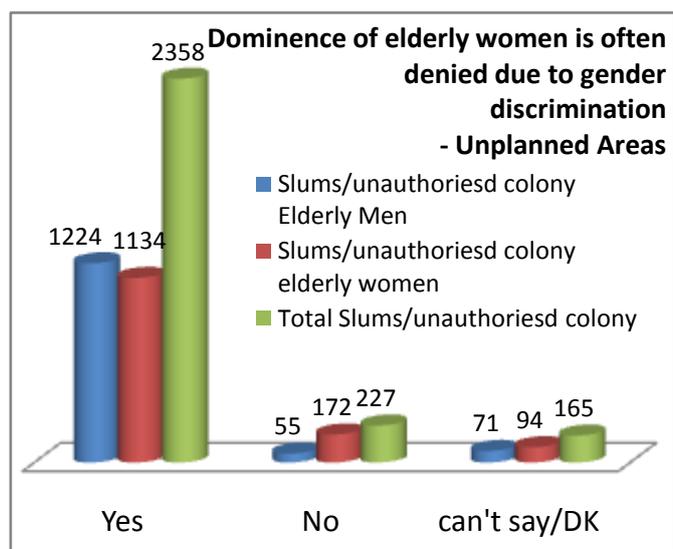
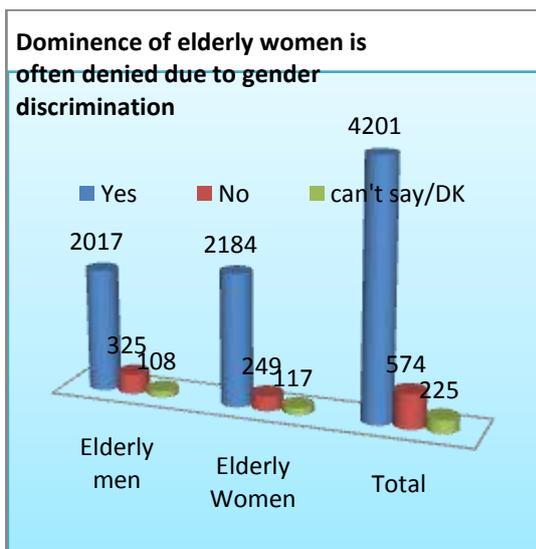
- They don't earn
- They are considered vulnerable.
- They may be appreciated for within the family issues but anything to do with outside world they seem to have no say.

- *Elderly women are considered as second class family members. In most families their role is limited to housekeeping and care giving.*
- *Family status of elderly women is slightly higher in planned areas, because of increased awareness, better financial and health status, etc.*



### Dominance of elderly women often denied due to gender discrimination

- 84.07% elderly respondents (4201 respondents out of 5000 respondents) acknowledged that dominance of elderly women is often denied in families due to gender discrimination.



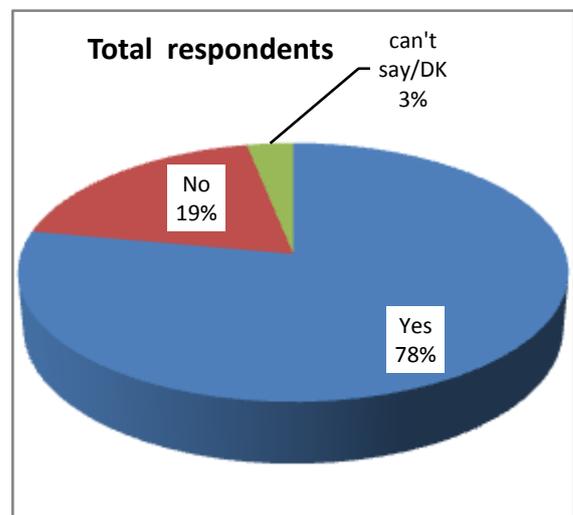
- 85.68% elderly women and 82.4% elderly men accepted that dominance of elderly women is restricted due to gender discrimination.
- 85.83% elderly living in unplanned colonies said that they think elderly women are denied dominance in their families. In planned colonies 81.9% respondents were found to be in agreement with this view.
- Only 11.46% respondents (8.2% unplanned colonies and 15.5% planned) were of the view that gender discrimination does not matter, when dominance in family is adjudged.



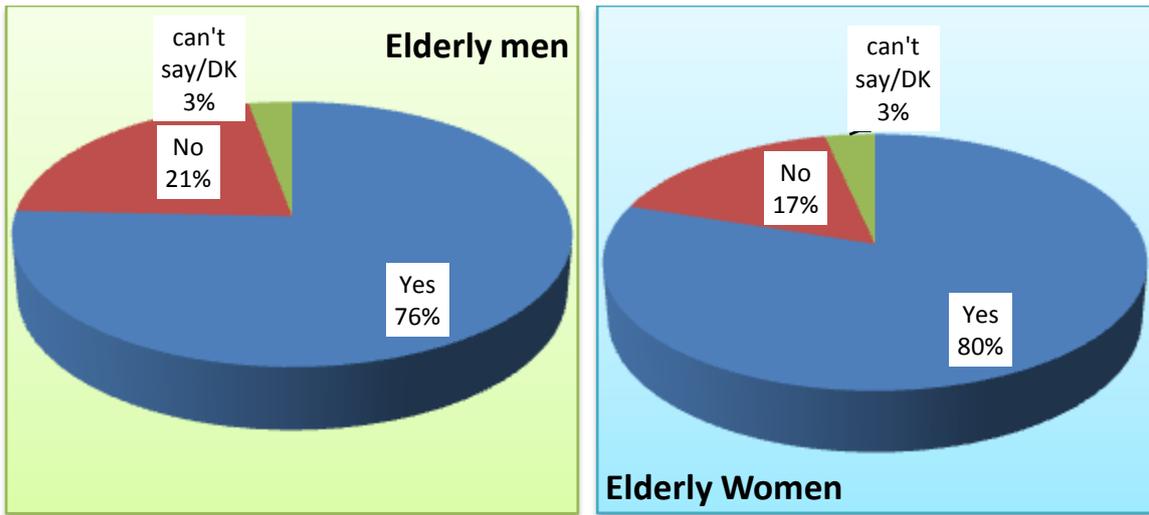
*Even in natural cases like death of senior male member, senior most women are commonly denied supremacy in their respective families.*

### Social life of elderly women is restricted due to gender discrimination

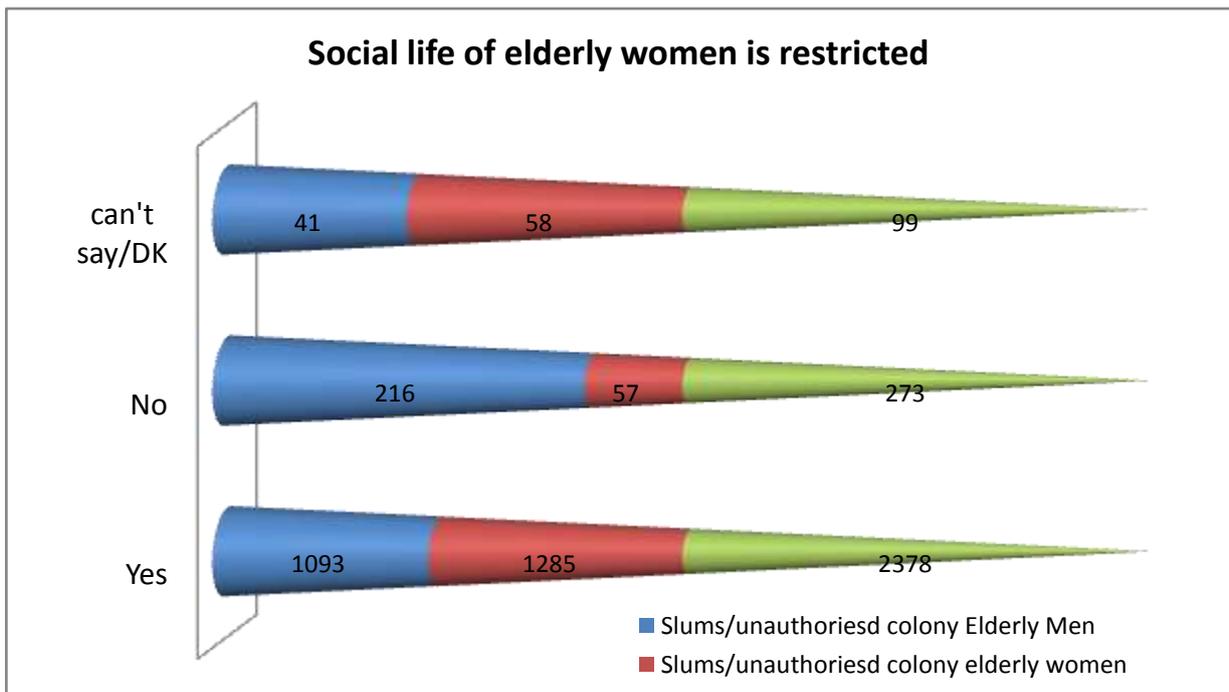
- 77.36% elderly respondents (86.7% elderly living in unplanned colonies & 65.9% elderly from planned colonies) opined that social life of elderly women is restricted due to gender discrimination. Out of 5000 elderly respondents interacted during the survey, 3868 respondents opined this.



