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## UNIT 14 REPORTING SOCIAL ISSUES

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### Structure

- 14.0 Introduction
- 14.1 Learning Outcomes
- 14.2 Statistics
- 14.3 Problems/Reasons for Dependency
  - 14.3.1 Economic
  - 14.3.2 Government's Role in the Economic Policies
  - 14.3.3 Media's Role/Involvement in Spreading Awareness
- 14.4 Media Coverage Focusing On Issues such as
  - 14.4.1 Health Care
  - 14.4.2 Income and Housing
  - 14.4.3 Social Networks and Customs
  - 14.4.4 Abuse of Older People
  - 14.4.5 Safety and Security
  - 14.4.6 Road Safety
- 14.5 Media's In Educating People
- 14.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.7 References and Further Reading
- 14.8 Key Words
- 14.9 Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

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### 14.0 INTRODUCTION

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This unit is designed keeping in mind a holistic view of social problems. In the Indian context, such issues are multi-farious and inter-linked, but most get covered in areas like crime, political, legal, civic, etc. about which you have studied. In this unit, we focus more on the issues of the larger population which has a common thread across all socio-economic classes like old age and disability.

Is old age a curse or a blessing? Well, old age is not something to be savoured, but at the same time it should not become a curse too. Our elderly parents surely deserve a better fate than that. It would be best not to generalise it and make the best of one's life after 60 by ageing gracefully, keeping fit health wise, security wise and remaining happy and cheerful. Ageing is an inevitable natural process in human life cycle. Elders encounter a host of challenges in their lives with changes in their body, mind, thought process and the living patterns. Ageing refers to a decline in the functional capacity of the organs of the human body. However, it should not imply that everything has been finished. Even though the young people have great responsibility to take care of their elders, there are lots of other initiatives which the elders themselves may take up. Following a positive life style, developing a helping attitude and remaining socially active all these have a lot to do in their well being.

With increasing options and services available for post retirement life, one should plan old age with excitement so that it is hassle free and secure. The elderly should try not to depend on children or have any expectation from them as non fulfillment of these expectations will only lead to misery. The elderly at one time used to be the most respected members of the family and taking care of them was the responsibility of their children. However, the growth of individualism, materialism among the youth in today's modern and fast paced life coupled by western influence has led to their alienation and isolation from the families. Migration from rural areas also resulted in the growth of nuclear families in the towns and cities.

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## 14.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

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After working through this unit, you will be able to:

- describe the overarching social issues of Indian society;
- appreciate the problems and reasons for dependency of the ageing population; and
- analyse the need and kind of media coverage required for social issues.

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## 14.2 STATISTICS

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According to a recent UN report on “ageing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century”, India will beat China, the world's most populous nation hands down in the number of centenarians and will be closest to Japan, which by 2050 will have about 6.17 lakh centenarians. The number and proportion of centenarians is growing much faster. India's present number of centenarians of close of 30,000 is expected to reach anywhere between 1.51.lakh and 6.2 lakh, whereas China is expected to have 2.62 lakh persons aged 100 or over by 2050. Globally, the number is expected to increase to 32 lakh by 2050. The number of people aged 80 or above, often referred to as the oldest old has been increasing more rapidly than the older population as a whole. According to the United Nations report, globally, 1.6% of the population is aged 80 or above and the proportion is projected to rise to 4.3% by 2050, reaching 40.2 lakh.

Currently Japan is the only country with over 30% of its population aged 60 or over, but by 2050, 64 countries would have 30 % of their population consisting of older people.

Population ageing is more rapid in the developing countries like India than developed countries. Today, almost two in three people aged 60 or above live in developing countries, but by 2050, nearly four in five will live in the developing world. Population projections show that by 2050, the elderly population in India for the first time will surpass the population of children under 15 years. The elderly make up for 8% of India's population currently, which is likely to increase to 19 % by 2050.

Life expectancy at birth has risen across the world and in India it has gone up from 63.9 years to 66.1 years. According to a latest data life expectancy in urban India has increased from 68.4 to 69.6 years, whereas in rural India it has gone up from 62.7 to 64.9 years. According to experts three big reasons that lead to increase in life expectancy are better food supply and nutrition, healthier life style and better hygiene.

