

## LIVELIHOOD OF ELDERLY PEOPLE IN THE AGE OF GLOBALISATION: A STUDY IN JHERO VILLAGE OF HOOGHLY DISTRICT IN WEST BENGAL

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**Abstract:** In the era of globalization, the socio-economic fabric of rural India is undergoing a rapid transformation. While globalization has brought technological and economic growth, it has also triggered the disintegration of the traditional joint family system, leaving the elderly population vulnerable. This study focuses on Jhero village in the Hooghly district of West Bengal to examine the livelihood challenges faced by the elderly. Through a micro-level analysis, the research explores their economic dependency, health status, and the impact of out-migration of the younger generation. The findings suggest that while state-sponsored social security schemes exist, they are often insufficient to ensure a dignified life, necessitating a more inclusive policy framework.

**Keywords:** Globalisation, Elderly Livelihood, Rural West Bengal, Jhero Village, Socio-economic Vulnerability.

### **Introduction:**

Livelihood simply means the way an individual lives by fulfilling the necessities of life. It further means the activities performed by an individual to lead his life. It describes how an individual is dependent on many things for his/her food, shelter, and clothes for the ultimate goal of living a good life. According to Robert Chambers, "a livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living". Elderly or old age consists of ages nearing or surpassing the average life span of human beings. The boundary of old age cannot be defined exactly because it does not have the same meaning in all societies. Government of India adopted 'National Policy on Older Persons' in January, 1999. The policy defines 'senior citizen' or 'elderly' as a person who is of age 60 years or above. For the purpose of our Study, the same definition is used here.

For a good living, people need resources. Quality of life can be ensured if there is capacity of the people to afford them. But, even in the 21st century world, there are so many issues and challenges faced by a large section of the society. On one hand, when there is development on agenda, there are efforts to uplift the downtrodden, to distribute resources among the have-nots, on the other hand, the gap between the poor and the rich is widening. According to a Report of Oxfam International, 73% of the wealth generated in 2017 went to the richest 1%. The rich are getting richer at a faster rate while the poor are still struggling to earn a minimum wage to afford the basic necessities of life.

Globalisation has brought about many changes in the world. The impact of globalisation has transformed the lives of the people all over the world to a greater extent. Still, one can find places where livelihood patterns remains mostly traditional where the effect of globalisation is

almost absent. Even in this age of globalisation, there are people who find it very tough to manage the means of livelihood to afford the basic necessities of life. When it comes to livelihood of the Elderly people who depend on agricultural activities, the problem of livelihood becomes more challenging. The elderly people due to their age becomes gradually too weak to work hard. Particularly, the people whose livelihood mainly depends on farming and manual labour becomes vulnerable during their old age. They become many times dependent on their children for all kind of expenditure. The mental and the physical conditions of the old people also become weak.

At this backdrop, this study looks at a village of Hooghly District of West Bengal, India, for a study about the livelihood issues of the people in general and the elderly people in particular.

### 1.1 Objectives of the Study:

To understand the socio-economic profile of the elderly in Jhero village.

To analyze the sources of livelihood and financial independence among the aged.

To assess the impact of globalization-induced migration on their quality of life.

### Review of Literature:

Existing literature suggests that aging is not just a biological process but a social construction. Researchers like Archita Nayak (2018) argue that globalization has commodified care, making it difficult for poor rural families to support non-earning members. In the context of West Bengal, studies highlight that the state's high population density and reliance on fragmented landholdings make the elderly more dependent on government pensions. K. Visweswara Rao (2007) has focused on the problems of aged people of India based on the major social, economic, psychological abuse and other miscellaneous problems. This book provides a comprehensive demographic and sociological profile of the elderly in rural settings. It specifically discusses the breakdown of traditional support systems and the changing attitudes toward the aged in the wake of modernization.

The economic problem that the aged people have experienced is that of exploitation. There have been cases of family members and relatives, who keep a watch on the finances that they possess. In a direct as well as in an indirect manner, they make an attempt to take money from them, they exploit the elderly family members and take money from them for their own benefit. The problems of the aged people are diverse. The miscellaneous problems may be relating to inability to get accustomed to modern and innovative techniques and methods, traditional viewpoints and perspectives, occurrence of conflicts and disputes, disagreements, inability to get along with others, boredom, lack of knowledge and awareness, loss of control, low self-esteem and lack of preparedness for old age.

