

**Agewell Research & Advocacy Centre**

**AGEWELL STUDY ON STATUS OF OLDER  
PERSONS IN NUCEAR FAMILIES IN INDIA  
2009**

**December 2009**

**Agewell Foundation**

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## **STATUS OF OLDER PERSONS IN NUCLEAR FAMILIES**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Agewell is a consortium of over 1500 NGOs and 6500 volunteers spread across 540 districts of India, committed to initiate better interaction between generations and extend a helping hand.

With ever changing socio-economic scenario living conditions in the society have changed vehemently. Older persons find it very hard to cope with new socio-economic settings. Feeling of alienation with a sense of social marginalization is becoming a major problem for most of the elderly. Their role in respective families has considerably narrowed and they find themselves marginalized.

Research & Advocacy Centre at Agewell Foundation recently carried out a nationwide survey to study and identify /understand the difference between myth and reality about the status of older persons in nuclear families.

### **METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE DESIGN**

Direct in depth interviews were conducted by administering semi-structured schedules to collect information /impression from older persons from across the country

For the survey a representative sample of 10000 older persons (approx. 5000 each from rural and urban areas) was interviewed spread across 20 states.

#### **Sample Units**

The sample units were selected based on purposive random sampling but taken care to incorporate the representative views of the country from five divisions.

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S. No	Type of sample			
	State	No of sample districts	No of sample blocks*	No of respondents
	<b>Region 1 – North India</b>			
1	Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Delhi	20 (Approx.)	50	2015
	<b>Region 2 – South India</b>			
2	Andhra Pradesh Tamilnadu Kerala, Karnataka	20 (Approx.)	50	1995
	<b>Region 3 – East India</b>			
3	West Bengal, Orissa, Assam	20 (Approx.)	50	2011
	<b>Region 4 – West India</b>			
4	Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat	20 (Approx.)	50	1989
	<b>Region 5 – Central India</b>			
5	Madhya Pradesh, Bihar Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh	20 (Approx.)	50	1990
	All India Total	100	250	10000

\* 2-3 blocks were selected from each district for the study randomly, one from a block headquarters and the others from rural area.

### Sample Respondents

The populace of 60+ years was randomly selected as per the 4 groups as given under;

- Category I : Rural older persons
  1. Rural older women
  2. Rural older men

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- Category II : Urban Older Persons
  1. Urban older women
  2. Urban Older Men

A total of 2500 respondents were selected from each group. In each group the target was to include every sections of the society, specifically –

- Retired older persons
- Non-pensioners/labourer farmers
- Housewives
- Literate
- Illiterate
- Financially secure
- BPL family

### **Parameters of the Study**

To understand the problems being faced by older persons living in nuclear families, families have been redefined as per follows:

#### **Nuclear / Small Families**

- Family of less than 6 family members including Grand-parents
- Family of old couples only
- Single old person living alone

#### **Joint/extended Family**

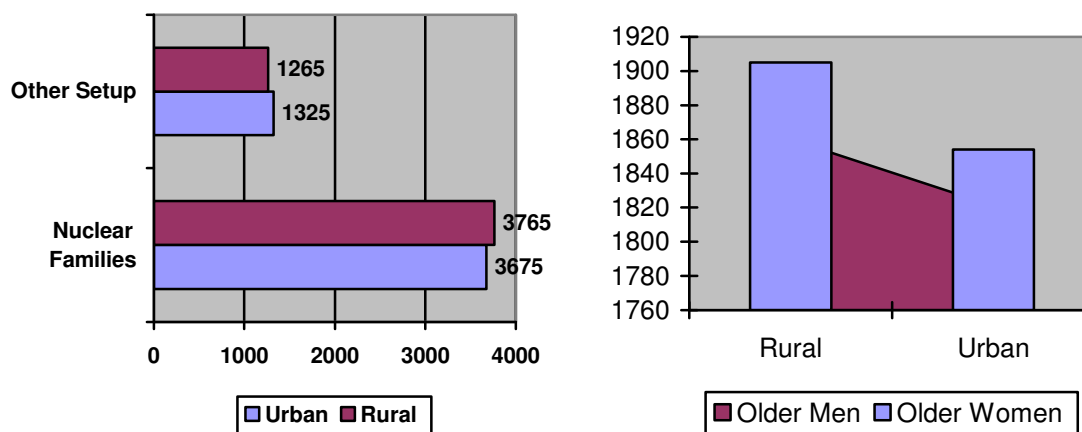
- Families with more than 6 members
- Close relatives other than grand-parents, parents and children are also part of the these families

