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IN RURAL ORISSA**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the familial system of care and support for the elderly, mainly focusing on the living arrangements, in a rural setting in Orissa. Data for this study come from a field survey conducted in the Bolangir district of Orissa during September 1989 and February 1990. For the original study all the 1107 households and 6033 population in five villages were covered. However, since the basic tenet of this research is to examine the living arrangements of the elderly, the analysis in this paper is mainly confined to those households where at least one elderly person aged 60 years or over is living. Thus, the sample is restricted to 271 households consisting of 341 elderly persons.

The results of the study indicate that the family is still the main social institution for the care of the elderly in rural Orissa. However, increased poverty and economic stress in rural Orissa is likely to erode the traditional family care and support for the elderly in general, and for the elderly women in particular. Therefore, unless additional socio-economic support is given to the households by the government, the households may not be able to continue the care for the elderly in future. Moreover, there is evidence of serious gender asymmetry in the support and care for the elderly: more female than male elderly are staying alone without direct support from their children. Female elderly, in general, lack access to and control over productive resources such as arable land as a result of patrilineal and patrilocal societal arrangements in rural Orissa. This further compounds their difficulty in obtaining enough income for survival. Therefore, there is a need for the government to pay special attention to the support and care for the elderly women.

JEL Classification: I38, J12, J14, H55

Key words: living arrangements, gender, property rights, social institution, patrilineal, patrilocal, elderly, poverty

I. Introduction

As a result of rapid declines in fertility and mortality, many of the developing countries over the past three decades have witnessed substantial increases in the number and proportion of their elderly population. However, many of the high-fertility countries are still demographically young. Although the proportion of the elderly in these countries is low, the size of the elderly population is undoubtedly alarming in some of these countries such as India. The estimated elderly population (60 years or over) of India in 1991 is 55 million, representing 6.54 per cent of the total population. It is projected that elderly population would increase to 76 million by the year 2001, representing 7.63 per cent of the total population (Bose, 1994; Gokhale et al., 1994). In fact, the number of elderly population in India is currently larger than the total population of many countries.

In relation to population aging, the family itself undergoes a transformation as a result of demographic changes which are part of the aging process, and the family also serves as a buffer, lessening the social and economic impact of population aging on its members. In other words, corresponding to the theory of demographic transition there is also a related theory of family transition (United Nations, 1994a, 1994b). However, systematic research on the process in which the changes in family and household structures are interacting with changes in population age structure in developing countries, has only begun. In particular, there is a need to expand the knowledge of how changes in the demographic relationships between the generations will change

intergenerational family relationships, particularly family care for the elderly.

In India, the family is the traditional social institution for the care of the elderly and is expected to continue the role of caregiver and as the principal source of support and security in old age. Generally, the familial system of care and support for the elderly includes emotional, social, economic and health support in old age. In reality, the capacity of the family to care for the elderly in a given social context, to a large extent, is dependent on the social and economic circumstances of the family, the social and cultural norms within which it functions, and its changing structure resulting from industrialisation and urbanisation, as well as on the availability of quality support services. The large number of families who live under the poverty line, for instance, cannot possibly provide the care and support for the elderly that they are traditionally expected to (Chang, 1994).

The current situation of the elderly is reflected in their living arrangements. In fact, living arrangements are an important component of the general well-being of the elderly. The most crucial aspect of living arrangements of the elderly is co-residence with adult children in extended families or multi-generational households, where kin provide income, personal care and emotional support to the elderly. The elderly not only receive care and support from children, they also contribute to the overall well-being of the family in terms of their support in child care, family decision making and other household tasks and daily chores. In India the older people are viewed as an integral part of the family, with high esteem and prestige. Not only family provides economic and emotional needs of the elderly, the elderly enjoy absolute authority over the younger generations. However, the recent literature suggests that social and economic support for elderly people at the level of the family is related

to their control over assets such as land, among other property. Once this is eroded, their status in family settings is severely undermined (Petri, 1982; Sen, 1994).

