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### Effect of age and gender on sociability, loneliness and depression among older adults

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#### Abstract

The aim of the study was to understand the effect of age and gender on sociability, loneliness and depression among older adults. The study was conducted in Kanpur Nager area of Uttar Pradesh. Using purposive sampling technique the questionnaire were administered to 65 elderly people between the ages of 61-80 years. Data was collected using interview method. Revised UCLA loneliness scale, Geriatric depression scale (GDS), and Berkman-Syme Social Network Index were used to assess loneliness, depression and sociability. The results suggested that gender had no effect on loneliness, depression and sociability. Age on the other hand had a significant impact on sociability, but the effect was not significant for depression and loneliness.

**Keywords:** Sociability, depression, loneliness, older adults

#### Introduction

"Older adults" typically refers to individuals who are in their later years of life, usually considered to be age 65 or older. However, it is important to note that the aging process is complex and can vary greatly from person to person. Some older adults may experience physical and cognitive decline, while others may remain active and healthy well into their later years. As of 2021, the estimated global population of older adults (defined as individuals aged 65 and over) is approximately 703 million, according to the United Nations Population Division. This number is expected to reach 1.5 billion by 2050, representing a significant demographic shift. In India, the population of older adults is also growing rapidly. As of 2021, the estimated population of older adults in India is approximately 118 million, according to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. This number is expected to reach 340 million by 2050.

As people age, they may experience changes in their social lives, which can have an impact on their mental health. Aging is an inevitable process that comes with various physical, psychological and social changes. These changes can influence an individual's social interactions, leading to changes in their sociability, loneliness, and depression. Social support has been identified as an essential factor in maintaining physical and mental health among older adults. In contrast, loneliness and depression are significant contributors to the decline in health and well-being among older adults (Lim, Baek, Lee, & Kim, 2022) <sup>[6]</sup>. Therefore, understanding the effect of age and gender on sociability, loneliness, and depression among older adults is crucial in promoting their overall health and well-being.

Sociability refers to the extent to which individuals engage in social activities and interact with others. Loneliness is the feeling of being alone or isolated, while depression is a mood disorder characterized by feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and loss of interest in activities. The purpose of this paper is to explore the effect of age and gender on sociability, loneliness, and depression among older adults.

Sociability is an important aspect of social functioning that can have a significant impact on the mental health of older adults. As people age, they may experience changes in their social lives, such as retirement, loss of friends and family members, and physical limitations, which can affect their ability to engage in social activities. Sociability plays a vital role in safeguarding older people from experiencing psychological distress and in improving overall well-being. Studies have shown that older men who did not participate in group activities showed poor self-rated health (Caetano, Silva, & Vettore, 2013) <sup>[2]</sup>. One of the major risk factors among older people that can lead to functional difficulties is social isolation. Losing important relationships in life can often lead to feelings of loneliness and depression.

Loneliness is the feeling of being alone and disconnected from others. It is a subjective feeling and can be influenced by various factors, such as personality, life experiences, and social support. One of the fastest growing psychosocial health issues in the modern era is loneliness. Loneliness is studied across various academic disciplines like social work, psychology, psychiatry, physical health and more. Loneliness is a common experience among older adults, and it can have a significant impact on their mental health.

Research has shown differences in loneliness with respect to gender (Wilson-Genderson, Heid, Cartwright, Collins, & Pruchno, 2022)<sup>[9]</sup>. Studies have shown that the burden of loneliness is higher among older adults as compared to young adults (Hossain, *et al.*, 2020)<sup>[5]</sup>. Loneliness is not subject to living alone or being alone in all cases, it has been argued that loneliness can occur even when people are around. Studies have shown that men living with people show decrease in loneliness compared to other groups in the study (Wilson-Genderson, Heid, Cartwright, Collins, & Pruchno, 2022)<sup>[9]</sup>.

Depression is a mood disorder that can have a significant impact on the mental health of older adults. Depression is characterized by feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and loss of interest in activities, and it can lead to a range of negative health outcomes, including cognitive decline, physical disability, and increased mortality. Depression among older adults is a significant issue, as it can have a negative impact on their overall quality of life. Some causes of depression among older adults are health issues, loneliness and isolation, lack of sociability, reduced sense of purpose, fears and the grief that accompanies the bereavement of loved ones. Meta reviews have shown the difference in depression among elderly based on gender. A review titled 'The Gender Difference in Depression: Are Elderly Women at Greater Risk for Depression Than Elderly Men?', states that older women show more depression as compared to older men (Girgus, Yang, & Ferri, 2017)<sup>[4]</sup>.