Volunteers' network spread across the country worked as interviewers for the survey. The interviews were conducted during the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> week of December 2009.

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## MAJOR FINDINGS

- Out of total older persons contacted during the survey, 74.4% older persons were found living in Nuclear families/ small families. Number of older women living in nuclear or small families is slightly higher (75.2%) than older men (73.6%).
- 73.5% of older persons of urban areas live in Nuclear families/small families. Whereas in villages 75.3% of older persons live in nuclear/small families. Migration of large rural population to urban areas is one of the major causes of high percentage of older persons living in nuclear/small family set up. In spite of popularity of joint family system in rural areas.



### Impact of Migration on Nuclear Family set up

#### MIGRANTS IN THE COUNTRY

Rural Urban status	Migration
Rural areas	73,949,607
Urban areas	20,655,277
Unclassified	2,955,436
<b>Total</b>	<b>97,560,320</b>

Source: Census of India 2001

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High rate of migration was found in most populated and less developed states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Orissa, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Uttarakhand, etc.

Young men opt to migrate from villages to urban areas in search of better job opportunities leaving their old parents to live alone or with their daughters-in-law & grandchildren.

- 74.4.0% of older men in rural areas were reportedly found living in nuclear or small families, whereas 17% were living with their joint/extended families. 8.6% of older men were found living with their respective spouses or all alone.
- 72.8 Older men in urban areas were reportedly found living in nuclear or small families, whereas 11% were living with their joint/extended families. 9.7% of older men were found living alone but with their respective spouses and around 6.5% were found living alone.

### **Contribution of Older Persons in Nuclear Families**

Majority of Older persons living in nuclear families said that they are active member of their families. Their role in families was found as under:

#### Older Men

##### Family activities

- Assistance in household chores
  - Phone, electricity, water, etc. Bills/ tax payments
- Accompany grandchildren to school or playground
- Take care of house property in absence of their children
- Assistance in family business, if any

##### Income generation activities

- Pension / Salary
- Interests on investments
- Rent from house/ land property

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## Older Women

### Family activities

- Assistance in household chores
  - o Cooking, Washing, etc.
- Looking after grand children in absence of their children

### Income generation activities

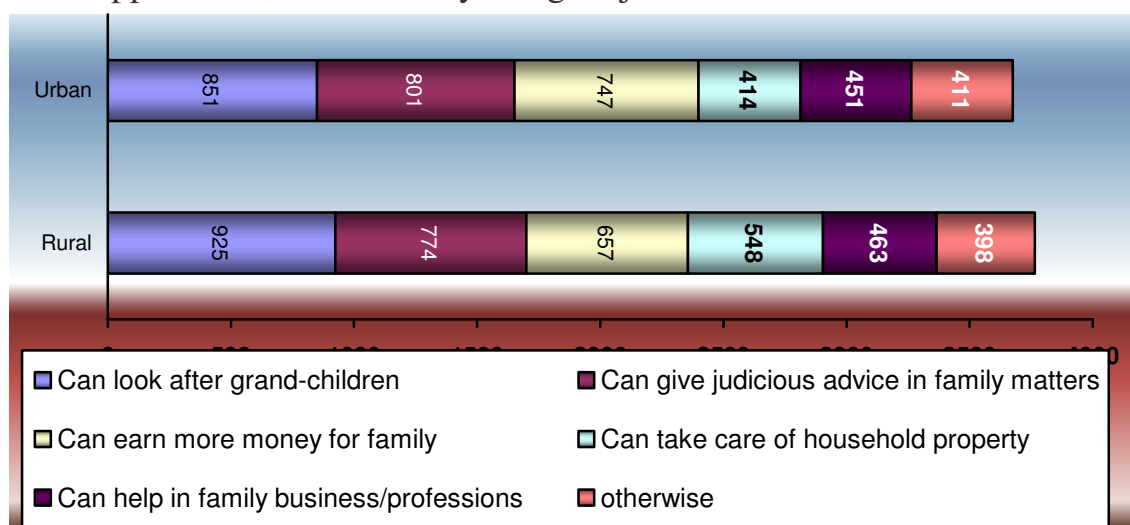
- Agricultural work
- Handicraft production