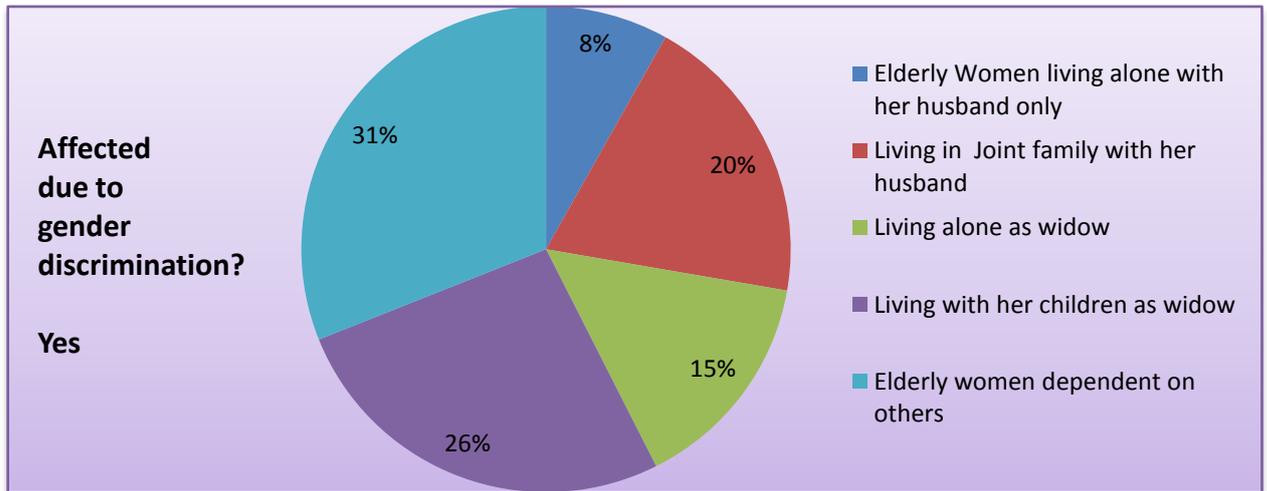
- When collected data was further analyzed, it was found that 75.68% elderly men and 78.98% agree that social life of elderly women is restricted comparatively to elderly men.
- In planned colonies every 3<sup>rd</sup> respondent and in slums/unauthorized colonies every 10<sup>th</sup> respondent were of the view that there is no restrictions on social life of older women in Delhi.



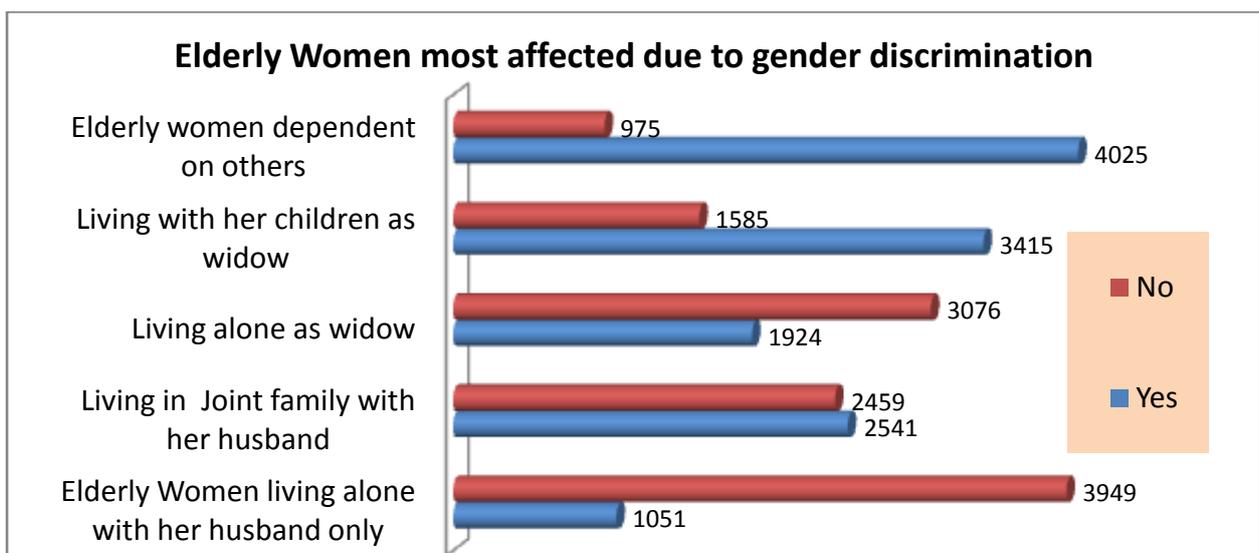
- Only 1/5<sup>th</sup> respondents claimed that elderly women are free to lead their social life and their family members do not put restrictions on them.
- Social life of older women is restricted to family relatives only.



- According to 268 elderly respondents living in unplanned colonies (out of total 2750 respondents) said, they don't agree that social life of elderly women is restricted. In planned colonies (707 respondents out of 2250 respondents) said, there are no restrictions on social life of elderly women.



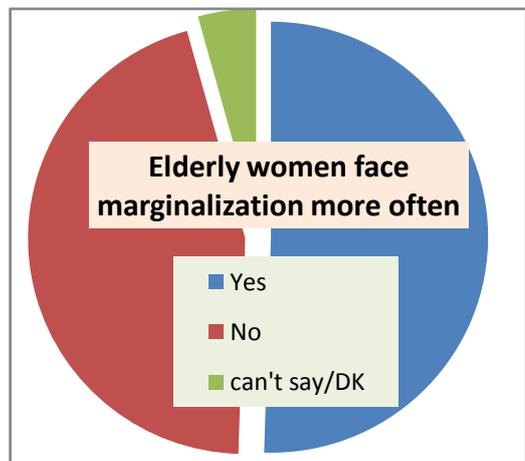
- When it was attempted to identify the most affected section of elderly women, it was found that as per 80.43% respondents (4025 respondents out of 5000 elderly) elderly women dependent on, other than their own family members, are living in worst conditions.
- 21.08% respondents reported that elderly women living alone with her husband are comparatively less affected due to gender discrimination.



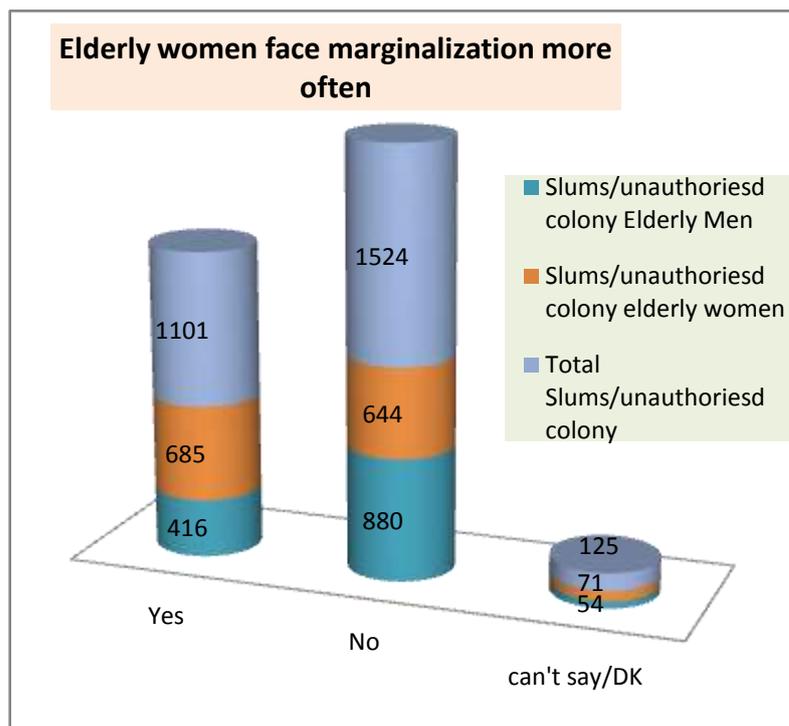
- When interviewers enquired about status of elderly woman living in joint family along with her husband, respondents were found divided in almost two equal parts. 50.84% respondents said that this section of elderly women is most affected due to gender discrimination and but rest of respondents did not agree with this fact.
- Elderly women living with their children as widow are the second worst affected section of elderly women as per the respondents. 68.31% respondents said that these are the worst affected section of elderly women.

**Marginalization/isolation due to gender discrimination**

- Every second respondent (50.59%) said that elderly women have to face marginalization / isolation due to gender discrimination, even in old age. 52.84% elderly men and 48.43% elderly women agreed that gender discrimination causes marginalization / isolation of elderly women.



- In slums/unauthorized colonies 40.08% respondents (415 elderly men and 644 elderly women) maintain that elderly women face marginalization in old age due to gender discrimination, whereas in planned colonies 63.43% elderly respondents (880 elderly men and 542 elderly women)



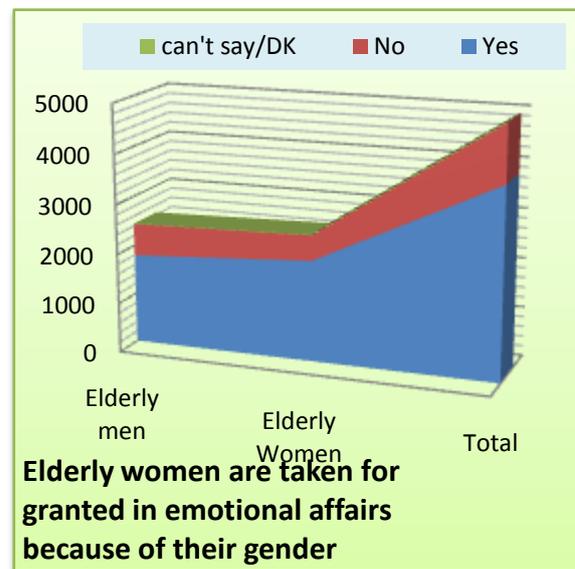
claimed the same.