Amiri M. (2018) has focused on the problems faced by old age people. Author has stated that the problem of old age has been considered as a main social problem all over the world. In old age phase, people are required to face many socio economic and health problems, which they are not able to solve and have to suffer and thus becoming problematic issues for the society. It is concluded that existence of nuclear family system, and the impact of economic and social transformation have focused on the peculiar problems which the old age people are facing nowadays, and the duties or obligations of young generation towards the old age people is being eroded

Ali. M. A. Z. (2014), has focused on the adjustment problems of oldest people. Author has stated that there is a need for preserving the Indian joint family system. There should be mutual cooperation and understanding between new and old generations. In the opinion of author the situation of oldest people in India calls for concerted efforts of the government, NGOs, religious institutions etc. not only to understand but also to solve the problems resulting from a greying society so that the old age people can leave a dignified and quality of life. Through the study author has focused on the emotional adjustment, social adjustment and marital adjustment of oldest people. Author has observed that, old age people staying in old age homes feel more emotional problems than those who are staying with the families.

Raju, S. S. (2011), has focused on the research on ageing India and provides an analysis in terms of social, financial, psychological and physical and health aspects and elder abuse. Author has also discussed the issues upon which models of care for old age people can be framed and argues that factors like place of accommodation, social class and gender among others tamed to influence such models of care. In the opinion of author, the institution of the family needs to be protected and standard and social work intervention or through professional welfare services, including economical support, counselling to old age people and their family members also. Author has concluded that, not all aspects of ageing have been uniformly steady and majority of them are micro-level localised studies.

**"India's Elderly: A Multidisciplinary Dimension" edited by A.K. Kapoor and Satwanti Kapoor** This volume is particularly valuable because it contains specific research on **West Bengal**. Look for the chapter *"Expressing Desire for Death Among Elders in Rural West Bengal"* by Debdulal Dutta Roy, which explores the psychological impact of neglect and isolation.

### Research Methodology:

This study adopts a **descriptive and analytical research design**.

- **Study Area:** Jhero Village, Hooghly District. This village was chosen due to its mix of agricultural roots and its proximity to developing industrial belts, making it a perfect site to study the "clash" of tradition and modernity.
- **Sampling:** A purposive random sampling of 100 individuals aged 60 and above.
- **Data Collection:** Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire and personal interviews. Secondary data was gathered from various books, articles and reports.

### Research Questions:

- What is the source of income of the elderly people?
- What type of assets do they possess?
- What type of problems do they face in their old age?

### Demography of the Selected Village:

The name of the selected village is Jhero which is under Dumurdaha Nityanadapur- II Gram Panchayat of Balagarh Block. It is under Balagarh Vidhan Sabha Constituency which is reserved for scheduled castes. The village falls under the jurisdiction of Chinsurah Subdivision of Hooghly District of West Bengal. All the people of this village belong to the Bauri community. The Bauris are people of aboriginal origin belonging to the Bengali Hindu community. Most of the Bauri people use 'Baul Das' as their surname.

**Table 1: Demographic Configuration**

|                         |             |
|-------------------------|-------------|
| <b>Total population</b> | <b>2090</b> |
| Male population         | 1090        |
| Female population       | 1000        |
| SC population           | 1518        |
| ST population           | 122         |

**Data Analysis:****General information:**

In the study, 50 households have been selected to observe the status of elderly people of the village. Among 50 households, 52 % of the total Elderly are women and rest (48%) of them are men. Most of the elderly people equally belong to the age- group of 60 – 79 years in an average. Only three percent respondents are above 80 years old.

**Table 2: Female – Male distribution (percentage)**

|                   |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| Female respondent | Male respondent |
| 52                | 48              |

Most of the respondents have no institutional education (42% & 39% respectively). Only 10 % elderly female and male have below secondary level school education and three percent elderly male have education that is above secondary.