### Rationale

The topic of the effect of gender and age on sociability, loneliness, and depression among older adults is important to investigate due to the growing aging population worldwide. Social isolation and loneliness are common issues experienced by older adults and have been linked to various negative health outcomes, including depression and cognitive decline. Gender and age may play a significant role in an individual's level of sociability, loneliness, and depression. Additionally, older adults may experience unique challenges and stressors associated with their age and gender that can impact their sociability, loneliness, and depression. By examining the impact of gender and age on these factors, interventions can be developed to improve the well-being and quality of life of older adults, particularly those at higher risk for social isolation and depression.

### Objectives

- To study gender differences with respect to sociability, loneliness and depression among elderly persons
- To study the age-based differences with loneliness, depression and sociability in elderly persons

### Hypotheses

1. **H0:** There are no significant gender differences with respect to the sociability in old age.
2. **H1:** There are significant gender differences with respect to the sociability in old age.
3. **H0:** There are no significant gender differences with respect to the loneliness in old age.
4. **H2:** There are significant gender differences with respect to the loneliness in old age.
5. **H0:** There are no significant gender differences with

respect to the depression in old age.

6. **H3:** There are significant gender differences with respect to the depression in old age
7. **H0:** There are no significant age-based differences with respect to the sociability in old age.
8. **H4:** There are significant age-based differences with respect to the sociability in old age.
9. **H0:** There are no significant age-based differences with respect to the loneliness in old age.
10. **H5:** There are significant age-based differences with respect to the loneliness in old age.
11. **H0:** There are no significant age-based differences with respect to the depression in old age.
12. **H6:** There are significant age-based differences with respect to the depression in old age.

### Methodology

#### Sampling Procedure

The data was collected from 65 elderly people of Kanpur Nager area of Uttar Pradesh. Using purposive sampling technique the questionnaire were administered to 65 elderly people between the ages of 61-80 years. Data was collected using interview method.

#### Variables

**Independent variable:** Gender (Male, Female) & Age (61-71 & 71-81 years)

**Dependent Variable:** Depression, Loneliness, Sociability

#### Tool

Revised UCLA loneliness scale, developed by Russell, Peplau and Cutrona, in 1980, was used to measure loneliness. The measure has high internal consistency (coefficient alpha = .96) and a test-retest correlation over a two-month period of .73. Geriatric depression scale (GDS), first created by Yesavage, *et al.*, in 1982<sup>[10]</sup>, was used to measure depression. A short form GDS consisting of 15 questions was developed in 1986. Berkman-Syme Social Network Index (Berkman & Syme, 1979)<sup>[11]</sup> is a self-reported questionnaire for use in adults aged 18–64 years old that is a composite measure of four types of social connections: marital status (married vs. not); sociability (number and frequency of contacts with children, close relatives, and close friends); church group membership (yes vs. no); and membership in other community organizations (yes vs. no).

#### Data Analysis

Independent Samples T-test, One way ANOVA and Pearson's Correlation Coefficient were used to analyse the results.

#### Results & Discussion

The data was screened and the findings were presented in the order of objectives of the research.

#### Demographics of the Participants

Most participants were between 71-81 (52%) years old, followed by 61-71 years. Sixty eight percent were males and 30% were females and some did not disclose their gender. Most participants, i.e. 33 lived in joint families. During old

age it is well expected to find to most people living in joint families, where they are supported by their family members. However 32 participants lived in nuclear families, which is almost 50%. Most participants, were graduates, and post graduates.

**Table 1:** Mean, SD, t-value & significance of gender differences with respect to the sociability in old age

Sociability	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
Males	7.7	3.8	.392	.697
Females	7.3	4.0		

The above table depicts the Mean, SD, t-value & significance of gender differences with respect to the sociability in old age. The t-value was .392 which was not significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis, i.e., There are no significant gender differences with respect to the sociability in old age, was accepted and the alternate hypothesis, i.e., There are significant gender differences with respect to the sociability in old age was rejected. The mean differences suggest that males had a slightly higher sociability than females. Panwar, Kumar & Chellappan in 2019 [7], found no gender differences in sociability, in line with the current study.