Declining fertility rates, lower infant mortality, increasing survival rate of older people due to better medical care has substantially resulted in ageing. According to a study

- 62 % of the elderly are dependent on the financial support from children for their survival.
- 32% only of the elderly avail pensions or support of any kind, skewed due to the presence of retirees.
- Reading Newspaper/magazines, watching TV, prayer, shopping, and walking are the leisure time activities of the elderly.
- Feeling of isolation is high among nearly 5 % of the elderly that are living alone without any support.

Today, the elderly demand that society should provide care, fulfillment and dignity besides independence and participation. After all, the last stage of life holds as much potential for growth and development as earlier stages of life. Infact, in our fast ageing world, older people will increasingly play a critical role - through volunteer work, transmitting experience and knowledge, helping their families with caring responsibilities and increasing their participation in the paid labour force.

Already now, older persons make major contributions to society. For instance, throughout Africa –and elsewhere - millions of adult AIDS patients are cared for at home by their parents. On their death, orphaned children left behind (currently, 14 million under the age of 15 in African countries alone) are mainly looked after by their grandparents.

It is not only in developing countries that older persons' role in development is critical. In Spain for example, caring for dependent and sick individuals (of all ages) is mostly done by older people (particularly older women); the average number of minutes per day spent in providing such care increases exponentially with the carers' age: 201 minutes if the carer is in the age group 65-74 and 318 minutes if aged 75-84 - compared to only 50 minutes if the carer is in the age group 30-49 as per a study conducted in Spain.

Such contributions to development can only be ensured if older persons enjoy adequate levels of health, for which appropriate policies and their implementation are in place.

Care and support for the elderly population is becoming an important issue, is apparent from the growing number of elderly in the population. Older persons should be treated as respected Citizens of our country requiring strengthening of their legitimate place in the society and we should help them in every possible way so as to enable them to live their last phase of life with purpose, dignity and peace.

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### **14.3 PROBLEMS/REASONS FOR DEPENDENCY**

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Given the trend of aging population in the country, the older population faces a number of problems and adjusts to them in varying degrees. Many have no problems, yet there is a risk of increasing dependency. The main reasons for dependency are –

- Poverty on account of low, insufficient income, absence of social security of pension to support themselves.

- Sickness or ill health on account of poor and bad diet.
- Physical disability on account of arthritis.
- Mental Impairment on account of dementia.
- Isolation as friends and families move away or die.
- Bereavement on the death of spouse.
- Non availability of opportunities for creative use of free time.

The needs and problems of the elderly vary significantly according to their age, socio-economic status, health, living status and other characteristics.

### **14.3.1 Economic Problems**

Among the several problems of the elderly in our society, economic problems occupy an important position. Mass poverty is the Indian reality and the vast majority of the families have income far below the level, which would ensure a reasonable standard of living. As people live longer and into much advanced age (75 years and over), they need more intensive and long term care, which in turn may increase financial stress on the family. Inadequate income is a major problem of elderly in India. The most vulnerable are those who do not own productive assets, have little or no savings or income from investments made earlier, have no pension or retirement benefits, and are not taken care of by their children or live in families that have uncertain low incomes and many mouths to feed.

### **14.3.2 Government's Role in Economic Policy**

Though Government's economic security policy is covering retirement benefits for those in organised sector that includes employees of the Central and State Governments, economic security benefits for those in the unorganised sector like landless agricultural workers, small and marginal farmers, artisans, unskilled labourers on daily, casual or contract basis, self employed and old age pension for rural elderly. Given high growth rate among the elderly and also high longevity, serious thinking on the part of planners is needed to evolve suitable programmes and schemes and bring reforms in the existing pension policies. Old age pension remains a concern in developing countries like India where a large part of employment lies in the unorganised sector. The demand for old age pension should be looked upon as recognition of their contribution to the economy. It is time they were given the much needed economic support and rest after a life time of hard work.

The beneficiaries among the older persons for various schemes and programmes initiated by the government are very insignificant when compared to the very high size of their population and the growth rate among them. Further, given the level of urbanisation and industrialisation of India, economic factors and diminishing value system are likely to make welfare of the elderly as the most critical area for intervention. There is need to protect and strengthen the institution of the family and provide such support services as would enable the family to cope with its responsibilities of taking care of the elderly. A holistic approach to population ageing taking social, economic and cultural changes into consideration is needed to effectively solve the emerging problems of the elderly.

### 3.3.3 Media’s Role in Spreading Awareness

Based on the existing diversities in the ageing process, media needs to pay greater attention to the increasing awareness on the ageing issues and its socio-economic effects in order to promote the development of policies for dealing with an ageing society.