- In spite of active participation of older persons in family's economy and having originally possessed major part of the household/land property, they are rarely treated as respected family member. Negligence of their old age related needs by younger family members is common practice.

## Role of Older Persons in Nuclear Families

When asked about their role in the present family set up, most of the old people feel that they can play vital role in their families.

- 23.9% older persons living in nuclear families said that they can look after their grand-children effectively.
- 21.1 % older persons said that their advice in family matters should be appreciated, because they can give judicious advice.



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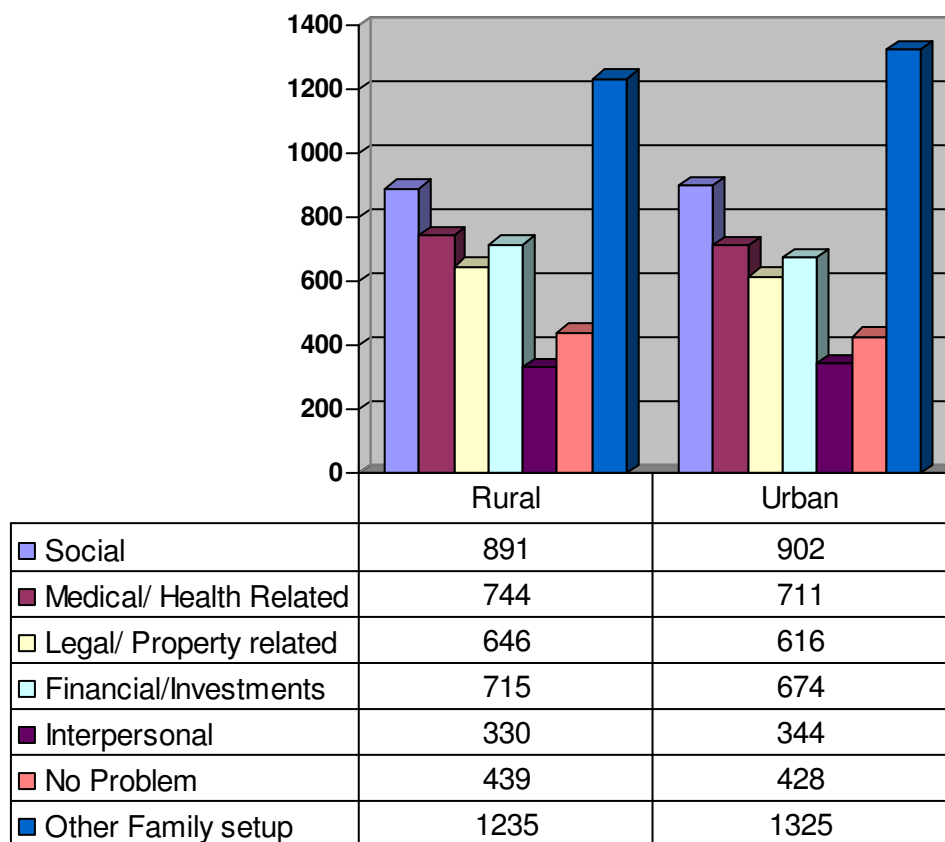
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## Problems of Older Persons in Nuclear Families

After analyzing the data obtained from older persons living in nuclear / small families it was found that these older persons were facing different kinds of problems.