- As per elderly respondents living in planned colonies, almost 1/3<sup>rd</sup> respondents did not agree with this and said that gender discrimination is not responsible for marginalization / isolation of elderly women.
- In slums/unauthorized colonies more than half of respondents (55.24%) also said that there is no link between marginalization of older women and gender discrimination.

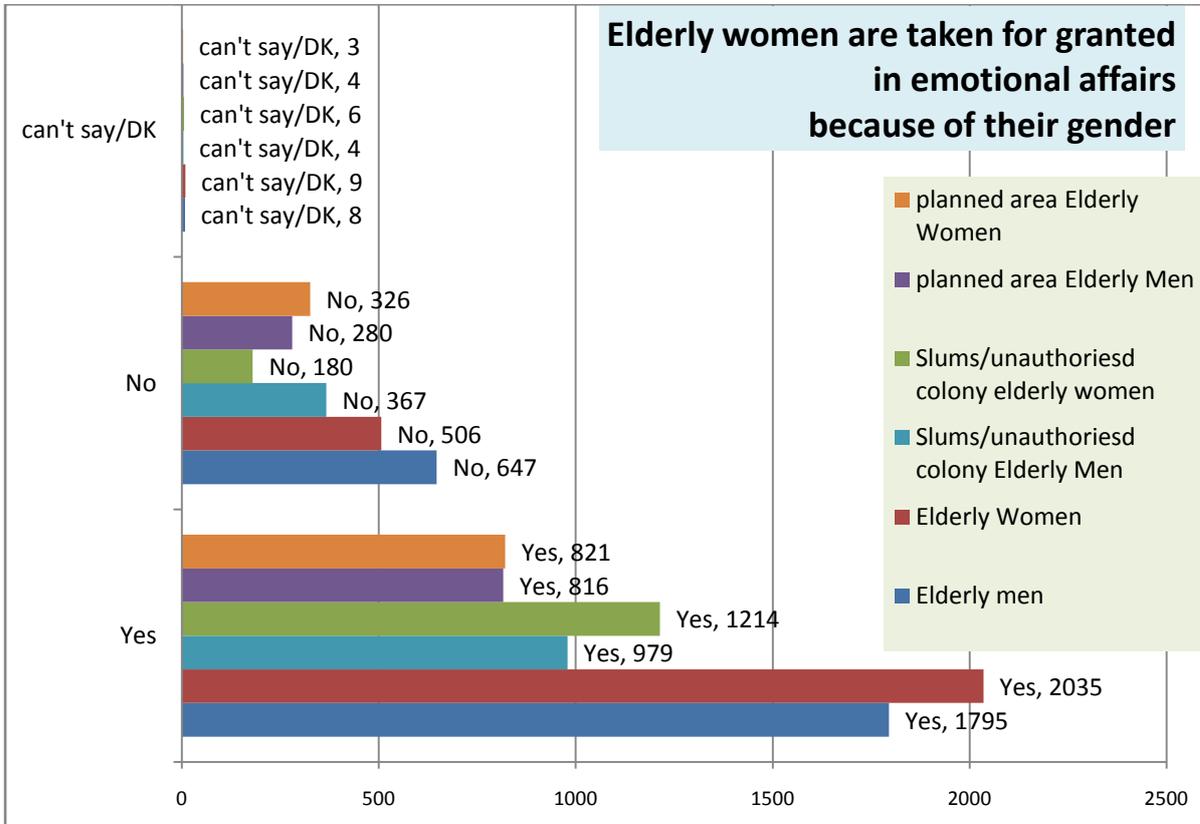


### Elderly women are taken for granted in emotional affairs because of their gender

- 76.6% elderly respondents (73.3% elderly men and 79.8% elderly women) said that elderly women are taken for granted in emotional matters just because of their gender.
- Only 19.67% respondents i.e. 983 out of 5000 respondents expressed that they did not agree with this.
- In slums/unauthorized colonies 79.77% respondents accepted that feelings and emotions of the elderly women are often ignored by the family members in general.
- In planned colonies 72.75% elderly



respondents said that people take elderly women's sentiments lightly and never take them seriously.



- Overall only 19.67% respondents (16.27% in slums/unauthorized colonies and 23.82% in planned colonies) opined that elderly women are not taken for granted in emotional matters at family as well as society level.

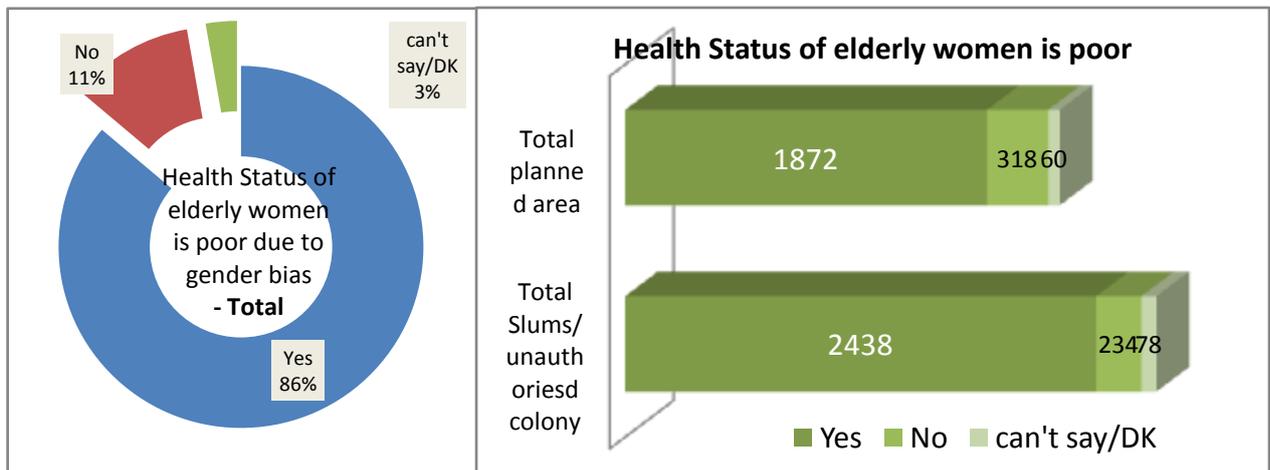
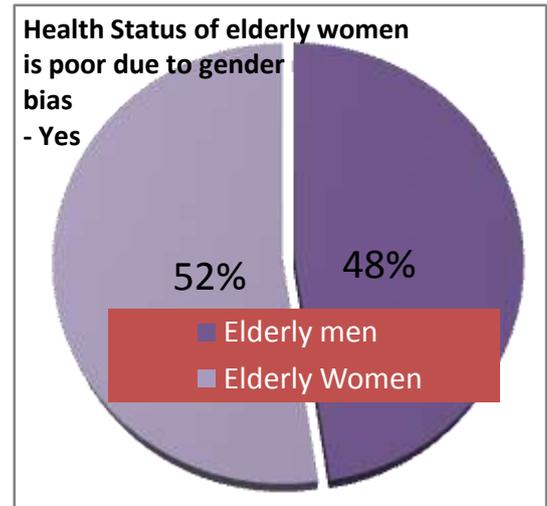
- *Elderly women have very limited role in decision making process at all levels-family, society and national.*
- *They are often exploited by others emotionally, socially, financially and even physically.*



## HEALTHCARE

### Health Status of elderly women is poor due to gender bias

- According to 86.13% elderly respondents, health status of elderly women is neglected due to gender bias. Only 11.12% elderly said that they did not agree with this fact as gender of elderly people is not related to their poor health conditions.
- Out of 5000 elderly respondents contacted during the survey, 4303 older persons including 2254 elderly women claimed that people don't care as much for them, properly as compared to male elderly in their families.
- Only 558 elderly respondents said that health status of older women is not poor just because of their gender.



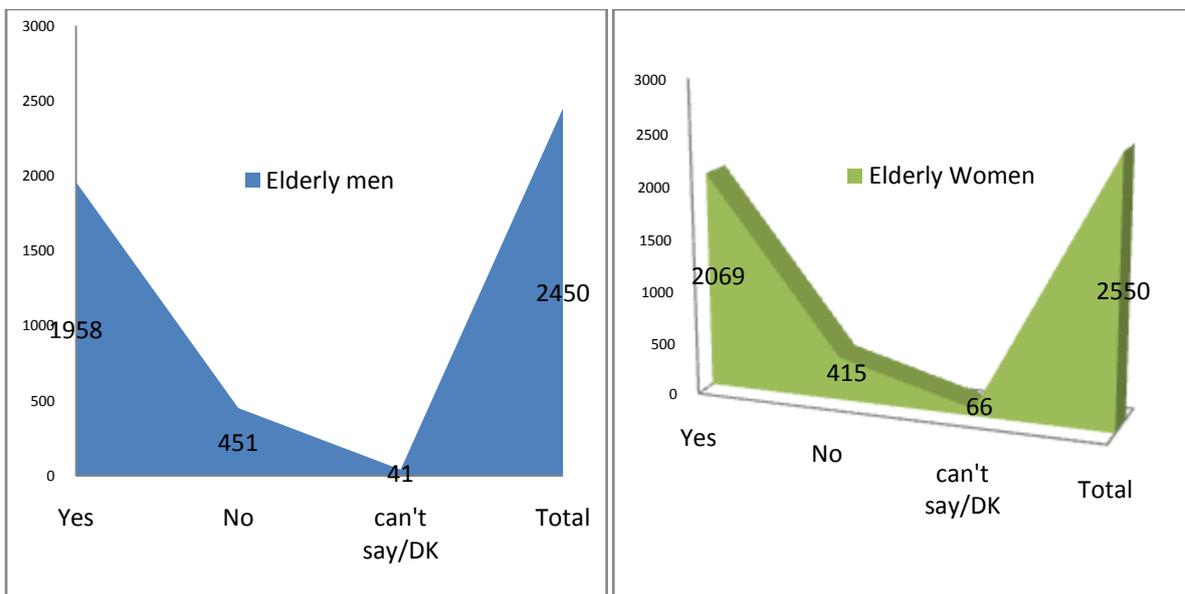
- In slums/unauthorized colonies 88% elderly respondents claimed that gender discrimination is also responsible for poor health condition of elderly women, whereas in planned colonies 83.84% elderly respondents said that elderly women do not get proper health care in comparison to their male counterparts.