The unbiased reporting of social issues like old age will call for the concerted efforts of the Government, Non-Government organisations, religious institution and individuals not only to understand, but also to solve or at least mitigate the whole gamut of problems resulting from a greying society so that the aged people can lead dignified and meaningful life.

#### Check Your Progress 1

- Note:** 1) Use the space given below for your answer  
 2) Compare your answer with those given at the end of this Unit.

1. What are the problems and reason for dependency of the elderly?

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## 14.4 MEDIA COVERAGE FOCUSING ON ISSUES SUCH AS

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Media coverage is invaluable for publicising the issues and difficulties faced by older persons such as- health care,

### 14.4.1 Health Care

India is the only country where in majority of the population has to spend from their pocket for an illness. One major health stroke in a family wipes out the entire family’s earnings of a life time. As such most of the health care is beyond the reach of majority of Indians, its time media through awareness campaigns wakes up the government to completely revamp the health care in India for the elderly. Improved health care facilities, advanced equipments, geriatric wards in hospitals must be made easily accessible to the poor in rural areas with the yearly allocation of state funds. Government needs to make detailed and tangible action plan for the various schemes launched and a definite time-line for their implementation. E.g. many states have not yet woken up putting in place systems or infrastructure in executing National Programme for Health care of Elderly (NPHCE). Mere commitment on paper would do nothing in ameliorating programs.

The challenge for India, as for all countries over the world, is not only to add further years to life, but more importantly to add life to years and to ensure that the elderly are able to live full, enriching and productive lives and for this to be possible, good health is the key.

There is a provision that escalators/lifts be installed on stations, but this facility is yet to be installed at most of the stations. It is often a torture for senior citizens to climb up or come down the platform bridges with luggage. Provision of escalators or ramps facility will be a great boon for the Senior Citizens, elderly women, the

sick and the disabled. Where escalators cannot be installed, provision of ramps should be considered. The more detailed these plans are, the better services the elderly will receive. Government should highlight nation wide programmes for sensitisation of health care workers to recognise and develop a protocol for treatment of the elderly people.

#### 14.4.2 Income and Housing

Since access to employment opportunities, transportation, housing and income are key concerns; the media should highlight financial literacy, such as impact of finances on retirement, when all that one has to subsist is social security like pension and personal savings, inheritances, and lifestyles for those on fixed incomes as also avenues for continuity in employment and post retirement opportunities.

India belongs to a league of 12 countries including China, Japan, Korea, which have passed national laws and is among 21 nations which have a national policy on older persons. To improve the quality of lives of Senior Citizens the Indian Government announced The National Policy on Older Persons (NPOP) in 1999. It envisages state support to ensure financial and food security, health care, shelter, protection against abuse and other needs of older persons. Though the policy mandates every state to have its own policy for elderly persons but, unfortunately, only seven states in India have formulated their own policy. Despite repeated reminders no significant budget allocations have been made to implement welfare measures in terms of health care provisions, special geriatric set ups or income security. The media should give adequate coverage on regular basis so that the proper implementation of the (NPOP) takes place at the earliest.

Currently, persons above 60 years get pension of Rs 200 per month and those over 80 years get Rs 500 per month under the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension scheme (IGNOAPS) constituted by the Ministry of Rural Development. However, this is limited to persons below the poverty line. Of the total elderly population, only 1.97 crore are beneficiaries of this existing government scheme, which means that only one in every five over 60 years old receive this pension.

Public distribution system should reach out to cover all senior citizens living below the poverty line and revision in paltry sum of old age pension should be reworked as even several low and middle income countries like Bolivia with per capita GDP about 40 % higher than that of India pays a pension of about Rs 1500 per month. Lesotho, with per capita GDP that is about two third that of India's pays Rs 2300 per month and Kenya with just half the per capita GDP of India pays over Rs 1250 per month. Even Nepal, with per capita GDP about one third that of India's pays a pension of Rs 313 per month to its elderly. It is observed that taxes paid by the elderly population substantially exceed the benefits they receive.

Welfare- Senior citizens, especially widows, single women and oldest old should be eligible for Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme. They should be provided additional pension in case of disability. The scheme should be reviewed every five years. Housing complexes for single older men and women should be looked into by the Government.

Government should develop a robust social security system that not only ensures income security to the older persons but, also gives them opportunities for income generation. To encourage bonding with parents, Government should develop policies and schemes such as tax relief, rebates on medical expenses and giving preference in the allotment of houses to those children who live with their parents.

