



# Depression and Quality of life among elderly people: A comprehensive review

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## Abstract:

The ageing population has emerged as a significant concern in both developed and developing countries, including India. In the contemporary world, the proportion of elderly individuals is steadily increasing, leading to complex social and healthcare challenges. In India, the issue is more pronounced due to the gradual decline of the traditional joint family system, while adequate institutional care facilities are still insufficient. This review aims to explore the symptoms of depression, quality of life, and the major challenges faced by elderly individuals, particularly in India and West Bengal. Existing literature indicates that many older adults experience feelings of loneliness, isolation, helplessness, and reduced self-worth, even when living in well-equipped care homes. Studies have shown that chronic diseases play a crucial role in determining quality of life, whereas factors like age, education, and marital status have limited influence. Overall, the review underscores the increasing burden of depression among the elderly and highlights the urgent need for comprehensive primary healthcare services and community-based interventions to improve their quality of life and ensure early detection and management of mental health issues.

**Keywords:** Depression, Quality of life, Elderly People, West Bengal, India

## Introduction:

The ageing process is inevitable and represents a growing global trend. With advancements in healthcare, improved medical science, and declining birth rates, the proportion of younger populations is decreasing while the number of older adults is rising rapidly across regions such as North Africa, Western Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. According to the 2011 Census of India, individuals aged 60 years and above constitute 104 million, accounting for 8.6% of the total population. Reports by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) project that India's elderly population will rise to 20.8% by 2050 and may reach nearly 36% by the end of the century. Globally, estimates indicate that the population aged 65 years and above was about 771 million (nearly 10% of the world population) and is expected to increase to 16% by 2050 and 24% by 2100, with the population aged 80+ growing at an even faster rate.

Ageing is an irreversible process often associated with increased vulnerability to physical and mental health problems. Among these, depression is one of the most common mood disorders affecting elderly individuals, significantly reducing their quality of life and increasing morbidity and mortality. Despite this, older adults remain one of the most neglected and underserved population groups, with many cases of depression going undetected and untreated. The rapid growth of the elderly population poses significant challenges for governments and healthcare systems in addressing their complex needs and ensuring a satisfactory quality of life.

In India, the issue of ageing is particularly critical due to the transition from traditional joint family systems to nuclear families, alongside the lack of adequate institutional care facilities. Although old age homes and care institutions are increasing, evidence suggests that many elderly individuals residing in such facilities continue to experience loneliness, isolation, helplessness, and a sense of burden. Previous studies, including that of Čanković et al. (2015), have highlighted that the presence of chronic diseases plays a significant role in determining quality of life, whereas demographic factors such as age, education, and marital status have limited influence on physical, psychological, and environmental domains. Therefore, assessing depression and quality of life among the elderly has become a critical issue, particularly in developing countries like India, where comprehensive and community-based approaches are urgently needed.

## Findings

### Depression among Elderly People

The American Psychiatric Association defines psychiatric disorders as significant disturbances in thinking, emotions, and behavior that impair daily functioning. Depression is one of the most common mental health problems among the elderly and contributes substantially to reduced quality of life. Several studies highlight a high prevalence of mental disorders among older adults. For instance, Sreeith et al. (2015) reported that 33.9% of the geriatric population exceeded the threshold for mental illness, with a higher prevalence among females (77.6%) compared to males (42.4%). Depression (21.9%), anxiety (10.7%), and cognitive impairment (16.3%) were particularly common, especially among individuals aged above 80 years.

Other studies indicate that institutionalized elderly individuals often experience higher levels of depression and lower self-esteem compared to those living in community settings. Living arrangements play a critical role, as elderly individuals living alone tend to show higher levels of depression, anxiety, anger, and hostility. Additionally, rural populations exhibit a greater prevalence of severe depression compared to urban populations. These findings collectively demonstrate that depression among the elderly is influenced by gender, age, living conditions, and health status.

### Quality of Life among Elderly People

Quality of life (QoL) among elderly individuals varies widely across different settings. Studies show that a considerable proportion of elderly people experience average or poor quality of life. For example, Sood (2012) found that only 30.4% of respondents reported good quality of life, while a significant percentage experienced poor or very poor conditions. Similarly, Dasgupta et al. (2018) reported that 54.1% of elderly individuals in rural West Bengal had poor quality of life.

In contrast, some urban-based studies indicate relatively better outcomes, where a higher proportion of elderly individuals reported good or excellent quality of life. However, disparities persist between rural and urban areas, with rural elderly populations consistently reporting lower quality of life. Factors such as education, marital status, and living with a spouse positively influence physical, psychological, and environmental domains of quality of life.

### Socio-Demographic Variables and Depression

Socio-demographic factors significantly influence depression among the elderly. Studies reveal that illiteracy, co-morbid conditions, financial dependency, and lack of social support are strongly associated with higher levels of depression. Research indicates that a large proportion of elderly individuals suffer from chronic illnesses such as hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases, which further increase the risk of depression.

Additionally, factors such as living alone, low socioeconomic status, and poor family support systems are major contributors to mental health problems. Statistical analyses from various studies confirm a significant association between socio-demographic variables and depression, highlighting the need for targeted interventions. Socio-Demographic Variables and Quality of Life. Quality of life among elderly individuals is also strongly influenced by socio-demographic characteristics. Education, income level, and financial independence are key determinants of better quality of life. Studies show that elderly individuals with higher

education and stable income tend to experience better well-being compared to those without formal education or financial support. Furthermore, elderly women, particularly in rural areas, are more likely to experience poor quality of life due to social and economic disadvantages.

### **Relationship between Quality of Life and Depression**

A strong negative relationship exists between depression and quality of life among elderly individuals. Higher levels of depression are associated with lower quality of life across physical, psychological, and social domains. Studies indicate that elderly individuals residing in old age homes often experience higher stress and mild to moderate depression.

Research conducted in urban areas of West Bengal found that a significant proportion of elderly individuals suffer from mental illness, with many remaining untreated. Factors such as chronic illness, social isolation, and lack of emotional support contribute to both depression and reduced quality of life.

### **Conclusion**

The growing elderly population presents a significant challenge for society, particularly in developing countries like India. Mental health issues, especially depression, are highly prevalent among older adults and are closely linked to poor quality of life. Factors such as advanced age, lack of education, living alone, financial dependency, and chronic illnesses significantly contribute to both depression and diminished well-being.

Despite these challenges, many geriatric mental health conditions can be effectively managed with early diagnosis and appropriate intervention. Therefore, there is an urgent need for comprehensive healthcare strategies, including community-based support systems and improved primary healthcare services, to enhance the quality of life and mental well-being of the elderly population.

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