- *Though elderly women live longer than their male counterparts, but overall healthcare needs and requirements are often ignored by their family members.*
- *Their general illnesses never attract attention of their family members.*

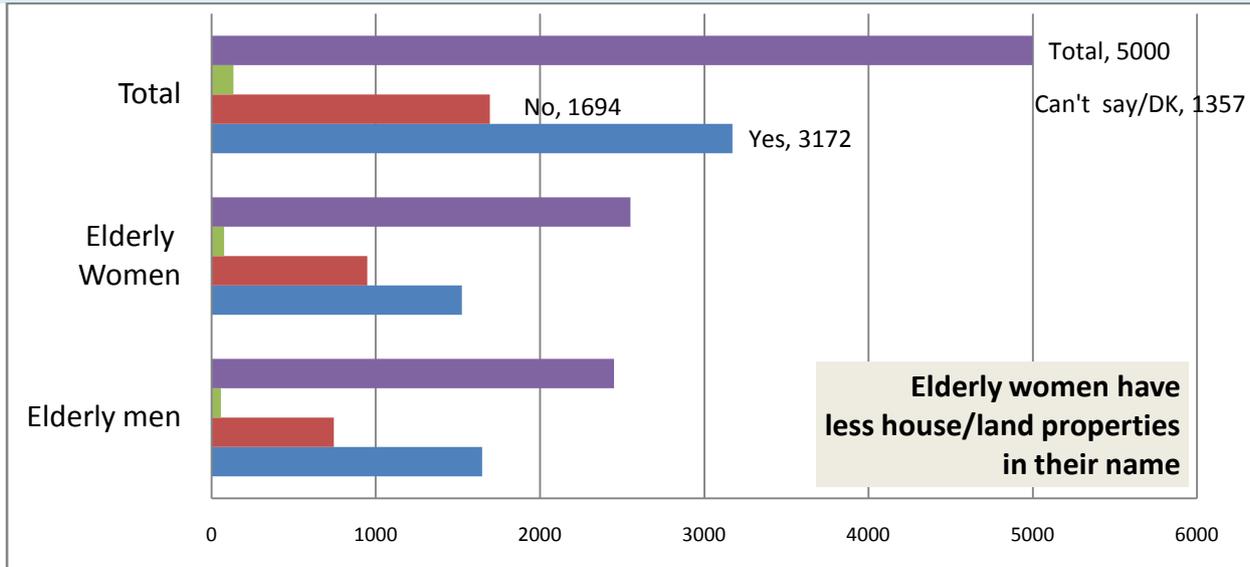
## FINANCIAL

- During the survey conducted by Agewell volunteers it was found that as per 80.49% elderly respondents' financial status of elderly women is weaker.
- Only 17.36% elderly said that elderly women are financially not weaker but there is no relation between gender discrimination and their poor financial status.

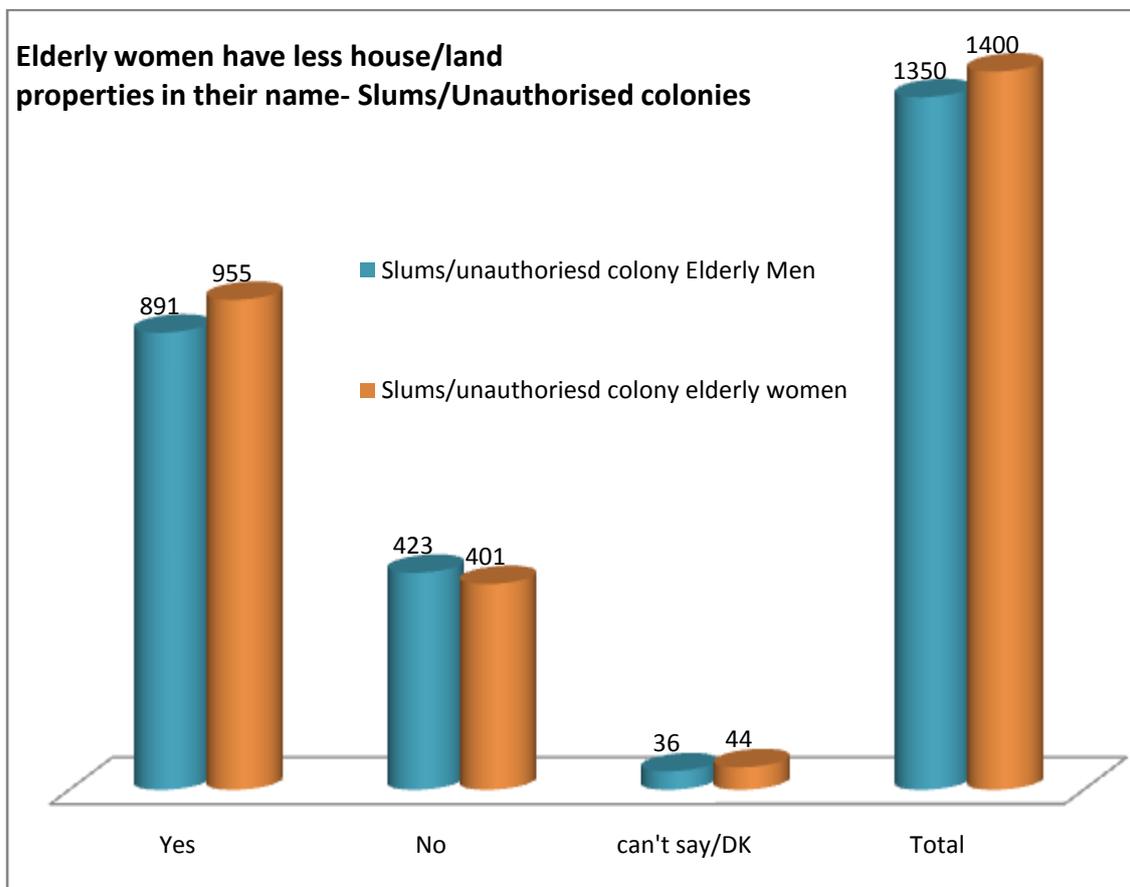


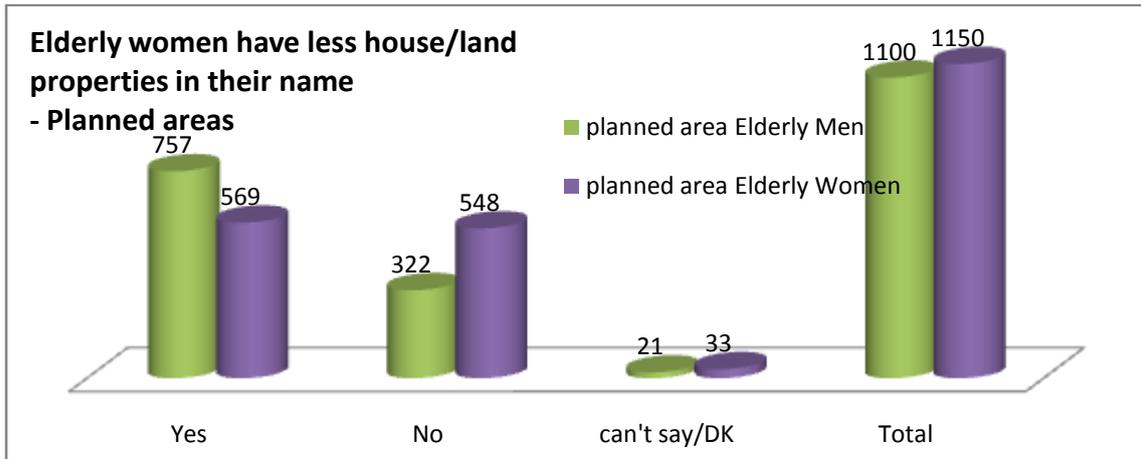
### *Is financial status of elderly women is weaker than elderly men?*

- When survey data was analyzed gender wise, it was found that 79.79% elderly men and 81.17% elderly women said that financial status of elderly women is weaker because they are women and have fewer opportunities to earn their own income.
- 63.44% respondents (67.27% elderly men and 59.77% elderly women) admitted that elderly women have no or less house/land properties in their name due to gender discrimination.
- Only 1/3<sup>rd</sup> respondents claimed that gender discrimination has no role in determination of net worth value of elderly women.