In recent years, the traditional value system within the family in India seems to be gradually diminishing. As a result the traditional position and status of the elderly have been undermined by several factors such as: (a) decline in the institution of joint family system; (b) fewer children due to the acceptance of small family norm; (c) increasing participation of women in economic activity; (d) migration of the younger members to cities for employment; (e) paucity of adequate housing; (f) changing lifestyles and values arising from urbanisation and according priority to the needs of the immediate family; and (g) gradual breakdown of the system of common ownership of the means of production such as land due to changing rural economic structure (D'Souza, 1989; Dandekar, 1993; Shah, 1993; Bose, 1994; Gokhale, 1994; Irudaya Rajan, Mishra and Sarma, 1995).

These rapid social, economic and demographic changes are widely assumed to have profound implications for the circumstances under which the future elderly will live. Therefore the importance of and means to preserving the traditional value system within the Indian family, such as familial duty and family care for the elderly, has increased.

This study investigates the familial system of care and support for the elderly, mainly focusing on the living arrangements, in a rural setting in Orissa. It asks three questions: First, are elderly population different from the general population in the selected rural setting in terms of socio-economic and demographic characteristics? Second, are the households with the elderly population different from the total households in terms of economic status or poverty? Third, have the often observed co-residence patterns of elderly members with their children changed,

suggesting the weakening of the traditional familial system of support and care for the elderly?

II. Background

Orissa, which lies on the eastern coast along the Bay of Bengal, has 3.7 per cent of the total population and 4.7 per cent of the land area of the country. The economy of Orissa is predominantly agricultural. The agricultural sector absorbs 80 per cent of the total work force and contributes 50 per cent of the state's domestic product. About 87 per cent of the population of Orissa live in rural areas, compared with 74 per cent in India as a whole. According to the 1991 Census, the literacy rates are 63 per cent for males and 35 per cent for females in Orissa compared with 64 per cent and 39 per cent for males and females respectively in India (Census of India, 1991).

On the economic front, 48.3 per cent of Orissa's rural population compared to 33.4 per cent nationally lived below the poverty line in 1987-88, according to the officially released Planning Commission estimates. According to the Expert Group on Poverty (1993), the incidence of poverty in rural Orissa was even much higher than rural India (61.5 per cent and 37.6 per cent respectively). Regardless of the debate on the methodology of poverty estimation, it is clear that rural poverty in Orissa is the highest in the country. In 1990-91, Orissa's real annual per capita income was Rs. 1615 compared to Rs. 2239 for India as a whole (Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, 1993). Orissa is characterised, *inter alia*, by low agricultural productivity and the highest incidence of rural poverty in India. Agricultural modernisation and infrastructural development in Orissa lag behind most of India (World Bank, 1991).

With regard to status of women Orissa exhibits a bleak picture. The status of women is low and is associated with patriarchal and

patrilineal social structure, as noticed in Northern India (Dyson and Moore, 1983). The general pattern of social life is derived from the ideologies of dependence and the notions of social inferiority of the female - sanctified by scriptures and supported by the folklore (Jetley, 1984). Arranged marriages, physical and social segregation and extensive restrictions on women are some of the characteristic features of rural society.

A study conducted by the author in rural Orissa indicates that the perceived benefits from children is very high and most of the couples are dependent on children for short-term economic support and long-term old age support (Panda, 1994). It also reveals that poverty and low status of women are strongly linked to perceived benefits from children. In this rural setting, 20 per cent of the households are headed by women. Of these, two-thirds are headed by women who are in the oldest generation present in the household and who do not have a spouse in the household. These conform to the most common perception of female headship. In nearly all the other one-third female headed households, the woman who heads the household, belongs to the oldest generation in the household but does have a spouse present. Furthermore, poverty and female headship are found to be strongly linked (Panda, 1995). These results have serious implications on the living arrangements of the elderly, particularly elderly women. We shall discuss these issues in the context of the present paper subsequently.

In Orissa, as elsewhere in India, the property owned by parents is generally shared with adult children in intergenerational co-residence and joint production. Among the different forms of transfers from parents to adult children in India, inheritance, co-residence of sons with parents and dowry payments to daughters are predominant (Rosenzweig, 1994). To a great extent, therefore, wealth in the form of land is likely to determine the elderly persons' status in family settings.