Government should promote the importance of family for the well being of older persons and should have programmes to promote family values, and desirability of inter-generational bonding. All this can be given adequate coverage and highlighted by media from time to time.

### **14.4.3 Social Networks and Customs**

Poor social interaction with family and friends, poor social networks, and those without families are some other difficulties faced by senior citizens. As more people live longer they are also increasingly disconnected. To promote interaction of elderly with neighbourhood associations and enrolment in special programmes in rural and urban areas, older people are encouraged to network locally and keep a check on each other and their families in order to detect crime against them. Educational programmes like computer education, pottery designing and yoga for older people should be encouraged as these activities besides promoting a healthy life style would help elderly to put their free time to good use. Protective services should be established and linked to help lines, legal aid etc.

### **14.4.4 Abuse of Older People**

A study on abuse of India's elderly, conducted across cities and involving over 5,500 older people revealed shocking findings that almost 32% of them have faced abuse. The son has been found to be primary abuser in 56% of cases followed by daughter-in-law in 23% cases. Occasional articles in newspapers hear of elder abuse but that is about all. Some of the elderly are ousted from their home by their own children, some are beaten until death and some are exploited socially. Older people often get very shabby treatment at the hands of their children over petty matters of day to day expenditure which itself becomes meagre at old age after retirement. It is common scenario that if parents are rich, the children are always eying their money and property and at times engage them in ugly property disputes. A sense of insecurity prevails all the time. They are isolated and cut off from society in some cases where son and daughter-in-law do not let them interact and move around freely in the society.

The old people are not looked after properly and their health problems are neglected. Due to the abuse and mental trauma they suffer, some of them leave home and stay in old age homes. This is a problem that largely gets swept under the carpet, and remains within the four walls of the house. It is grossly under reported and un-discussed as the older people themselves do not want to discuss it and the relatives and neighbours who are aware of this do not want to get involved. Although the president of India has given assent to the The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act 2007 which punishes children who abandon parents with a prison term of three months or fine has yet not been fully implemented in all the states. The law can be very effective as a deterrent against neglect and abandonment of senior citizens, but unfortunately even after five years many states have not yet set up tribunals meant to hear disputes.

### **14.4.5 What can Media do?**

The media should continue to spread awareness amongst people regarding the legal rights they have in hand for fighting against the atrocities they are subjected to. Under these rights parents cannot be evicted from a house without due process of law if they have been staying there from before. They can also demand maintenance from children in the same way that a wife can demand it from her

husband. The Domestic Violence Act too provides parents with the right to seek relief from any kind of abuse. Nation wide programmes in schools and colleges through media should sensitise children and young adults towards ageing and the needs of elderly people.

In the present scenario of nuclear families, awareness about social value of senior citizen needs to be created. These days a large percent of the senior citizens are living alone as either the younger generation does not have the time to take care or consider it a burden. Many of them now prefer to be independent in their own homes or want to lead a hassle free life in senior citizens homes. The trend of appointing care takers to give company to elderly is fast catching up. People should be given training to become professional care takers of elderly.

Now old people are mustering courage to speak up and report about painful legal battles over property and other crime and abuse against them by their own children and families. Innovative campaigns along with media coverage can help them regain their lost esteem and assets.

#### **14.4.6 Safety and Security**

Even though senior citizens form a sizeable vote bank, the state governments have not shown much interest towards their protection and security. Since their fragility and vulnerability makes them easy targets for criminals, security drive campaigns by police for older people can further help them fight against the crime by following advise on protection measures. Punishment for crime against senior citizens especially widows and those living alone and disabled should be tackled by community awareness, media and policing. Media should emphasize the role of police to keep a friendly vigil and provide comprehensive plan for security of senior citizens whether living alone or as couples. Senior citizens should be made aware of the facilities provided by the police such as toll free help lines and their registration with a particular beat officer. Interaction of the elderly with neighborhood associations and enrolment in special programmes in urban and rural areas should be highlighted.

#### **14.4.7 Road Safety**

Road traffic accidents have been the biggest cause of death for those aged above 60 years partly by fast moving vehicles and partly on account of badly designed roads. The disabled or aged persons are not in the thought process of people in-charge of redesigning urban infrastructure to make it elderly friendly. To avoid pedestrian road accidents, provision of foot paths should be statutorily provided and ban on speed brakers should be removed.