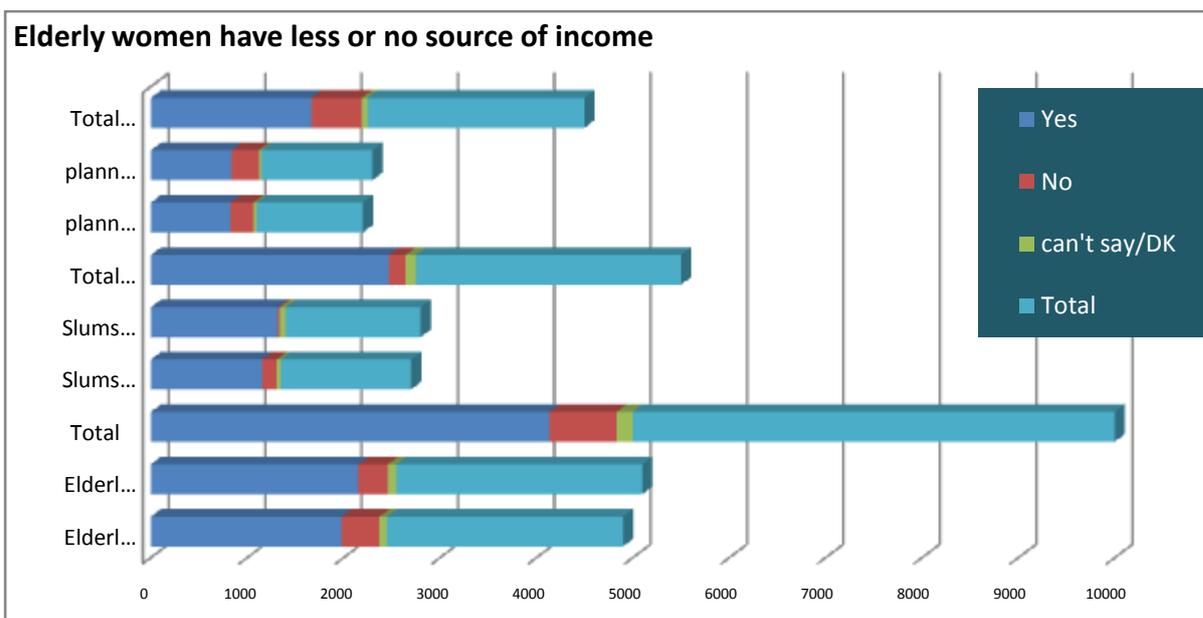


- In slums/unauthorized colonies 67.15% elderly respondents said that there are hardly any land/house properties in the name of elderly women, whereas in planned colonies. In planned colonies 58.92% elderly respondents claimed that elderly women have less house/land properties in their name due to gender discrimination.



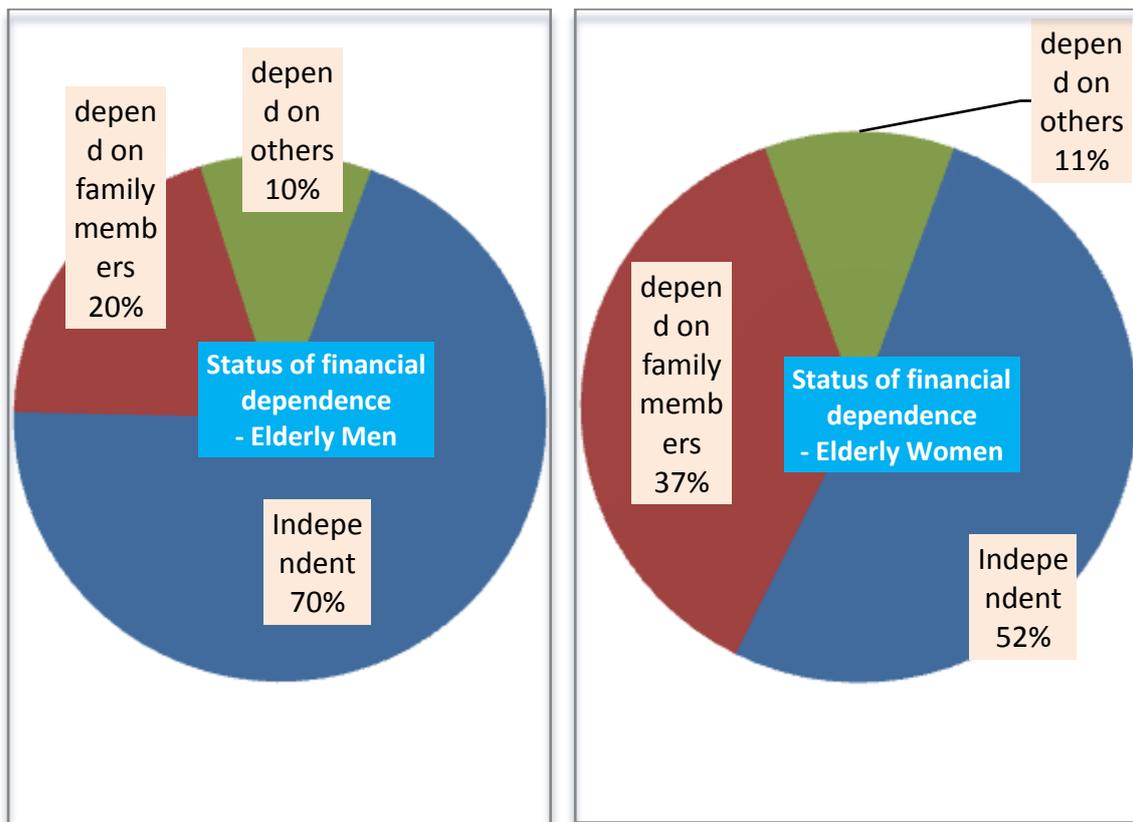


- 82.77% respondents (4133 out of total 5000 elderly respondents interviewed) admitted that elderly women have less or no source of income just because of their gender. According to them, elderly men always get advantage of their gender.
- Only 13.88% elderly respondents were found to disagree with the fact that elderly women have less or no source of income due to gender discrimination.
- 3.38% elderly respondents had no idea about the relation of gender discrimination and availability of source of income.
- In slums/unauthorized colonies, 91.27% older persons and in planned colonies 72.37% said that gender discrimination is also one of the major factor responsible for less source of income of elderly women.

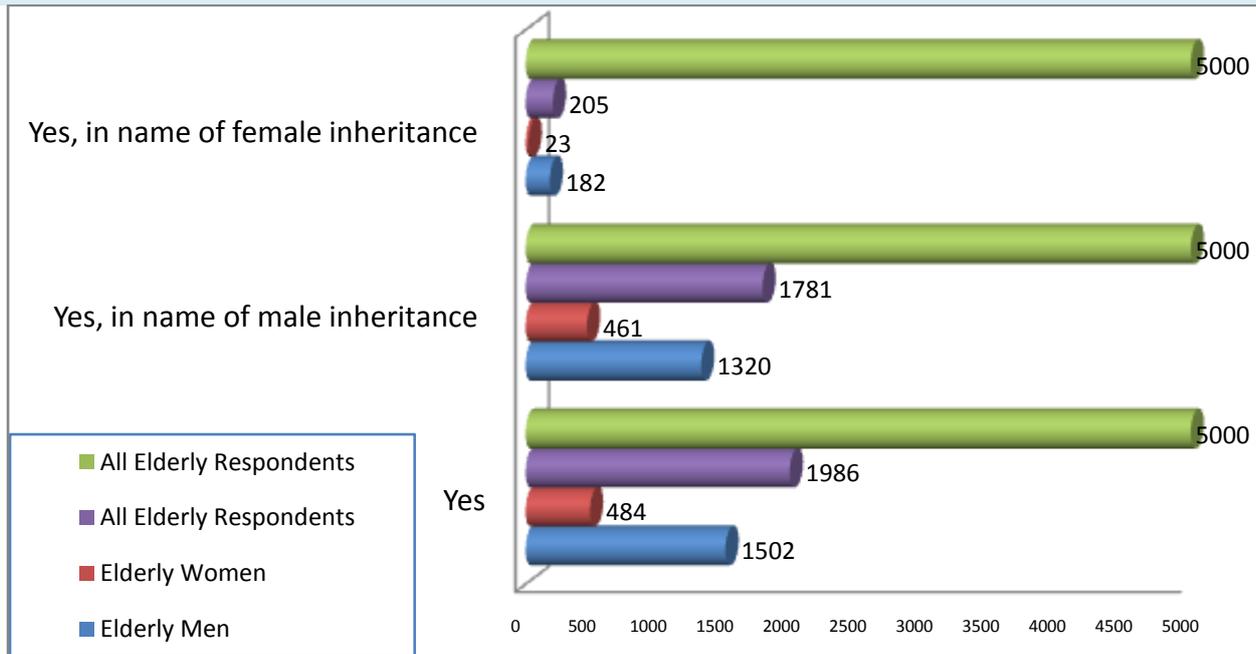


### Status of financial dependence

- When data collected by interviewers was studied further it was found that 70.24% elderly respondents were independent financially whereas only 51.45% elderly women were found financially independent.



- 19.69% elderly men found to be dependent on their family members in old age, whereas 37.05% elderly women said that they are dependent on their family members.
- When elderly respondents were asked whether they have transferred their land/house property through WILL or any other medium, 39.72% elderly respondents said that Yes, they had transferred their properties to their legal successor or others legally.
- Out of them 93.55% elderly claimed that they had transferred their land and properties in the name of male heir (son, grandson, son-in-law, nephew, etc.). Only 6.45% claimed that they transferred their properties in the name of their female heir.