**Table 3: Educational Qualification of the respondents.**

| Status           | Female Education (percentage) | Male Education (percentage) |
|------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Nil              | 42.0                          | 38.0                        |
| Below Secondary  | 10.0                          | 10.0                        |
| Above Secondary  | ---                           | 3                           |
| Graduate & above | ---                           | --                          |

**Basic needs:**

In the question of basic needs like Food, Shelter and clean Latrine; the situation is too poor. According to the National Institute of Nutrition Dietary Guideline for Elderly Indian (2011), an elderly person should take 270gm Carbohydrate and 160 g.m Vitamins per day. But in the study, it is found that the elderly people take only 99g.m Carbohydrate and 0.63 g.m vitamins. It has also been suggested that elderly people must take 100 g.m milk and milk products in 3 portions and 30 g.m Protein in two portions. But here the elderly people don't have the

capacity to buy milk or any milk products. They rarely buy fish, egg and meat. They take Protein 60 g.m in two portions from pulses and soybeans. Respondents take .12 g.m Fat per day whereas National Institute of Nutrition Dietary Guideline for Elderly Indian has announced that elderly people should take 25g.m Fat. So it can be said that the elderly people of ‘Jhero Village’ are taking insufficient diet.

The people of the village depend on community tube-well that has been given by the Gram Panchayat. They use tube-well water for drinking purpose only. They use pond water for their daily use like washing, bathing etc. In summer, they face a scarcity of water as the water level goes down in pond and tube-well as well.

Another two basic needs of the people are Shelter and clean toilet. Every respondent has their own house. But the condition is not satisfactory at all. 85 % respondents don’t have a proper Shelter. They live in Kuccha shelters whereas only 15 % have Pucca Shelter. The respondents who live in Pucca Shelters received government assistance after 2015.

**Table 4: Type of Shelter and Latrine**

| Type       | Shelter (percentage) | Latrine (percentage) |
|------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Not exists | Nil                  | 15.0                 |
| Kuccha     | 85.0                 | 40.0                 |
| Pacca      | 15.0                 | 45.0                 |
|            | 100.0                | 100.0                |

**Picture 1: Shelter and latrine**



Semi Pukka shelter in Jhero village

Pucca Latrine in Jhero village

It is so unfortunate that 15 % of respondents have no latrine. They defecate in the open at a time when there has been drive for ODF(Open Defecation Free) status. Another thing is that the difference between Kuccha and Pucca household are not so big. 45% of respondents use Pucca Latrine which is made by the grant received from the Government and 40% of household have Kuccha Latrine.

**Picture 2: Mud oven vs L.P.G connection**



Another Important need is fuel. 45% of respondents has L.P.G connection through Government fund. But rest 55% don't have any L.P.G connection in their Household. But mostly of them use 4Mud Oven for their daily cooking as they don't have much money in hand to have gas cylinder. They buy 1-2 litre Kerosine at Rupees 40/- per litre from local market for their use. All the respondents have Ration card and they get Atta (Wheat) from the Ration shop. Some family also get Rice from Ration shop.

**Table 5: Types of Ration Card**

| Respondents | APL Ration Card<br>(percentage) | BPL Ration Card<br>(percentage) | Antyodaya Ration Card<br>(percentage) |
|-------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Female      | 10.0                            | 42.0                            | Nil                                   |
| Male        | 13.0                            | 35.0                            | Nil                                   |

Most of the Female and male elderly people have BPL (Below the Poverty Line) Ration Card (Female – 35 % and Male – 42%) whereas 13% of Female elderly person has APL (Above the Poverty Line) Ration Card followed by 10% of Male Elderly people. In the study, no respondent has Antyodaya (poorest poor) Ration card.

#### Health Infrastructure:

There is a local Health Centre where the Elderly people get basic treatment. 75% of total respondents say they get health assistant from the local Health Centre and they go to the Health Centre frequently. But 25% of the total respondents say that don't get proper service from local Health Centre. They are aware of the 'Swasthasathi' Health insurance that is launched by the Government of West Bengal in 2016. This Swasthasathi is basic health cover for secondary and tertiary care up to Rs. 5 lakh per annum per family. Among the respondents only 6.45% ensure that their family has been covered under Swasthasathi. Rest of the respondents say that they have applied for the policy but yet they don't get any Health Insurance.

