

# As India Ages, Dementia Threat Looms

M. DUBASH, Indiaspend.org

India is a youthful country, for now. According to the Census of India, the population of the country below 35 years of age is 51.8%. By 2020, India is projected to become the youngest country in the world, with a median age of 29 years.

But, as this population advances into old age, India will face a demographic transition. The same numbers, or more, that make up the country's youth bulge will constitute the aging population over the next four decades. In a rapidly graying world, will India be prepared to deal with the challenges of an aging population?

Given the changing nature of Indian family structures, from joint families to nuclear, and severely limited old-age income support, the health care challenges posed by the aging population in India are likely to be greater.

Data suggest that the aging of India's population will lead to increases in the prevalence of chronic conditions associated with age. One such fatal chronic condition that is particularly prevalent among people over the age of 60 is dementia.

India, China at greater risk than the West

Dementia is projected to become an epidemic among the elderly in the coming decades, according to the World Health Organisation. The World Alzheimer Report 2012 estimates that the number of people with dementia above the age of 60 years in India will touch 4.4 million by 2015; the current figure is 3.7 million.

Moreover, the proportion of people with early-onset dementia in India is high (49.9%), as compared to that (7%-30%) in developed countries. Among the nations in the Asia-Pacific region, only Australia, Japan, and Korea have instituted public-health policies directly addressing the looming burden of dementia. China and India are only just trying to get de-

The threat of dementia looms in India.



Photo: <http://www.alzheimer.org.in>

mentia on the health-policy agenda.

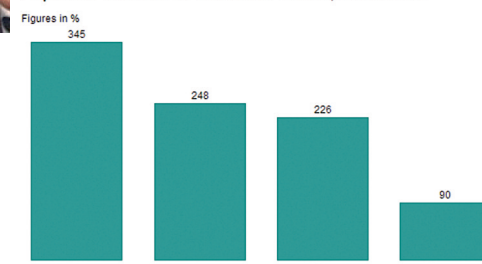
In many parts of the world, including India, the symptoms of dementia (forgetfulness, impairment of daily activities, etc) are considered a normal part of the aging process. Researchers now have a better understanding of these cognitive deficits associated with aging.

Dementia is a group of symptoms characterised by progressive memory loss and deterioration of other mental faculties such as language, judgment, and deficiency in social interaction. It is caused by progressive brain cell death, but may also be caused by head injury, stroke, or brain tumor.

The more common form of dementia is Alzheimer's disease (AD). AD is believed to be caused by "plaques" (a build-up of beta-amyloid protein) between the dying cells in the brain and "tangles" (caused by disintegration of tau proteins) within the cells. The brain tissue in a person with AD has progressively fewer nerve cells and connections. The diseased brain gradually shrinks in size.

The bad news is that there is no cure

Expected Increase In Dementia Cases, 2013-2050



for dementia as yet. The better news is that prevention, or in this case, delay of onset, can still be achieved through awareness and focus on the modifiable risk factors—hypertension, diabetes, obesity, stress, and sedentary lifestyle.

## IndiaSpend

Obesity, Diabetes: Risk Factors of Dementia

Diabetes and obesity are two risk factors implicated in cognitive dysfunction and dementia in later life. According to the International Diabetes Federation, diabetes affects at least 285 million people worldwide, and that number is expected to reach 438 million by 2030. Asia accounts for 60% of the world's diabetic population.

The major driver of the diabetic epidemic is obesity, which in turn is primarily driven by rapid urbanisation, nutrition

transition, and increasingly sedentary lifestyles. Although the rates of obesity in many Asian countries are lower than those in the West, there is a tendency toward greater abdominal or central obesity and less muscle mass among Asians, resulting in an increased tendency for insulin resistance. This "metabolically obese" phenotype among normal-weight individuals may explain the increased predisposition for diabetes in Asia.

Obesity is associated with a two-fold increased risk of dementia. The risk of dementia increases by approximately 50% in people with type 2 diabetes.