### **Most Common Problems of older persons living in nuclear/small families**



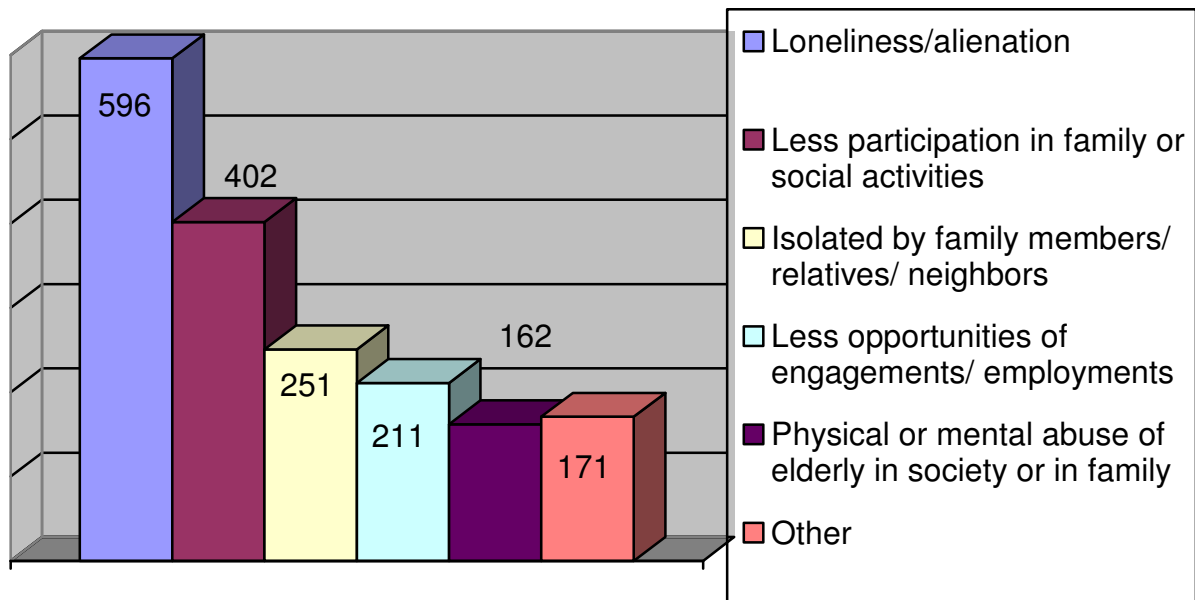
In both the areas - urban and rural, older persons living in nuclear families were found to be worst affected by social issues. Out of 7440 older persons living in nuclear families, 1793 elderly reported various social issues as their main concern. 1455 older persons out of 7440 older persons in this segment reported medical/health related issues as their most prominent concern.

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### Social problems of the older persons living in nuclear/small families

- 24.1 % older persons living in nuclear families reported that they are facing various kinds of social/interpersonal problems prominently.



Among 1793 older persons, most affected by social problems reported that loneliness/alienation (approx. 33.1%) is their main problem. Major Social problems accounted by older persons was as under;

- ✚ Loneliness/alienation
- ✚ Less participation in family or social activities
- ✚ Isolated by family members/ relatives/ neighbors
- ✚ Less opportunities of engagements/ employments
- ✚ Physical or mental abuse of elderly in society or in family

### Medical/Health related Problems of the older persons living in nuclear/small families

- Almost every older person accepted that he/she has been suffering from medical/health related problems. Approx. 19.6 % older persons in nuclear families said that medical/health related problems are their most common problems.