**Table 6: Elderly person spend (average) for medical cause in a month**

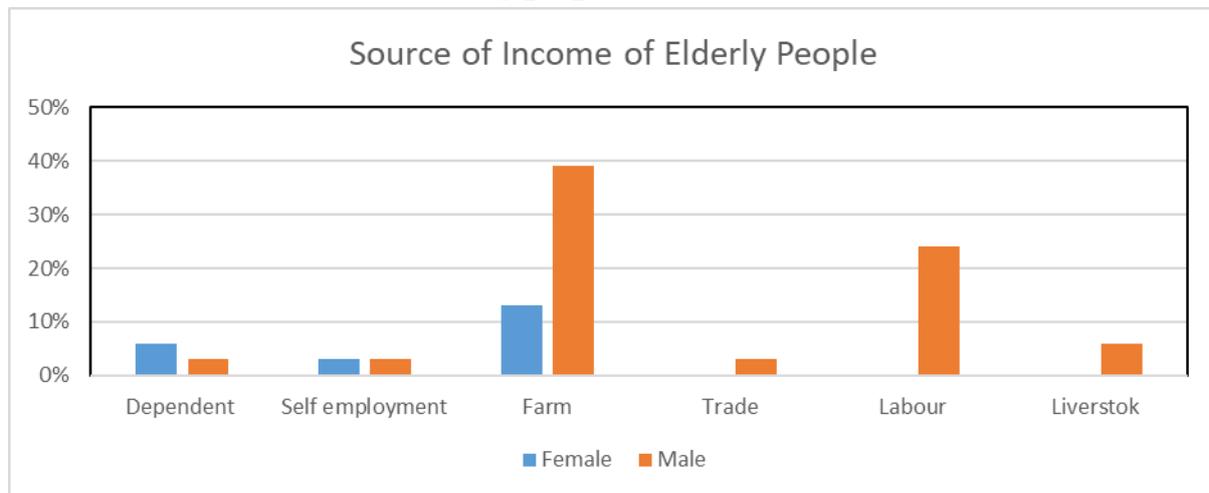
| Respondents | Below Rs. 500/-<br>(percentage) | Rs. 500 – 1000/-<br>(percentage) | Above Rs.1000/-<br>(percentage) | Not Replied<br>(percentage) |
|-------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Female      | 32.25                           | 13.0                             | Nil                             | 6.75                        |
| Male        | 29.03                           | 6.45                             | 6.45                            | 6.07                        |

Medical expenditure the elderly people spend ranges from below Rs 500/ to above Rs. 1000 in a month. A small percentage of the elderly female spend between Rs. 500 – Rs. 1000 while none of them spends above Rs. 1000. Only 32.25% of the elderly female spend below Rs. 500 as their medical expense per month. 29.03% of the elderly male spend below Rs. 500 per month whereas the percentage of the elderly male having expenditure in the range of Rs. 500 – Rs. 1000 is 6.45. The percentage is same for them who spend above Rs. 1000 per month as medical expense.

#### Income & Assets:

It is unfortunate a large number of Elderly people of Jhero Vilege has to work for their daily bread and butter even in their old age. Mostly they work in paddy field as share croppers (Bhaag- chashi). Near about 40% of male Elderly is attached with farming followed by female (13%) Elderly people in Jhero village. They work as labour in the farms of others. Some (24%) male elderly people also do the job of waged based labour. Few are dependents on other member of the family. 6% of male respondents have Livestock in their Household.

**Chart 1: Source of Income of Elderly people.**



On the question of land ownership (agricultural purpose), only 19% of male Elderly people say that they have their own land but rest don't have any land. 35% of the respondent of this village don't have any account in any bank. Fifty percent of these Elderly people have cash in their hands while the rest fifty don't have any cash with them.

**Elderly People & Household work:**

In the village only 3% of Elderly women respondents are not associated with any Household work. Rest of the Elderly women respondents actively take part in various kind of household work. 50% of Elderly women cook food for the household and simultaneously they work as wage labour in agricultural land. 45% of elderly women respondent have the responsibility for washing and cleaning. Those Elderly person who are single they used to do most of the household work by themselves. Else, 25% of Elderly men cook and clean their cloths by themselves.

**Communication & Entertainment:**

The roads towards the Jhero village from the Highway is good in condition and Pucca. But very few allies are still need to take care of. The Elderly people of Jhero village mainly get news from Television that has been installed in marketplace. Some Elderly people have Television (26%) in their own House. Among them, only 3% have LED Television. The Elderly people revealed that they can only recharge their Television whenever they have money in hand, otherwise they can't afford the cost of this mass media.