**Table 2:** Mean, SD, t-value & significance of gender differences with respect to the loneliness in old age

Loneliness	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
Males	53.2	4.4	.070	.945
Females	53.0	7.7		

The above table depicts the Mean, SD, t-value & significance of gender differences with respect to the loneliness in old age. The t-value was .070 which was not significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis, i.e., There are no significant gender differences with respect to the loneliness in old age, was accepted and the alternate hypothesis, i.e., There are significant gender differences with respect to the loneliness in old age was rejected. The mean differences suggest that males had slightly higher loneliness than females. These findings are similar to the findings of a study by Devkota, Mishra & Shrestha, in 2019 [3], where they found no significant difference in loneliness, with respect to gender.

**Table 3:** Mean, SD, t-value & significance of gender differences with respect to the depression in old age

Depression	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
Males	3.8	2.9	.285	.777
Females	3.6	3.1		

The above table depicts the Mean, SD, t-value & significance of gender differences with respect to the depression in old age. The t-value was .285 which was not significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis, i.e., There are no significant gender differences with respect to the depression in old age, was accepted and the alternate hypothesis, i.e., There are significant gender differences with respect to the depression in old age was rejected. The mean differences suggest that males had a slightly higher depression than females. Devkota, Mishra & Shrestha, in 2019 [3], found similar results where, gender did not significantly differ

with respect to depression. Gender differences in depression generally are seen across adolescence, and they decline across adulthood (Salk, Hyde, & Abramson, 2017) [8].

**Table 4:** Mean, SD, t-value & significance of age-based differences with respect to the sociability in old age

Sociability	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
61-71 years	8.7	3.4	2.63*	.011
71-81 years	6.2	4.0		

\*p<.05

The above table depicts the Mean, SD, t-value & significance of age-based differences with respect to the sociability in old age. The t-value was 2.63 which was significant at .01. Therefore, the null hypothesis, i.e., There are no significant age-based differences with respect to the sociability in old age, was rejected and the alternate hypothesis, i.e., There are significant age-based differences with respect to the sociability in old age was accepted. The mean differences suggest that 61–71-year-old age group had higher sociability than 71–81-year-olds. 61-71 year olds, generally are more mobile, they go on walks and have friends their age around, which tends to increase their sociability.

**Table 5:** Mean, SD, t-value & significance of age-based differences with respect to the loneliness in old age

Loneliness	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
61-71 years	53.1	4.4	.063	.95
71-81 years	53.0	8.2		

The above table depicts the Mean, SD, t-value & significance of age-based differences with respect to the loneliness in old age. The t-value was .063 which was not significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis, i.e., There are no significant age-based differences with respect to the loneliness in old age, was accepted and the alternate hypothesis, i.e., There are significant age-based differences with respect to the loneliness in old age was rejected. The mean differences suggest that 61–71-year-old age group had slightly higher loneliness than 71–81-year-olds. Devkota, Mishra & Shrestha, in 2019 [3] found a significant difference in loneliness across age groups, where 60-75 year olds had higher loneliness, however their bifurcation of age was in two parts, 60-75 years and >75 years.

**Table 6:** Mean, SD, t-value & significance of age-based differences with respect to the depression in old age

Depression	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
61-71 years	3.0	2.6	-1.77	.081
71-81 years	4.3	3.2		

The above table depicts the Mean, SD, t-value & significance of age-based differences with respect to the depression in old age. The t-value was -1.77 which was not significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis, i.e., There are no significant age-based differences with respect to the depression in old age, was accepted and the alternate hypothesis, i.e., There are significant age-based differences with respect to the depression in old age was rejected. The mean differences suggest that 61–71-year-old age group had lower depression than 71–81-year-olds. As people age a lot

more physical and mental illness become a part of life. Recent studies suggest that lower concentrations of folate in the blood and nervous system may contribute to depression, mental impairment, and dementia (American Psychological Association, 2012)<sup>[1]</sup>.

### Conclusion

The main focus of the study was to find out the effect of gender and age on sociability, loneliness and depression. In conclusion, the study found that gender did not have a significant effect on sociability, loneliness, and depression among older adults. However, sociability was found to be significantly affected by age, with older adults in the age group of 61-71 years being more sociable than those in 71-81 years. On the other hand, depression and loneliness were not significantly affected by age. These findings suggest that interventions aimed at improving social connectedness and reducing loneliness and depression among older adults should consider age as an important factor. Specifically, interventions that target older adults in the age group of 71-81 years may be particularly beneficial in enhancing sociability and reducing social isolation.

### Limitation

The study was conducted using purposive sampling technique, which makes the sample less representative. The sample of the study was small, making the results less generalizable.

### Recommendation

A larger, more representative sample would be suggested for further research. Other factors affecting sociability, loneliness and depression should be considered.

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