A study undertaken by Irudaya Rajan et al.(1994) reveals interesting findings on the pattern of household structure, and occupational structure of the elderly persons in India (Table 1). It reveals that the mean household size in Orissa is lower as compared to India as a whole (5.3 and 5.6 respectively). The same is true for rural and urban areas. Moreover, the proportion of households with more than five members as well as the extended families are relatively lower in Orissa as compared to India as a whole (40.5 and 16.1 per cent respectively in Orissa and 44.6 and 20.2 respectively in India). In other words, the fact that the proportion of joint and extended families and average household size are lower in Orissa reflects, in general, less number of persons available in the families to take care of the elderly persons.

As regards occupational structure, Table 1 shows that the work participation rate among the elderly persons is almost similar for Orissa as well as India as a whole (nearly 40 per cent). However, the proportion of agricultural sector workers among the aged workers is substantially higher both in Orissa and India, although this proportion is relatively higher in Orissa. There exists significant rural-urban differentials as well. Within the agricultural sector, a higher proportion of elderly workers are agricultural labourers both in rural and urban areas of Orissa, as compared to their counterparts in the whole of India.

Table 1. Household structure, and occupational structure of the elderly persons: Orissa and India, 1981

Indicators	Orissa	India
Household Structure		
Mean household size		
Total	5.3	5.6
Rural	5.3	5.6
Urban	5.0	5.5

Households with more than five members	40.5	44.6
Households with extended families	16.1	20.2
Occupational Structure		
Work participation rate among elderly persons		
Total	38.8	40.1
Rural	39.7	43.1
Urban	29.9	27.5
Proportion of agricultural sector workers among aged workers		
Total	89.4	80.1
Rural	85.5	89.2
Urban	34.3	24.3

Source: Adapted from Irudaya Rajan et al. (1994).

III. Data and Methodology

Data for this study come from a field survey conducted in five villages in the Bolangir district of Orissa. Bolangir district lies in the hinterland of the state which is predominantly agricultural. Hence, Bolangir district serves as a locale of this study and is characterised by rural poverty.

All the 1107 households were covered from the five villages with similar socio-cultural milieu but different levels of development, measured in terms of use of electricity, extent of non-agricultural work and agricultural modernisation. Villages were selected so as to be representative of different development pattern found in rural Orissa.

The survey utilised a household questionnaire that elicited information from the head of the household on the demographic details of each resident, as well as the household's social and economic

characteristics. The survey was conducted during the months of September 1989 and February 1990. Interviews took place at the convenience of the respondent, usually at a time when privacy could be maximal.

Since the basic tenet of this paper is to examine the living arrangements of the elderly, the analysis is mainly based on those households where at least one elderly person is living. Thus, the sample is restricted to 271 households consisting of 341 elderly persons. The elderly are defined by following the usual definition of the elderly in India i.e., persons 60 or more years of age. Since data were collected in the original study on family characteristics and living arrangements, along with household economic status indicators such as income and ownership of landholding, it provides an unique opportunity for this paper to examine the living arrangements of the elderly by age, sex, marital status and household economic status or poverty.

IV. Empirical Results

Total and aged population

A look at the socio-economic and demographic profile of the total and aged population in the selected rural setting in Orissa reveals interesting results (Table 2). It shows that 5.7 per cent of the total population is aged 60 years or over. The proportion of elderly females is slightly higher than that of elderly males (5.7 per cent and 5.6 per cent respectively). The sex ratio (number of females per 100 males) is relatively less adverse in the age group 60 or over than in the total population. However, males outnumber females even among the elderly population. This trend is also true for India as a whole contrary to the trend in developed countries and most of the developing countries where females always outnumber males in the older age groups. The main reason why sex ratio in India is unfavourable to females is the low status of

women resulting in higher rates of mortality even at older age groups. This is true for Orissa as well.

Table 2. Socio-economic and demographic profile of the total and elderly population by sex: Rural Orissa, 1989-90

Characteristics	Total Population	Population aged 60 or over
Size of the Population		
Male	3118	174
Female	2915	167
Total	6033	341
Percentage of the population aged 60 or over		
Male	--	5.58
Female	--	5.73
Total	--	5.65
Sex ratio	93.5	96.0
Percentage literate		
Male	57.3	17.8
Female	35.9	6.0
Total	47.0	12.0
Percentage economically active		
Male	64.9	59.2
Female	46.9	34.1
Total	56.2	46.9
Percentage SCs & STs		
Male	34.9	35.1
Female	36.9	35.3
Total	35.9	35.2

Notes: (1) Sex ratio is defined as the number of females per 100 males.