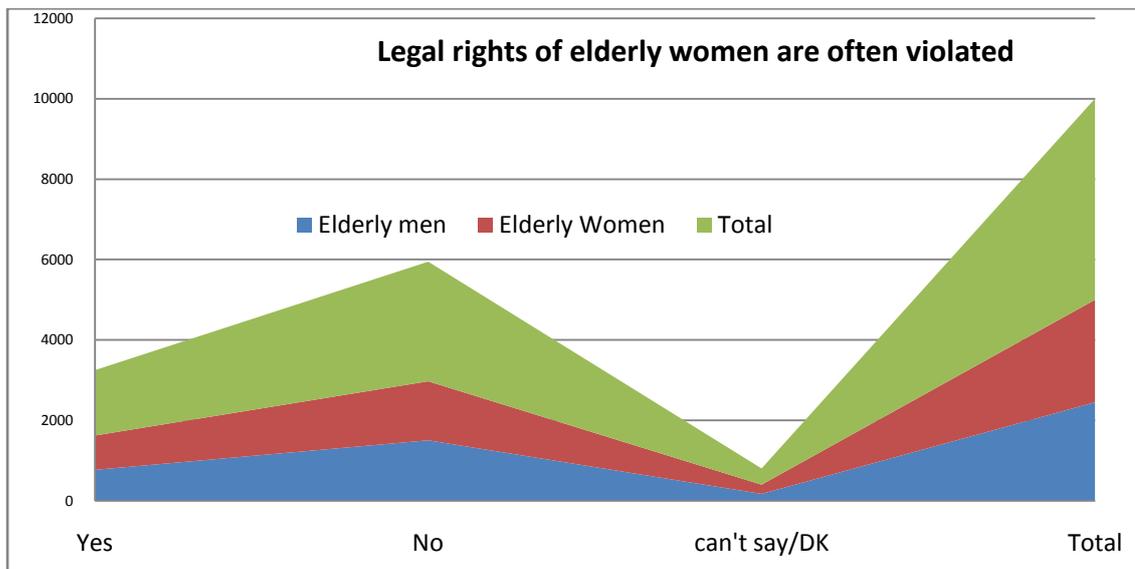


- *In most of the families it is believed that elderly women have nothing to do with financial matters. Reasons – they are illiterate/uneducated; they have no knowledge and experience of finance, banks, govt. schemes and other financial instruments.*
- *In most cases, they are treated as rubber stamp by their respective family members*



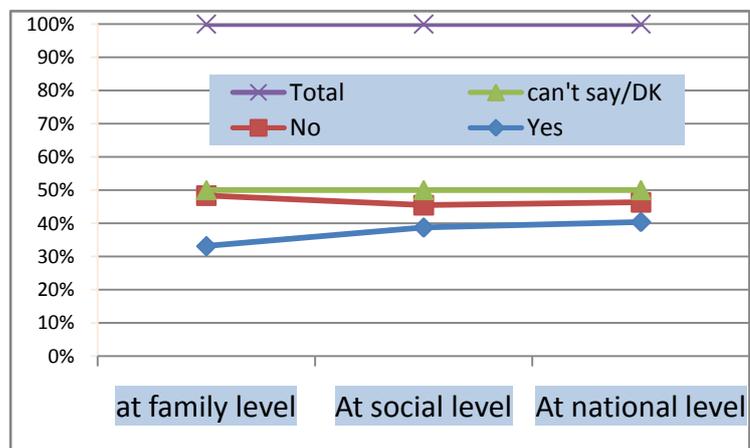
## LEGAL

- 32.53% respondents (27.73% elderly living in unplanned colonies and 38.4% elderly from planned colonies) reportedly said that legal rights of elderly women are often violated in comparison of legal rights of elderly men.



- Out of 5000 respondents, 1624 elderly respondents claimed that legal rights of elderly women are not respected just because of their gender.
- As per the survey data analysis, in planned colonies violation of legal rights of elderly women is more common, where 38.4% elderly respondents expressed the same view. In slums/unauthorized colonies almost 1/4<sup>th</sup> elderly respondents said that legal rights of elderly women are violated more often because of their gender.

- Study findings suggest that elderly women are ignored in decision making process to a large extent. According to 66.25% elderly



respondents, they are ignored in decision making process at family level.

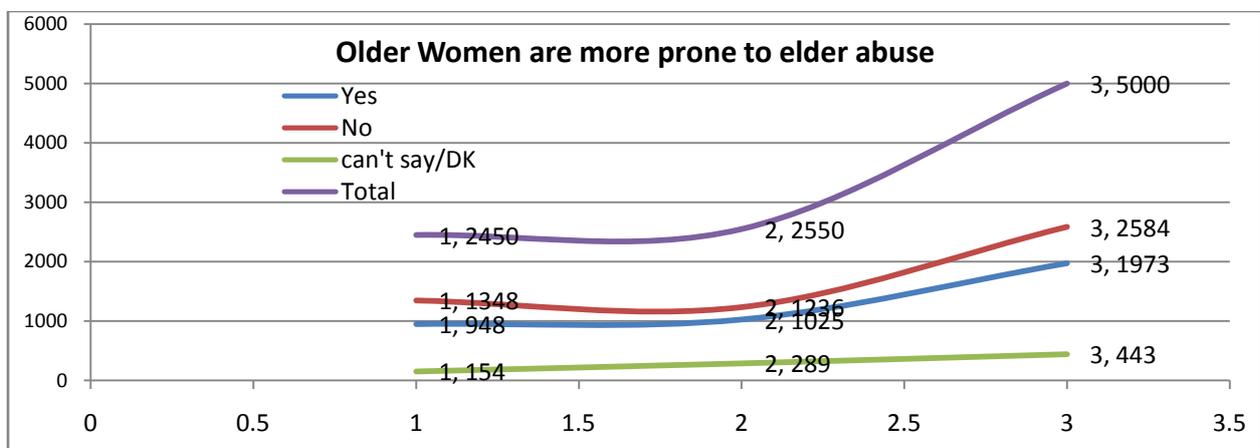
- According to 77.48% respondents (3870 out of 5000 respondents) elderly women are ignored in decision making process at society level. 80.82% elderly respondents (4042 out of 5000 respondents) said that elderly women are ignored at national level.



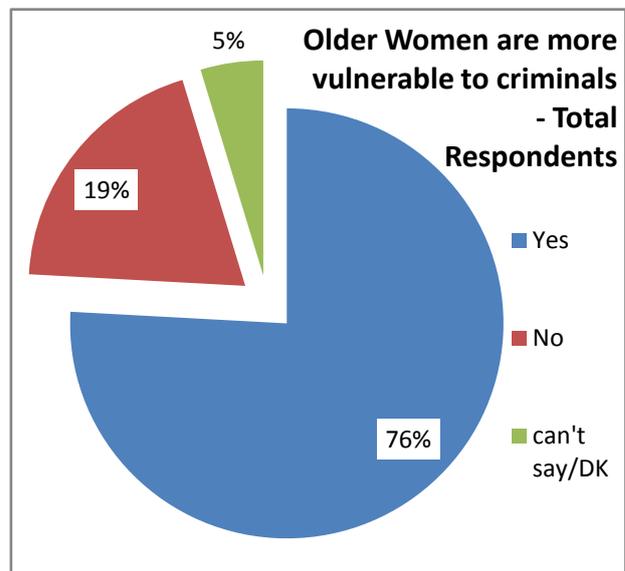
- *Elderly women have virtually no or minimal knowledge of their legal status, provisions & laws for their protection and overall security of elderly women.*
- *They always find themselves in no position to exercise their legal rights primarily because of their circumstances.*

## HUMAN RIGHTS

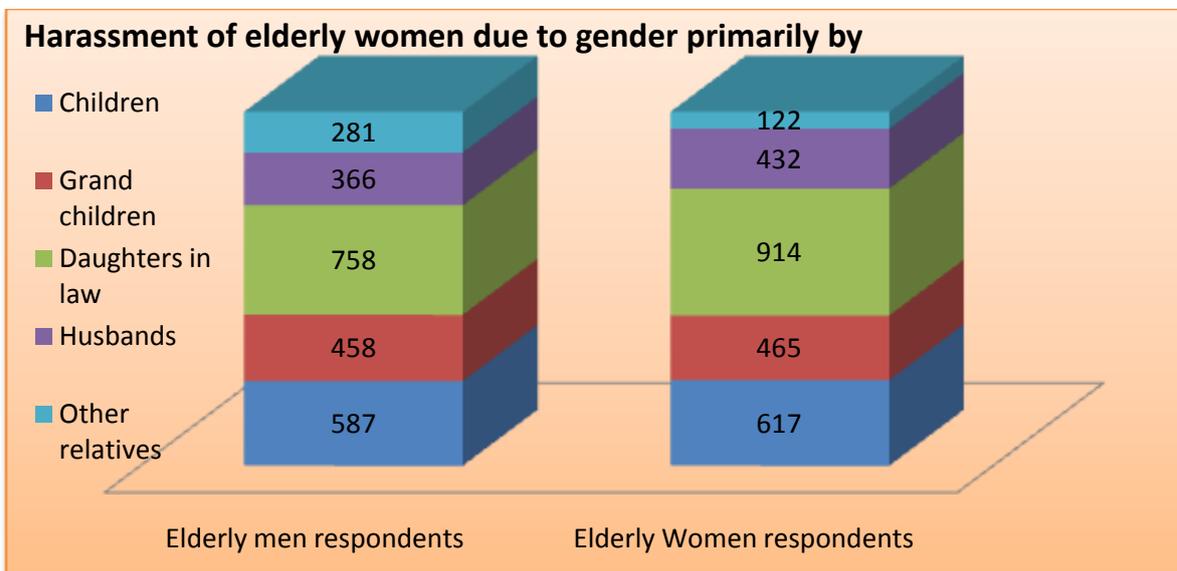
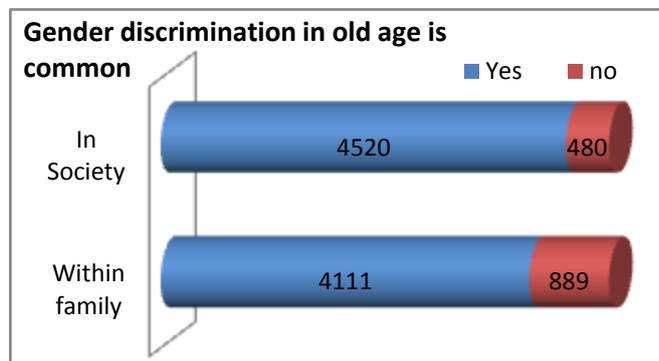
- 39.35% respondents (Out of 5000 elderly respondents 1963 older persons) said that older women are more prone to elder abuse in comparison to older men.
- Out of 2450 elderly men 9548 respondents and out of 2550 elderly women respondents 1015 respondents said that human rights of elderly women are violated more in comparison to human rights of older men.



