



**HOW DEPRESSIVE ARE OUR ELDERLY POPULATION? –  
A PREVALENCE STUDY IN A SLUM OF WEST BENGAL.**

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**ABSTRACT**

Prevalence of mental depression among the elderly is gradually increasing in West Bengal along with other part of the world. A community based cross-sectional study was conducted among elderly population in a slum of Medinipur town, West Bengal, India to find out the prevalence of depression and its related factors. 10% of the elderly population (n=204) was selected by systematic random sampling. Yesavage's Geriatric Depression Scale was used for collecting the data. 59.8% of the subjects were suffering from depression and prevalence increased with age. Prevalence was significantly higher (83.33%) among respondents who were single and/or physically disabled (88.9%). Thus sympathetic and positive attitude to the depressed elderly people by the surrounding people can help the society.

**KEYWORDS :** Mental depression, Geriatric depression scale, sympathetic attitude



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## INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a state of mental function resulting in activities, fulfilling relationship with other people and the ability to adopt to change and to cope up with adversity. With increasing life expectancy more people are living with senile dementia and various psychiatric disorders. A meta-analysis has estimated prevalence of various psychiatric disorders in India which revealed all psychosis – 15.4%, epilepsy – 4.4%, mental retardation – 6.9%, neurotic disorder – 20.7%, alcoholism & drug addiction – 6.9%.<sup>(1)</sup> Prevalence of depression among elderly in a rural south Indian community was found to be 12.7%.<sup>(2)</sup> Mental depression generates an immense public health burden of disability. 37% of the population with depression feel difficulty in performing the seven functions of activities of daily life (ADL).<sup>(3)</sup> Mental depression is also associated with long term physical problem and frequent suicidal tendency. 25% of people aged 65 years and above experience more specific mental disorder such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse and dementia.<sup>(2)</sup> Millions of people in the world currently are affected by depression whose suffering and disabilities are prolonged as their condition goes undetected or often is not adequately treated. Though mental disorders are gradually taking a shape of silent killer, only few studies are there in India in this regard.<sup>(5, 6, 7)</sup> So, the current study tried to find out the prevalence of depression among elderly population, measure the levels of depression and identify some selected factors related to the illness in a slum community of Midnapore.

## MATERIALS & METHODS

A community based observational study, cross sectional in design was undertaken in a slum area of Colonelgola, Laldighi, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal, India during August 2011 to December 2011. 10% of the registered 2038 above 60 years population were chosen by systematic random sampling technique

making it 204 in number. Elderly population suffering from debilitating disorders like cerebro-vascular accidents, cancers and other serious illnesses were not included in the study. All the study samples were interviewed using Yesavage's Geriatric Depression Scale (Short form). The data collected was analysed by using suitable statistical tests (SPSS version 12).

## RESULTS

Among 204 participants under study, 80.39% belonged to age group 60-69 years followed by 15.9% in 70-79 years age group. Only 4.49% were in the age group 80 years and above. 52.94% were males. According to Yesavage's Depression Scale, 122(59.8%) were found to be depressive among whom 62(30.4%) were mild depressive and 60(29.4%) were suffering from severe depression. (Table -2) The prevalence of depression increased with increasing age. The prevalence of depression among the age group 60-69 years was 89(54.25%) whereas it was 25(80.63%) in the age group 70-79 years and 8(88.88%) among the 80 and above years. The difference was found statistically significant. It was observed that 148(72.55%) of the surveyed population were living with spouse, 6(2.94%) living separately and 50(24.51%) had lost their spouse. The prevalence of depression was more among the persons who lived separately or whose spouse had died. The prevalence was 73(49.32%) among the separated and widow/widower whereas only 49(83.33%) among the elderly population who lived together. The difference was found to be statistically significant. It was seen that 18(8.82%) of the surveyed population were mildly physically disabled. The depression was more among the physically disabled (88.88%) whereas only 56.98% of physically normal persons suffered from depression and this difference was found statistically significant. (Table 2)