(2) Economically active population includes paid as well as unpaid family helpers.

Source: Survey data (see text).

As regards the socio-economic characteristics of the total and aged population in the selected rural setting, there are striking differentials. Literacy in the population aged 60 or over for both males and females is much lower than the general population. The sex differentials in literacy is very high. The differentials in female literacy between the aged and total female population is much pronounced: while only 6 per cent of the females are literate in the aged population, more than one-third of the females are literate in the general population. Although the economically active in the population aged 60 or over for both males and females is lower than in the general population, nearly three-fifths of the males and one-third of the females even at age 60 or over are economically active. One would find a similar picture in rural India as well. Since a significant proportion of the elderly in rural areas work in agriculture where functional age is more important than chronological age, many elderly persons are economically active even after age 60. Finally, Table 2 shows that the distribution of SCs and STs for both males and females is almost similar across the total population as well as the elderly population (more than one-third of males and females are SCs and STs).

Total households and households with the elderly

Table 3 presents a comparative profile of economic status between all households and households with elderly members. The data indicate that about one-fourth of the 1107 households have elderly members. The household size of all households taken together (5.5) is 1.3 times higher than the households with elderly members (4.1). This clearly suggests that relatively less number of persons are available to care for the elderly in the households they reside. The differences in land ownership and income between the total households and households with the elderly members are substantial. While three-fourths of the total households are owning lands in rural setting as a whole, only three-fifths of the households with elderly members are owning lands.

Moreover, the average size of landholding per household is 1.8 times higher in total households as compared to the households with elderly members (3.2 acres and 1.8 acres respectively). Even the size of landholding per capita is relatively higher in total households. Similarly, there are systematic differences in income between the total households and households with elderly members. The annual household income is 1.8 times higher in total households as compared to the households where the elderly persons reside. Even the per capita income is one and half times higher in total households as compared to the households with the elderly members (Rs. 2124 and Rs. 1438 respectively).

Table 3. A comparative profile of economic status between total households and households with elderly members: Rural Orissa, 1989-90

Indicators	Total households	Households with elderly members
Number of households	1107	271
Percentage of households with elderly members		24.5
Mean household size	5.5	4.1
Percentage of landless households	24.8	39.9
Size of landholding per household (acres)	3.2	1.8
Size of landholding per capita (acres)	0.6	0.4
Mean household income(Rs)	11576	6341
Per capita income (Rs.)	2124	1438

Note: The annual income is the sum of income generated from agriculture, non-agricultural household activity, wage income and remittances.

Source: Survey data (see text).

To summarise the findings of Table 2 and 3, compared to the total population, the population aged 60 or over are less likely to be literate and economically active. Moreover, compared to the total households, the households with the elderly members are less likely to be owning land and have far less income. All these factors suggest that aged population and the households where they live are relatively more vulnerable. We do not try to seek answers to such disadvantages in well-being of the elderly as compared to the households without elderly persons or the total households, since it is outside the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, this is an important area for further research as it will reveal the inter-generational differences in living standards in a specific social context.

Indices of population aging

Table 4 shows the selected statistics on population aging in the rural setting in Orissa. It indicates that the percentage of population aged 60 years or over is 5.7 and the percentage aged 65 years or over is 3.7. As one would expect, the proportion of the elderly progressively declines with advancing age. The median age of the total population is 19.5 years, showing that the population is still demographically young. The old age dependency ratio is 9.6 which indicates that the elderly constitute about one-tenth of the working age population. The aging index is 15.9 which indicates that the elderly constitute slightly more than one-sixth of the young population (0 to 14 years of age). Finally, the care giver ratio is 28.2 which means that 100 women in age group 15-49 have 28 elderly persons to care for. This indicator symbolises the other role, apart from labour-market and child rearing activities, which women are expected to tackle, that of caring for the elderly in their households (Concepcion, 1994). The old age dependency ratio and care provider ratio indicate that, in the coming years with further declines in fertility and mortality, the increase of the elderly population will be much faster resulting in

higher values of these indices. In other words, in future, the responsibility to care for the elderly will fall heavily on young wage-earners or women or on the government.