Media can definitely help in bring about a change in society's attitude by continuously highlighting the emerging issues and areas of action for elders. The correct and right portrayal of elderly people in the mass media influences the viewer's explicit and implicit attitudes and beliefs towards them and old age. The most important deterrent in senior citizen's mobility is the lack of safe and convenient public transport. For those who would like self driving, the chaotic dangerous traffic conditions frighten them. Journalists should not shy away from covering and highlighting the non availability of age friendly, barrier free access in buses, bus stops, railway stations, airports and transportation within the airports, banks and hospitals where they have to stand in the common queue and do not have a separate seating area in parks, places of worship, cinema halls, shopping malls and other places that senior citizens and the disabled frequent.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- Note:** 1) Use the space given below for your answer  
 2) Compare your answer with those given at the end of this Unit.

1. What is the importance of media coverage of social issues like healthcare, safety and abuse?

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**14.5 MEDIA’S ROLE IN EDUCATING PEOPLE**

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Media has an important role to play in highlighting social issues, identifying emerging social issues, the changing situation and areas of action. Media should dispel stereotypes and negative images about certain social issues. It should restrain from creating fear psychosis by responsible reporting, promoting intergenerational bonds and informing individuals, families, groups with appropriate information on ageing process. Resident Welfare Associations should encourage people to speak about such issues at special events organized by local government, which the media can attend such as religious ceremonies and festivals. RWA’s can run media awards for the best coverage of these issues. RWA’s should organise an eye catching event with older people, such as dramas or demonstration.

Journalists may work on new angles of everyday stories such as a child being cared for by a grand parent who has excelled in his/her school exam.

Plans, policies and accomplishments for the elderly by the elected government may be highlighted on ear marked days and anniversaries.

Journalists may also highlight unusual or touching stories about amazing individuals such as an older man caring for his sick son/daughter or an older woman who has set up an older people’s club where they can all meet to pursue their hobbies like reading, playing cards, watching movies and so on.

Young people often think old age is something they do not need to think about for a very long time, but actually everyone needs to consider it as we all have a part to play in the way in which age and being old is treated in society.

Unfair treatment solely on the grounds of someone’s calendar age (negative discrimination) should be avoided, as should preferential treatment and privileges granted because of age (positive discrimination). The correct criteria should take a person’s overall social situation into account. The media needs to highlight older people’s needs such as medication for chronic conditions and distribution of appropriate food and clothing. Media should through their campaigns highlight programmes in schools and colleges for sensitising tomorrow’s youth towards the needs of older people.

Senior citizen’s accounts in banks should be modified and simplified so that yearly process of filling and signing papers is not a cumbersome process and is hassle free.

- Need for services of mobile health clinics, health insurance cover to all senior citizens especially those over 80 years and who do not pay income tax should be highlighted in newspapers.
- Loans at reasonable rates of interest should be offered to senior citizens to start small businesses.
- More and more recreation centres and parks need to be developed for the aged people so that they can actively entertain themselves.
- Due coverage can be given to colonies which organise amusing events for the elderly people.

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## 14.6 LET US SUM UP

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The elderly citizens are in need of urgent attention. They do not need our pity but understanding, love and care. Media and educational institutions have a huge responsibility on their shoulders to sensitise youth about the rights and privileges of senior citizens. Our obligations at individual and collective levels are to make sure that these rights are fulfilled. Let them not feel irrelevant, rather make them feel a part and parcel of our lives.

In India, unlike in the USA, parents do leave their children (of course there are exceptions) on their own after they turn 18, but children find it hard to accept the fact that there are times when parents want to feel the love that they once shared with them. There are times when parents just want to relax and want their children to reciprocate their care. Every parent wants to see their child grow and be successful but no parent wants their child to treat them like an unnecessary load on their responsibilities. It is our duty to see that they do not spend the twilight years of their life in isolation, pain and misery. Elderly persons therefore need vital support that will keep important aspects of their lifestyles intact while improving their overall quality of life.

It is thus imperative on the part of media not only to examine the policies and programmes initiated by the Government, but also to see that their implementation takes place within the time line besides ensuring that the elderly are financially not unduly burdened with taxes, huge medical bills and are able to enjoy the given benefits and last but not the least to sensitize the youth of today in accepting their responsibility towards their elderly so that old age is a boon and a blessing which can be enjoyed and lived to the fullest.

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## 14.7 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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Azad India Foundation- on issues of old age.

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**14.8 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS**

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Check Your Progress 1 : refer to 3.2

Check Your Progress 2 : refer to 3.3