- 44.74% and 34.93% respondents from planned and slums/unauthorized colonies respectively said that so far as protection of human rights are concerned elderly women always remain at the receiving end.
- 75.93 % elderly respondents (65.74% in slums/unauthorized colonies and 88.38% in planned colonies) said that older women are more vulnerable to criminals in comparison to elderly men.
- 19.44% respondents said that older women and older men are similarly vulnerable to criminals. As per their opinion, gender discrimination doesn't matter most in old age.



- As per 82.02% respondents' gender discrimination in old age within families is common. 90.24% older respondents said that gender discrimination in old age in society is also common.
- When an attempt was made to determine the status of gender based harassment, it was found that almost 1/4<sup>th</sup> respondents hold children of elderly women responsible for harassment as 24.07% respondents claimed that elderly women are being harassed due to gender.
- 33.21% respondents said that elderly women are primarily harassed by their daughters-in-law whereas 18.49% said that grand-children harass their elderly female family members.
- 15.98% respondents reportedly claim that elderly women are being harassed by their own husbands mostly.
- 8.25% respondents said that elderly women are harassed by other relatives.



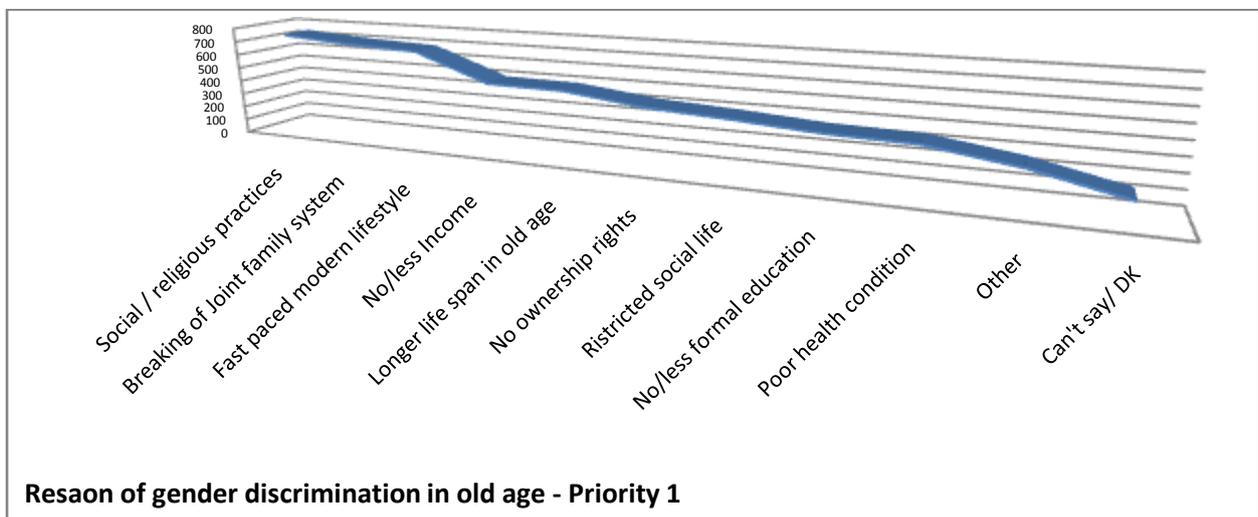
- In both, unplanned colonies and planned colonies daughters-in-law are main source of harassment of elderly women. But in planned colonies percentage of cases of harassment by daughters-in-law is higher (35.57%) in comparison to slums/unauthorized colonies (31.03%).



- Elder abuse is often termed as the ‘Curse of Old Age’.
- There is a rising trend of violation of human rights of elderly women by their own family members because most of them are confined to live within four walls of their home.
- Due to their physical, psychological, financial and social vulnerability, they become soft targets for wrongdoers.

## Factors responsible for gender discrimination in old age

- Most respondents (14.8%) said social/religious practices are responsible for incidences of gender discrimination in old age. Out of 5000 respondents, 740 respondents opined that our social and religious framework discourages gender equality and it continues in old age too.
- Breaking of Joint family system and popularity of nuclear families was also adjudged as most common factor responsible for gender discrimination in old age. 704 elderly respondents marked this as no. 1 factor.

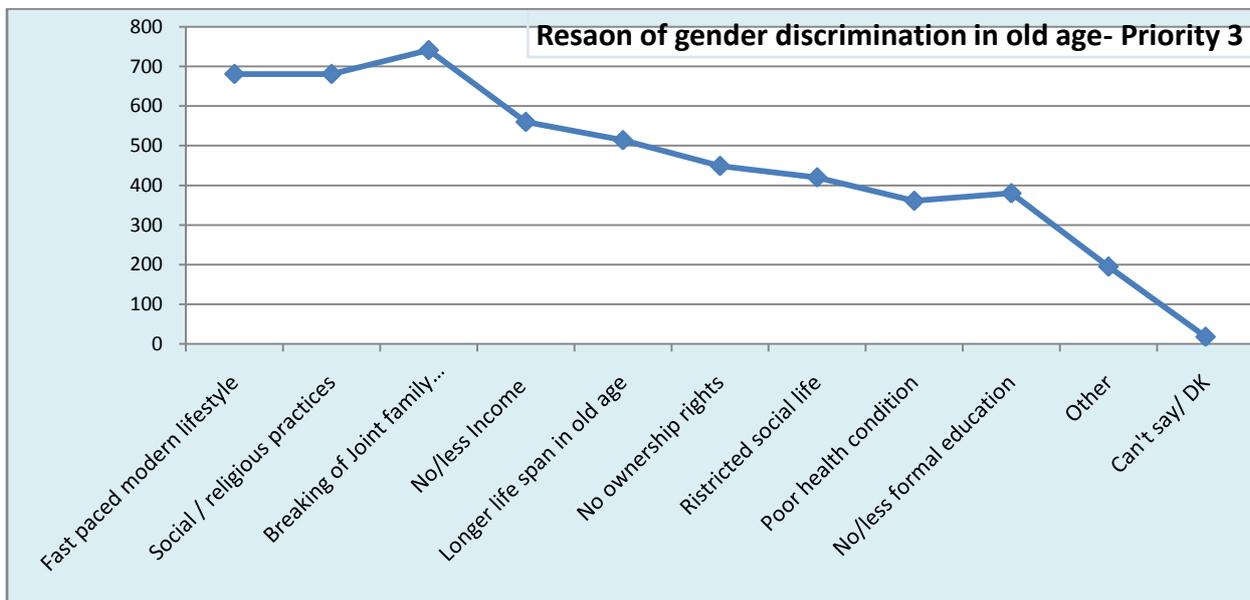
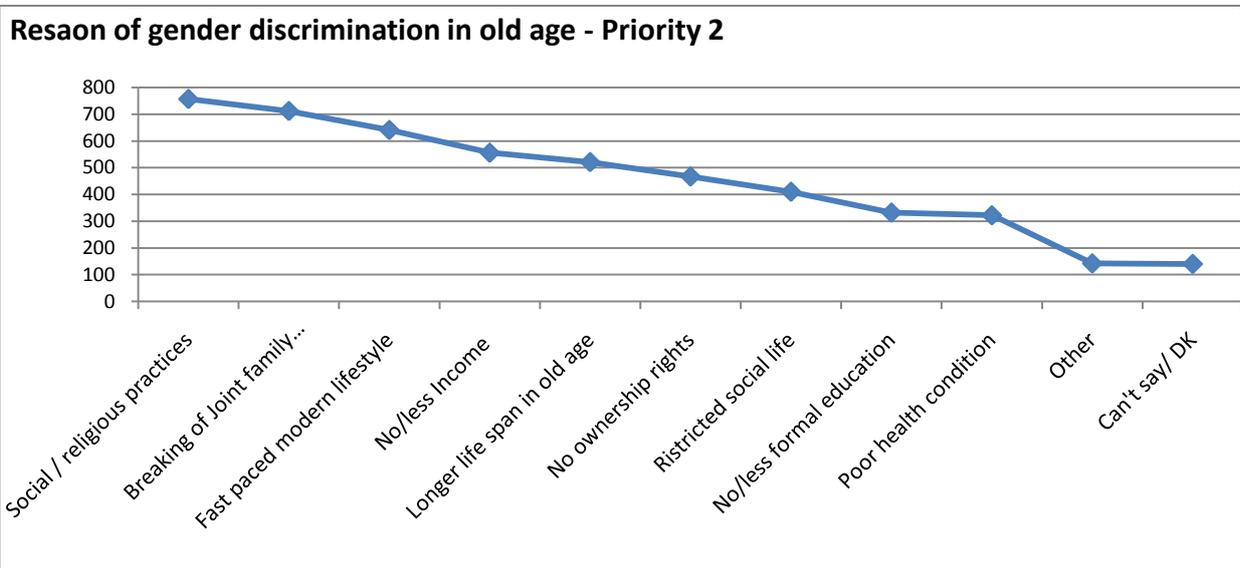


- Second priority was given to social/religious practices by 757 respondents. Again breaking of joint family system was given second priority by second most numbers (712 respondents).