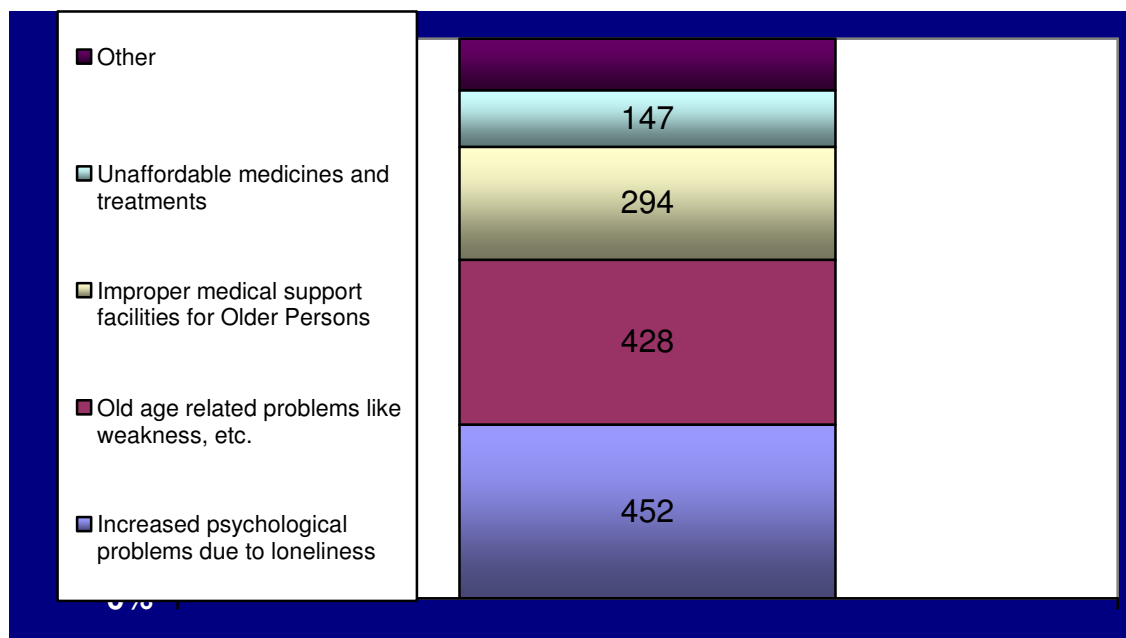
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1455 out of 7440 older persons were hardly affected by medical problems. Major medical & health related problems reported by older persons as under:

- ✚ Increased psychological problems due to loneliness
- ✚ Old age related problems like weakness, etc.
- ✚ Improper medical support facilities for Older Persons
- ✚ Unaffordable medicines and treatments



### Legal/property related problems of the older persons living in nuclear/small families

With fast changing socio-economical scenario, older persons have become most vulnerable in comparison to other members of society

- 17.0% of older persons living in nuclear families agreed that they have lost their peace of mind due to legal/property related matters.


1262 older persons out of total 7440 older persons living in nuclear families reported that they are facing acute legal problems. Their main concerns are further classified as under:

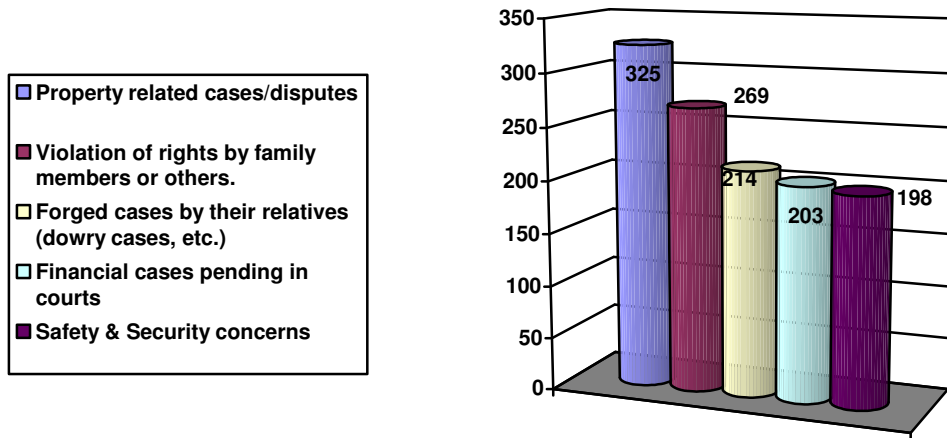
- ✚ Property related cases/disputes
- ✚ Violation of rights by family members or others.
- ✚ Forged cases by their relatives (dowry cases, etc.)