In the Jhero Village about 55% of the respondent have Electricity in their house, and they pay bill manually. No Radio or Transistor and Newspaper has been found there.

In the study, it has been seen 42% of the Household own only one Mobile phone that is basic phone to take the calls only. No smart phone has been found among the respondent. So it can be said that the elderly people are dependent on their Household in case of Mobile Communication.

When the respondent has been asked about their leisure , they became astonished. Actually they have answered that they generally have work on which they depend on .

### Summary of Discussion:

#### The Livelihood Crisis:

In Jhero, the elderly primarily rely on three sources of income:

1. **Agriculture/Labor:** Many continue to work in the fields despite physical ailments.
2. **Remittances:** Money sent by children working in cities.
3. **Government Pensions:** Schemes like the *Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS)*.

**The Globalization Factor:** As globalization increases the cost of living, the meager pension of ₹1,000 per month (approx.) is vastly inadequate. Furthermore, as the younger generation adopts "global" lifestyles, their ability or willingness to send money back home is decreasing, creating a "liquidity crunch" for the elderly.

#### Health and Digital Divide:

While globalization has brought better medicine to Hooghly's towns, the connectivity in Jhero remains poor. The elderly suffer from chronic issues like arthritis, hypertension, and cataracts. Moreover, the "Digital India" push has inadvertently marginalized them; many struggle to use ATMs or mobile apps required for pension verification (biometrics), leading to technological exclusion.

#### Social Isolation:

One of the most poignant findings in Jhero is the sense of loneliness. With the migration of the youth to IT hubs or construction sites in South India, the elderly are left in large, crumbling ancestral homes. The village square (the *Chayer Dokan* or tea shop) remains their only social outlet, but even this is shrinking as digital entertainment replaces communal gatherings.

#### Challenges to Livelihood:

The research identified four major threats to the livelihood of the elderly in Jhero village:

- **Health Shocks:** A single hospital visit can wipe out years of savings.
- **Inflation:** The rising price of essential goods (fuel, medicine) outpaces fixed pensions.
- **Loss of Traditional Role:** In the past, the elderly were "consultants" for agriculture. Today, modern seeds and technology have made their traditional knowledge seem "obsolete" to the youth.
- **Physical Security:** Empty houses with elderly residents are becoming targets for petty crimes, a side effect of changing village dynamics.

#### Recommendations:

Based on the micro-level study, the following measures are suggested:

1. **Mobile Healthcare Units:** Given the lack of transport in Jhero, the government should provide doorstep geriatric care.
2. **Revision of Pension:** The pension amount must be indexed to inflation to be meaningful in a globalized economy.
3. **Skill Utilization:** The elderly can be engaged in supervising MGNREGA projects or teaching local crafts to preserve heritage.
4. **Community Housing:** Encouraging "co-living" spaces within the village where the elderly can support each other.

### Conclusion:

The Elderly people mostly depend on their children though a small percentage of the Elderly people are not taken care of by their children. The practice of nuclear family system is absent in the village and so, the associated problems of nuclear family vis-à-vis elderly people are also not there. They live alone being dependent on begging for their livelihood. A section of the Elderly people defecates in the open. Though there exists government scheme to help the Elderly people, they don't get those benefits. The local politicians don't always select the beneficiaries based on the eligibility criteria, but on the political relations. The old people can't afford the proper diets for their health. While some work in the field against their health, some others being dependent on their children, don't work, and spends time idly or with their grandchildren. Even today, one can find a family even without a basic mobile phone, and depend on their neighbours for telephonic communication with their relatives. Poverty is so glaring there. Globalisation hasn't made any improvement in the livelihood of the Elderly people of the village.

The study of Jhero village reveals that globalization is an obvious process that is reshaping the livelihood of rural Indians. While it brings the promise of progress, it often ignores those who cannot keep up with its pace. To ensure that the elderly in West Bengal live with dignity, we must move beyond mere financial capabilities and create a social ecosystem that values their presence. The "Jhero Model" of study suggests that local problems need local, empathetic solutions combined with robust state support.

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