Elderly Population in India

Why in news?

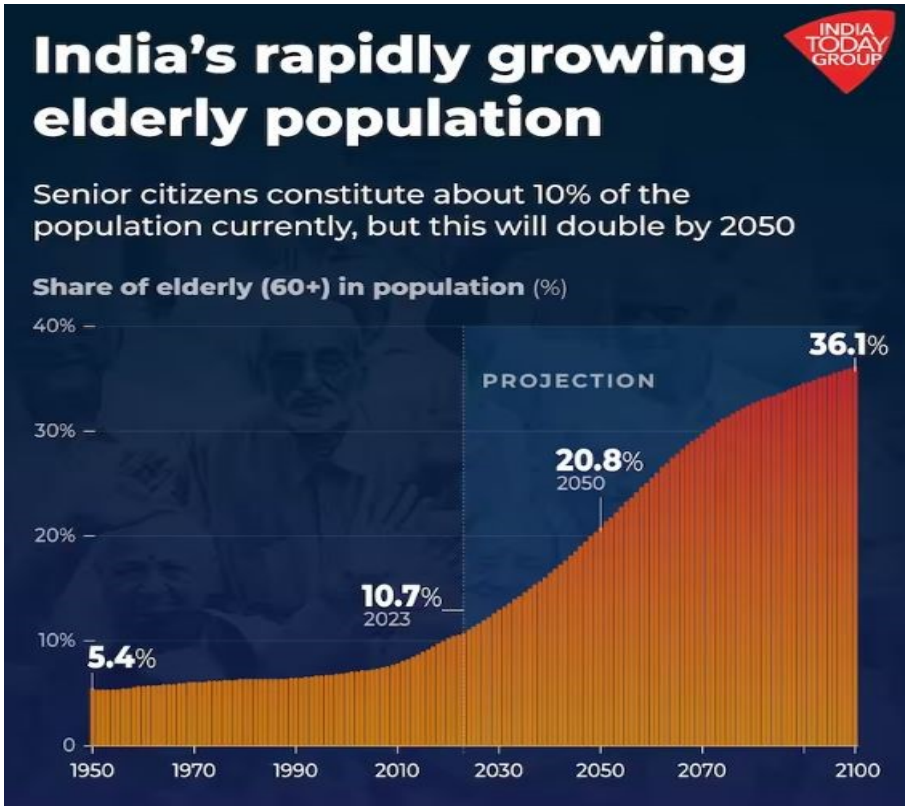
Amidst the focus on demographic dividend, the country is seeing a silent rise in its elderly demographic and increased problems caused by loneliness in later life.

What is the Status of Elderly Population in India?

- **Demographic ageing** – It is a global phenomenon of increasing elderly population which has hit Indian shores as well.
- It is possible due to
    - Easy availability of life saving drugs
    - Control of famines and various communicable diseases
    - Better awareness and supply of nutrition and health facilities
    - Comparatively better overall standard of living.
- **Elderly population** – The WHO defines those aged 60 -74 years as elderly.
- In 1980 the UN recommended 60 years as the age of transition for the elderly segment of the population, and has been categorized as follows:
    - **Young Old**- between the ages of 60-75 years.
    - **Old-Old**- between the ages of 75-85 years.
    - **Very Old**- 85 years and above

The number of people 60 years and over in the globe is 673 million in 2005 and is expected to increase to 2 billion by 2050, almost a triple increase and the 1st quarter of 21st century is going to be called as ***'The age of ageing'.***

- **In India** – According to Population Census 2011 there are nearly 104 million elderly persons (aged 60 years or above) in India
    - 53 million females and 51 million males.
- It is expected to rise significantly from 100 million in 2011 to 230 million by 2036.
- By 2050, they are projected to make up nearly 20% of the total population.



- **Old age-dependence ratio** – It measures the number of people aged 60-plus per 100 persons aged 15-59, has been steadily increasing.
- **Elderly in India 2021' report** – According to this report of Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, the old-age dependency ratio increases in the following manner
    - 1961 – 10.9%
    - 2011 – 14.2%
- It is anticipated to have reach 15.7% in 2021 and 20.1% by 2031.