Table 4. Selected statistics on population aging: Rural Oris 1989-90

Percentage of aged 60 years or over	5.7
Percentage of aged 65 years or over	3.7
Median age (years)	19.5
Old age dependency ratio	9.6
Aging index	15.9
Care giver ratio	28.2

- Notes: (1) Old age dependency ratio = persons 60 years or over / 100 persons 15-59 years.
(2) Aging index = persons 60 years or over per 100 persons aged 0-14 years.
(3) Care provider ratio = persons 60 years or over per women 15-49 years.

Source: Survey data (see text).

The results presented above give some idea about the nature and extent of aging population at the macro level. However, these are aggregate measures and do not reflect the situation of the elderly at the household or micro level. Following sections deal with the direct measures of care and support for the elderly in their households, primarily focusing on the nature of living arrangements of the elderly.

Demographic characteristics of the elderly

Table 5 presents the age and marital status distributions of the elderly by sex. Over three-fifths (62.5 per cent) of the elderly are aged 60-69 years (young-old) and the remaining 37.5 per cent are in their 70s (old-old). Owing to relatively higher life expectancy for women than for men, the proportion of elderly women is slightly more than that of elderly men in old-old category. As regards marital status, over half of the elderly (54 per cent) are married, 43 per cent are widowed; only 3 per cent are never married or divorced. However, there are substantial gender differences in marital status. A great majority (71 per cent) of the elderly males are married and only about one-fifth of them are widowed. On the contrary, majority (62 per cent) of female elderly are widowed and slightly more than one-third of them are married. The gender differences in marital

Table 5. Percentage distribution of the elderly by sex, according to age and marital status: Rural Orissa, 1989-90

Characteristics	Male	Female	Total
Age group			
60-69	63.2	61.7	62.5
70+	36.8	38.3	37.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Marital status			
Married	71.3	35.3	53.7
Widowed	25.9	61.7	43.4
Divorced	1.1	2.4	1.8
Never married	1.7	0.6	1.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(174)	(167)	(341)

Source: Survey data (see text).

status is the outcome of two factors: (a) the age differences between spouses (on an average females are at least five years younger to males), and (b) different rates of marriage (considerably higher proportion of males than females remarry). This observation is in conformity with earlier studies in India (Dreze, 1990; Cain, 1991). Since marital status of older persons deeply affects their living arrangements, support systems and individual well-being, the widowhood status of majority of elderly females is likely to depress economic well-being and care. On the other hand, since majority of the elderly males are married, they will be cared for by their wives.

Living arrangements of the elderly

Table 6 shows the distribution of elderly people aged 60 or over according to living arrangements. About four-fifths of the elderly live with their immediate family, where as 18 per cent live alone. The majority (57.2 per cent) of the elderly people live with one or more married sons where as only 4 per cent of the elderly people live with a married daughter. This clearly reflects the typical characteristics of patrilineal society, i.e.,

Table 6. Percentage distribution of the elderly according to living arrangements: Rural Orissa, 1989-90

Living arrangements	N	Percentage
Alone	62	18.2
Spouse only	41	12.0
Married sons	195	57.2
Married Daughter	14	4.1
Unmarried children	21	6.2
Others	8	2.3
Total	341	100.0

Note: "Others" refers to unrelated individuals and relatives other than those of immediate family, such as brother's or nephew's family.

Source: Survey data (see text).

the cultural norm of living with sons. Since residence pattern in this rural setting is patrilocal, like other north Indian set ups, daughters move to their husbands' homes after marriage while sons normally remain as members of their parents' households even after marriage. The elderly people live with one or more married sons either together in a large household or adjacent to it. When this preferred arrangement is not possible, the elderly people resort to co-live with other second-best alternatives as shown in other categories of living arrangements in the table.

It is disturbing to note that nearly one-fifth of the elderly are staying alone without direct support in the rural setting in Orissa. It does not mean, however, that potential support is altogether non-existent to the elderly persons living alone. But, for these persons, the amount of support is likely to be lower, and the degree of loneliness and social isolation is likely to be higher as compared to the elderly persons living with a spouse or children mostly in a two or three generational households. The data in Table 6 reveals that 12.5 per cent of the elderly persons are living with their spouse only. Therefore, nearly 30 per cent of the elderly people are living alone or with a spouse only. This gives a clear indication that the traditional family system in rural Orissa settings is gradually changing.