Reasons of gender discrimination in old age	1 <sup>st</sup> Priority	2 <sup>nd</sup> Priority	3 <sup>rd</sup> Priority
Social / religious practices	740	757	682
Breaking of Joint family system	704	712	680
Fast paced modern lifestyle	684	641	741
No/less Income	492	556	560
Longer life span in old age	485	521	514

No ownership rights	420	467	449
Restricted social life	391	410	420
No/less formal education	354	332	361
Poor health condition	341	322	380
Other	259	142	195
Can't say/ Don't know	130	140	18
	<b>5000</b>	<b>5000</b>	<b>5000</b>

- Fast paced modern lifestyle was given priority by 741 respondents, which was the highest in priority 3 followed by social/religious practices with 682 preferences.



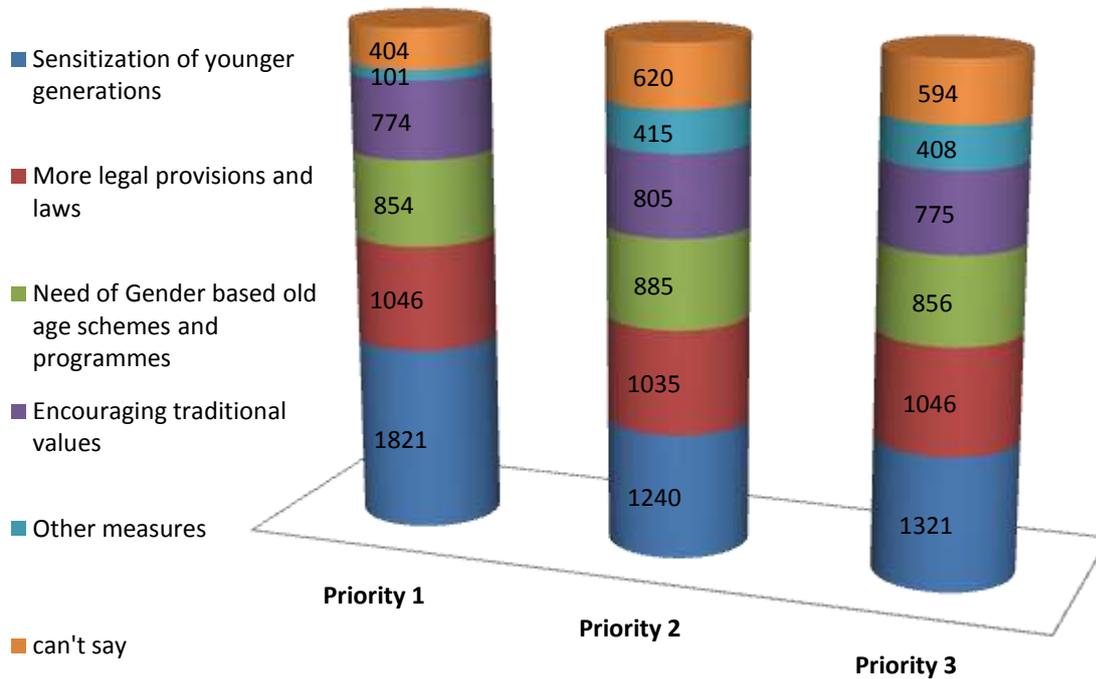
## SUGGESTED MEASURES TO ELIMINATE GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN OLD AGE

- When respondents were asked to suggest their opinion eliminate discrimination based on gender in old age, 36.4% elderly respondents (1821 out of total 5000 respondents) submitted that they would like to suggest sensitization of younger generations as most appropriate measure to handle the situation.

Suggested measures to eliminate gender discrimination in old age	1 <sup>st</sup> Priority	2 <sup>nd</sup> Priority	3 <sup>rd</sup> Priority
1. Sensitization of younger generations	1821	1240	1321
2. More legal provisions and laws	1046	1035	1046
3. Need of Gender based old age schemes and programs	854	885	856
4. Encouraging traditional values	774	805	775
5. Other measures	101	415	408
Can't say	404	620	594
<b>Total</b>	<b>5000</b>	<b>5000</b>	<b>5000</b>

- 1046 respondents (20.5% elderly respondents) said that more legal provisions and laws are their preference as most appropriate measures to promote the gender equality in old age.
- Almost every fourth respondent (1240 older persons) interacted during the survey gave 2<sup>nd</sup> priority to sensitization of younger generations. 1035 respondents i.e. 20.7% gave 2<sup>nd</sup> priority to modified legal provisions and laws as best measures to displace the gender discrimination.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> priority was again given to sensitization of younger generations towards elderly women by most respondents (1321 out of 5000 respondents).

### Possible measures to bridge gender gap in old age



Study concludes that creating awareness about gender equity through various media is required to get rid of gender discrimination against women particularly in old age.

## REPRESENTATIVE STATEMENTS FROM OLDER PERSONS

*“After death of my husband, there is no one to take care of me. My children and grand-children have left me long ago. They visit me only once in a while. I cannot go with them at this age. I am totally dependent on my neighbors.”*

- Damyanti Devi, an 85-year-old widow, Seemapuri, Delhi

*“Women are not allowed to go out without burqas in our society. Their age doesn't matter. These laws are natural for us and there is not matter of gender discrimination, it's a moral practice.”*

- Shakeena Begum, 81-year-old, Shahdra, Delhi

*“It hurt me a lot when our male family members didn't take us along to our family functions. They call me ill-mannered, unqualified and ignore us. Following his suites my family members also insult me from time to time, even in my old age.”*

- Seeta Wadhwa, 67, Patel Nagar



*“In a 6-member-family I am completely isolated. No body has time to give me a patience hearing. Even my grown-up grand-children often ignore my presence in the house.”*

- Saraswati Sharma, 78-year-old lady, Janakpuri

*“My sons and their family settled down abroad. We live alone in our house. Since my husband is confined to bed, security and safety has turned into a bigger trouble for me. Now people have also started encroaching on our house boundary. Being an old woman I have become soft target for anti-social elements.*

- Panna Devi, 79, Karol Bagh

## OBSERVATIONS

Most of the older persons are used to ignore age discrimination only. Awareness about basic and human rights of elderly women is negligible. Young old people (60+), particularly living in planned or semi-planned colonies seem to be familiar with basic human rights of the elderly women.

Popularity of nuclear family system and resultantly transformation of traditional joint family system into small family system is one of the main factor responsible for continuance of age and gender discrimination, in old age.

In many households elderly women are confined to their homes and work as caretakers of the house and grandchildren. Since most elderly women depend on their children, they have no or limited role in decision making process at family level.



In comparison to unplanned Delhi cases of violation rights of elderly women with family is on rise in planned or semi-planned colonies of the state. Prevalence of age old rigid social, religious and cultural gender discriminatory practices, lack of intergenerational interaction due to fast paced modern lifestyle, limited or virtually zero social interaction of elderly women, restricted family life within four-walls of their houses, non-existence of social security system for elderly women, etc are among the most important reasons of dejected condition of elderly women in Delhi.

In almost all communities of Delhi, women have no separate entity. Even under social security schemes they are hardly covered as direct beneficiaries. They are always recognized by the name and status of their husbands. Once their husband becomes old, wife is also treated as old women. Their age never matters. They have to live with “Old Age” tag for almost 2-3 decades.

Due to their comparatively simpler, religiously sound and psychologically constant lifestyle elderly women live longer. Elderly women are the biggest sufferer of age discrimination in old age due to their longer life span, poor financial and health status and marginalisation, isolation and even dejection in old age.

## CONCLUSION

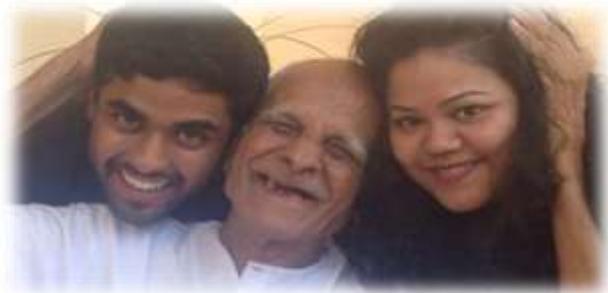
In changed socio-economic and demographic set up of Delhi, elderly women face increased incidences of age discrimination, ageism, elder abuse and mistreatment of older community, which are strictly against any civilized society.

Awareness about gender equality in the society, particularly among older persons and protection of basic and human rights of elderly women is very urgent, particularly in view of their longevity.

To decrease the incidences of age-discrimination within families, society and at state level various gender equality supportive measures need to be undertaken at various levels.

In Delhi there is an urgent need for inclusive social security program for older women at grass root level while utilizing tools like value based education, awareness generation, research & advocacy in order to protect basic and human rights of older persons with special attention on elderly women.

In view of fast-paced modern lifestyle, ever-widening intergenerational gap, longevity of elderly women and comparatively miserable living conditions of elderly women, there is a pressing need to;



- Inculcate a sense of responsibility towards needs & rights of older women through curriculum of schools and colleges and promote traditional joint family system.
- Policy formulation of social security schemes dedicated to elderly women with special focus on widows, dejected, dependent elderly women and its implementation with a practical approach.
- Encourage social interaction of elderly women through various governmental, non-governmental, individual mediums like Social Patrol, Health check-up initiatives, etc.

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