What are the concerns of elderly population?

- **Disabilities** – Old age implies increasing physical, mental and psychological disabilities.
- **Health concerns** - Health issues like blindness, locomotor disabilities and deafness are most prevalent.
- Absence of geriatric care facilities at hospitals in rural area.
- **Economic problems** - Economic dependence is one of the major factors that very often affects the wellbeing of older persons.
- The functional ability status of the care receiver and care giver is an additional factor that appears to contribute to the burden.
- **Exacerbated class disparities** - The market offers a wide and innovative array of eldercare services.
- However, this is not accessible to those who cannot afford these services.
- **Increased loneliness** – The Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI) in 2017-18 surveyed 72,000 people from 35 States and Union Territories.
- 20.5% of adults aged 45 years and above reported moderate loneliness, and 13.3% were severely lonely.

To know more about Loneliness, click here

How loneliness can be addressed among elderly population?

- **Encouraging familial responsibilities** – Families shall be encouraged to undertake the *maximum amount of care work* possible.
- **Moving to care homes** – In this way, one can *live with others from similar backgrounds* and be free from arranging daily care for oneself.
- **Joining social forums** - Joining offline or online forums to *socialise with those from the same age group*.
- **Promoting intergenerational bonding**- Many old people in care homes believed *interacting with young students was enjoyable and alleviated feelings of loneliness* to some extent.
- **Purchasing companionship services** – It involves younger people to provide companionship services to older clients.
    - **For example**: ***Pronam*** is a public-private partnership in Kolkata, catering to the needs of older people who do not live with their relatives.

Companionship Services
• **Companions** – Younger people • **Function** – These companions function as *proxies for people's children* and undertake different types of work. - **For instance**: Paying electricity bills, providing reminders for medicines and taking them out on walks or to the doctor. • **Establishing trust** – Care companions build an *emotional connection* with the people they look after and many clients look forward to their visits and become dependent on them. • *Regular visits* to check on the wellbeing of older people even without forming strong bonds can also be a useful measure to tackle loneliness.

What are the initiatives taken by India?

- **Constitutional measures** - Article 41 and Article 46 are the constitutional provisions for elderly persons.

  Article 41 *of the Indian Constitution directs the state to secure the right to work, education and public assistance in certain cases such as unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement.*

  Article 42 *of the Indian Constitution direct the State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.*

- **Legislative measures** - *Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007* provides legal sanctions to the rights of the elderly.
- Section 20 of *Hindu Marriage and Adoption Act, 1956* makes it obligatory provisions to maintain an aged parents.
- Under *Section 125 of Criminal Procedure Code*, the elder parents can claim maintenance from their children.

- **Financial measures** – The expenditure for implementation of the various scheme is being met from the "*Senior Citizens' Welfare Fund*".
- **Policy measures** - National Policy for Older Persons Year 1999 – It is launched for accelerating welfare measures and empowering the elderly in ways beneficial to them.
- **Atal Vayo Abhyudaya Yojana (AVYAY) –** It is a comprehensive initiative aimed at ensuring a *dignified life for senior citizens* in India.
- It *recognizes the contributions made by the elderly* to society and seeks to ensure their well-being and social inclusion.
- **Senior care Ageing Growth Engine (SAGE) –** It aims to *help startups* interested in providing services for elderly care.
- **Integrated Programme for Senior Citizens –** It primary objective is to *improve the quality of life* of the old-age population.
- It provides *financial support* for running and maintaining elderly Homes, Continuous Care Homes, Mobile Medicare Units, etc.
- **Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana-** It aims to *provide Physical Aids and Assisted-living Devices* for Senior citizens belonging to BPL category.

Way forward

- Recognizing loneliness as a public health concern and adapt strategies to support those affected by this growing issue.
- Enhance mental health awareness by improving healthcare facilities, and addressing social disparities.
- Take a comprehensive surveys in local languages can uncover the extent of loneliness across India's diverse population.

The year 1999 was declared by the UN as the International Year of Older Persons.

References

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