Demographic characteristics and living arrangements

Table 7 shows the distribution of the elderly according to living arrangements, broken down by age, sex and marital status. It indicates that old-old, women and widowed are more likely to live alone or with a married daughter, and they are less likely to live with married sons. In fact, there is not a single male or female elderly who are currently married in the category living 'alone'. Almost all the elderly living alone are widowed, except two cases who are single.

Table 7. Living arrangements of the elderly by age, sex and marital status (percentage): Rural Orissa, 1989-90

Living arrangements	Age		Sex		Marital status	
	60-69	70+	Male	Female	Married	Widowed
	N=213	N=128	N=174	N=167	N=183	N=148
Alone	16	21	12	25	-	39
Spouse only	12	13	13	11	22	-
Married sons	60	52	64	50	66	48
Married daughter	3	6	3	5	3	5
Unmarried children	6	6	6	6	8	5
Others	3	2	2	3	1	3

Note: "Marital status" excludes 10 cases of the elderly who are divorced or never married.

Source: Survey data (see text).

Economic status and living arrangements

In table 8, we present the distribution of elderly persons according to living arrangements, broken down by economic status. Economic status is measured by way of two indicators: ownership of arable land and per capita income. It is observed that differences in living arrangements by economic status presented in Table 8 is more striking than those by age and sex presented earlier in Table 7. Table 8 shows that elderly people living in landless and low income households are more likely to live alone or with spouse only, and they are less likely to live with married sons. While only 35 per cent of the elderly live with married sons in landless households, as high as 73 per cent of the elderly live with married sons in land-owning households. Similarly, although relatively less sharp, while 54 per cent of the elderly living with married sons belong to 'low'

per capita income category, 64 per cent of the elderly living with married sons belong to 'high' per capita income category. This result clearly suggests that the poor elderly are disadvantaged because they lack control over sons that comes with property ownership such as landholding. This aspect is emphasised and evidenced by many researchers in India and else where (Adishesiah, 1980; Cain, 1982; Petri, 1982; Goldstein, Schuler and Ross, 1983; Martin, 1990; Chadha, 1991).

Table 8. Living arrangements of the elderly by indicators of economic status (percentage): Rural Orissa, 1989-90

Living arrangements	Land ownership		Per capita income	
	No N= 142	Yes N=199	Low N=207	High N=134
Alone	35	6	23	10
Spouse only	17	9	13	11
Married sons	35	73	54	63
Married daughter	4	5	3	5
Unmarried children	8	5	5	8
Others	2	3	2	3

Note: The mean per capita income (PCI) per annum for the whole sample with elderly members is Rs. 1438. Thus, "low" and "high" per capita income is defined as "below mean PCI" and "above mean PCI" respectively.

Source: Survey data (see text).

To what extent do living arrangements by sex differ when cross-classified by demographic characteristics and economic status indicators? This issue is taken care of in the next section.

Gender and living arrangements

Table 9 shows the distribution of living arrangements of the elderly people by sex, according to age and marital status. It shows that the proportion of the elderly living alone increases considerably with age, ranging from 11 per cent for males less than 70 years of age to 28 per cent for females aged 70 or over. Furthermore, the likelihood of co-residing with married sons declines with age, reflecting the process of children leaving home to establish their own households. As regards differences by marital status, a significantly higher proportion of elderly males are living with their spouse and married children and a lower proportion of elderly males who are widowed live with married sons (73 per cent and 44 per cent respectively). In contrast, half of the married women live with their spouse and married children, and half of the widowed women live with married sons. Nearly two-fifths of elderly widowed of both sexes are staying alone.

Table 9. Living arrangements of the elderly by sex, according to age and marital status (percentage): Rural Orissa, 1989-90

Living arrangements	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	60-69	70+	60-69	70+	Married	Widowed	Married	Widowed
	N=110	N=64	N=103	N=64	N=124	N=45	N=59	N=103
Alone	11	14	22	28	-	42	-	38
Spouse only	12	14	12	11	18	-	32	-
Married sons	67	59	52	45	73	44	51	50
Married daughter	3	3	4	8	3	2	3	7
Unmarried children	5	9	8	3	6	9	12	3
Others	3	-	2	5	1	2	2	3

Source : Survey data (see text).