**Table 1**  
**Distribution of study population according to Yesavage's Geriatric Depression scale**

Perception	Responses	
	Yes No. (%)	No No. (%)
Satisfied with life(N)	122(59.81)	82(40.19)
Dropped many of the activities & interest in life (Y)	136(66.66)	68(33.34)
Feeling emptiness in life(Y)	92(45.10)	112(54.90)
Often get bored(Y)	138(67.64)	66(32.36)
Stay in good spirits in most of the time(N)	124(60.78)	80(39.22)
Afraid of something is going to happen(Y)	102(50.00)	102(50.00)
Feels happy most of the time(N)	122(59.80)	82(40.20)
Often feels helpless(Y)	98(48.00)	106(52.00)
Prefer to stay at home at night rather than go out & do new things(Y)	70(34.30)	134(65.70)
Feeling of more problem with memory than most(Y)	134(65.68)	70(34.32)
Feel wonderful to live now(N)	144(70.58)	60(29.42)
Feel pretty worthless the way one is now(Y)	90(44.12)	114(55.88)
Feels full of energy(N)	102(50.00)	102(50.00)
Feels hopeless(Y)	96(47.10)	108(52.90)
Think that most persons are better than me(Y)	78(38.30)	128(62.70)

*These Yes (Y) and No (N) responses are taken as criteria of depression.*

**Table-2**  
**Distribution of elderly population according to grade of depression n = 204**

Mental status	no	Percentage
normal	82	40.21
Mild depression	62	30.39
Severe depression	60	29.40
Total	204	100.00

**Table-3**  
**Distribution of elderly population according to age, status of spouse & physical disability with mental status. (n = 204)**

Age (yrs)	Mental Status			X <sup>2</sup> ,df, p value
	Normal No.(%)	Mild Depression No.(%)	Severe Depression No.(%)	
60-69	75(45.73)	42(25.6)	47(28.65)	X <sup>2</sup> = 10.86 df=2 p=.004
70-79	06(19.5)	17(54.83)	08(25.8)	
≥80	01(11.11)	03(33.33)	05(55.55)	
<b>Status of spouse</b>				
Alive, living together	75(50.67)	55(37.16)	18(12.16)	X <sup>2</sup> = 24.68 df=2 p=.00000437
Alive, living separately	01(16.66)	03(50.00)	02(33.33)	
Died	06(12.00)	04(8.00)	40(80.00)	
<b>Physical disability</b>				
Present	02(11.11)	13(72.22)	03(16.66)	With Yates Correction X <sup>2</sup> = 5.68 df=2 p<0.0171
Absent	80(43.01)	49(26.34)	57(30.64)	

## DISCUSSION

The focus of the current study is to find out the prevalence of depression among the elderly population and identifying some predisposing factors. A community based study by Jain R.K & Aras RY conducted in an urban slum of Mumbai found 45.9% depressed elderly a little lower than the present studies, may due to low

socio economic groups in the study population. The significant variables associated with depression were poor socio-economic status, marital status, non-working or dependency and illiteracy (p < 0.05).<sup>(8)</sup> Rajkumar AP et al. at Kaniyambadi block, Vellore, India Prevalence of geriatric

depression (ICD-10) was 12.7%.<sup>(2)</sup> In another study Biswas SS et al at Vellore, India, over 60 years prevalence of depression and common mental disorder, using the CIS-R standard, was found to be 31.5%.<sup>(3)</sup> Devi ES et al. at in Udhyava Village of Udupi district Karnataka Majority of the clients had moderate depression (58%), And about 19% of them had severe depression belonging to low socio economic status.<sup>(4)</sup> Tiwari SC et al in an epidemiological study funded by the Indian Council of Medical Research rural geographical area in northern India found aged 60 years or above and to ascertain the causative/contributory role of biosociodemographic factors, the prevalence of psychiatric morbidity was found to be much higher in the geriatric group (43.32%) than in the nongeriatric group (4.66%).<sup>(5)</sup> disability status were not significantly associated with geriatric depression.<sup>(2)</sup> Similar study reported in the European Journal of Psychology showed that depression is significantly associated with decreased physical ability

where 37% of the physically disabled women suffered from depression whereas only 20.2% of the women suffered from depression who were physically active ( $p < .001$ ). Prevalence estimates are affected by several clinical and methodological variables. The clinical conditions vary from place to place depending on local problems. The present study deals only with local problems so the prevalence differed in the present study.

## CONCLUSION

To reduce the depression of the elderly and to increase the smooth life expectancy of people living in the low socio economic status, non working, dependency and illiteracy the responsible factors should be eliminated. The surrounding people and relatives can help them by giving sympathetic and sensitive attitude and then accompany them to reduce loneliness. Thus our society may be benefited and can reduce the social crises.

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