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-  Financial cases pending in courts
-  Safety & Security concerns

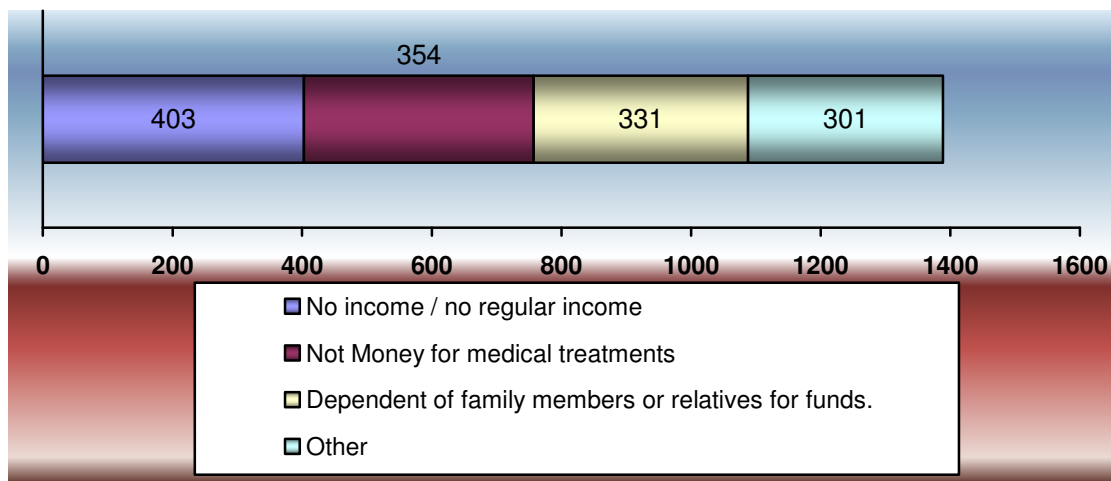


### Financial problems of the older persons living in nuclear/small families

- *It was found that 18.7 % of older persons living in nuclear families reported that financial problems are their most urgent problems. 1389 older persons out of 7440 older persons from nuclear families said that their financial condition is in very bad shape.*

Major financial concerns were reportedly found as under:

- No income / no regular income
- Not Money for medical treatments
- Dependent on family members or relatives for funds.



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Financial problems are most common problems in old age. There are no or limited employment opportunities available for older persons. Old age related problems encumber income generation activities. On the other hand, in old age, they need more funds for their medical requirements.

### **Impact of self-centeredness and decline on interpersonal warmth**

- When asked about interpersonal problems being faced by older persons living in nuclear families, majority of the respondents agreed that they are not happy with their current living conditions. However, they were perceived as happy in the general society.
- 9.1% of the total older persons in nuclear family set up replied that interpersonal relationship is their most prominent problem. This problem is more critical in urban areas, where social interaction of older persons is limited.

### **Salient observations**

- Older persons living nuclear families have very little say in day to day lives of their children or grandchildren.
- Older Persons of urban areas are financially better placed in comparison to older persons in rural areas.
- Due to increased level of migration, joint family system is loosing ground in rural areas as well, and older persons are forced to live in nuclear/small families.
- In spite of popularity of traditional joint family system in India, emergence of **Nuclear families of older persons** is on rise in urban and rural areas, which is alarming situation for our traditional social structure.

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## **Conclusion**

Older persons living with nuclear or small families have an important role in family system. They not only form integral part of an ideal family, but also act as custodian of traditional values.

Emergence of nuclear families of older persons is not a happy equation for all-round development of human society. Family support system is most urgent need of the older persons in old age.

Timely actions should be taken to increase role of older persons in their respective families/societies, while sensitizing generations towards traditional family system of the country and instilling core human values in them.

Younger generation in every family set up, governmental agencies, Non-governmental organizations, media and other stakeholders should play a vital role in this direction.

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