In Table 10 we present the distribution of living arrangements of elderly people by sex, according to economic status indicators. As regards differences by ownership of land, the striking feature is that of females: there is a seven-fold difference between the landless (42 per cent) and land-owning (6 per cent) elderly in the proportion living alone. Even for males, there is a four-fold difference between the landless (25 per cent) and land-owning (6 per cent) elderly in the proportion living alone. A similar, although relatively smaller, difference is found in terms of per capita income. For women, there is a twofold difference between the poor (30 per cent) and non-poor (14 per cent) women in the proportion living alone. For men also there is a two-fold difference between the poor and non-poor in the proportion living alone, but the levels are relatively smaller (16 per cent and 8 per cent respectively).

Table 10. Living arrangements of the elderly by sex, according to indicators of economic status (percentage): Rural Orissa, 1989-90

Living arrangements	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	Land-less N=57	Own land N=117	Land-less N=85	Own land N=82	Low PCI N=98	High PCI N=76	Low PCI N=109	High PCI N=58
Alone	25	6	42	6	16	8	30	14
Spouse only	21	9	14	9	13	12	12	11
Married sons	40	76	31	70	60	70	48	53
Married daughter	4	3	4	7	3	3	4	9
Unmarried children	9	5	7	5	6	7	5	9
Others	2	2	2	4	2	1	2	5

Source : Survey data (see text).

It is evident from Table 10 that for both sexes, the likelihood of the elderly living alone and co-residing with a spouse only, declines with economic status. On the contrary, for both sexes, the likelihood of the elderly co-residing with married sons increases with economic status. In other words, poverty is clearly linked to the elderly's status of living alone or living with spouse only. Therefore, in the rural Orissa setting under investigation, poverty rather than modernisation seems to be an important determinant of living arrangements. Since the poverty status of elderly women living alone is the highest as compared to even elderly men living alone, these women are really the vulnerable group. The primary reason for poverty of such women is lack of ownership of property rights such as land. This important issue has been highlighted by many researchers in the context of India and South Asia (Petri, 1982; Cain, 1983, 1986, 1991; Mason, 1992; Agarwal, 1994).

V. Conclusion

The results suggest that the elderly population in rural Orissa are less likely to be literate and economically active than the general population. Similarly, the economic status, measured in terms of ownership of arable land and income, is likely to be much lower in the households with elderly members than the total households. In other words, the elderly population and their households are likely to be disadvantaged both socially and economically as compared to the total population and total households in rural settings in Orissa. We reiterate that rural poverty in Orissa is the highest in the country. This relative vulnerability, therefore, indicates that families or households with elderly members need additional socio-economic support, mainly from the government, to effectively take care of the elderly members. This carries much relevance at this juncture when provision of social security for the elderly in India is far less than needed, and retirement benefits are applicable only to a very small proportion, that is, less than 10 per cent of the work force in the formal sector.

As regards living arrangements of the elderly, the results suggest that in accordance with the traditional cultural norm of a patrilineal and patrilocal society, majority of the elderly co-live with their married sons. However, it is disturbing to note that nearly one-fifth of the elderly are living alone and further one-tenth are living only with spouses without direct support and care from kin.

One of the striking findings of this paper is that living arrangements of the elderly are not homogeneous, but differ significantly in terms of age, gender, marital status and economic status. For instance, old-old, women, widowed and poor (landless and low income) are more likely to live alone. Moreover, the differences by economic status are remarkable when patterns of living arrangements are compared by gender. For instance, the poor elderly women are much more likely to live alone as compared to poor elderly men. This is explained by two factors: first, majority of the elderly women are widowed, and therefore as they grow old, the likelihood of living alone increases; second, in a patrilineal society such as Orissa, women do not inherit land, the most valuable resource for survival. Therefore, women more than men become vulnerable as they grow old. Unless the status of women is enhanced by providing access to and control over resources, the strong nexus between poverty, living arrangements, widowhood, and gender can not be disentangled.

In rural Orissa, increased poverty and economic stress is, in future, likely to erode the traditional family care and support for the elderly in general, and for the elderly women in particular. Because of the existing patriarchal family system in Orissa, elderly women have limited access to property rights which further compound their difficulty in obtaining enough income for survival. Therefore, there is a need for the government to pay special attention to the support and care for the elderly women. The immediate step, however, should be to provide social security to targeted elderly women who are living alone as they are the poorest of the poor.

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