Patients with diabetes mellitus are more likely to present earlier brain

atrophy. Many studies suggest that the risk of brain degeneration increases not only in the case of patients with diabetes, but also in people with pre-diabetes. Individuals with pre-diabetes are those with impaired fasting glucose and/or impaired glucose tolerance.

Since there is no known cure for dementia, we must aim for better preventive interventions to lower the disease incidence or slow its progression. Better weight management can afford better protection to the brain, in addition to myriad other health benefits. There is also consistent evidence from several studies that physical exercise and cognitively stimulating activities in early and mid-life have a role to play in delaying the onset of dementia.

The best way forward is to take early action to prevent disease progression at an individual level and undertake measures at a societal level that includes policy making, planning, and allocation of health and welfare resources toward dementia care.

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Photo: Waseem Andrabi for IndiaSpend

## Kashmir's High Voter Turnout

The first phase of assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir witnessed a turnout of more than 71 percent, the highest over the past 18 years.

The high participation of voters, despite the boycott calls by separatist groups and the recent floods, is being widely lauded, but an indication of J&K's troubled existence is available from its highest-ever voter turnout, which came 27 years ago.

In 1987, 75% of voters turned out to vote, but the election was widely seen as flawed, with even members of the Congress party alleging malpractices, such as this recollection by Khem Lata Wukhloo: "I remember that there was a massive rigging (sic) in 1987 elections. The losing candidates were declared winners. It shook the ordinary people's faith in the elections and the democratic process."

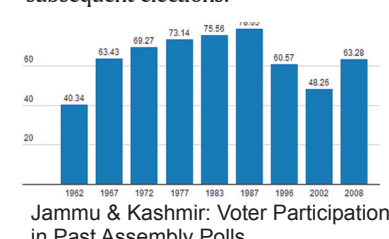
Many parties which lost in 1987 went on form a separatist alliance and the state eventually exploded into violent insurgency, the murder and exodus of Pandits, or Kashmiri Hindus, and a security crackdown that led to thousands

of deaths, overwhelmingly Muslim. Voter participation in elections plunged dramatically after this, recovering to some extent 21 years later, although trouble and dissatisfaction continued to roil the state.

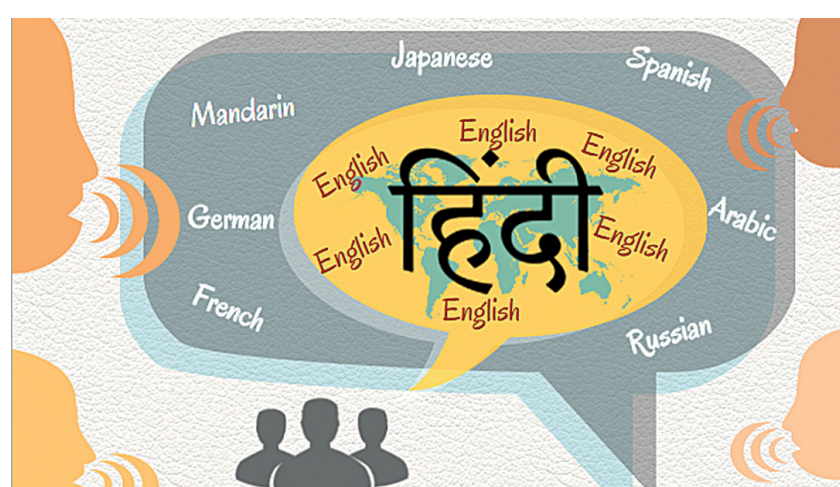
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Here is a quick view of the voter turnout in the past assembly polls in the state: An interesting fact: the first assembly election in J&K, in 1962, had no women registered as voters. However, there was one woman who contested, Shanta Bharti, but she lost her deposit. So, women were allowed to contest but not vote. The participation of women rose in subsequent elections.

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Jammu & Kashmir: Voter Participation in Past Assembly Polls



## Hindi Outpaces English Globally

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The global growth rate of Hindi appears to have outpaced the global growth of English, according to estimates from the People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI), an organization surveying Indian languages from the ground up, particularly those spoken by fragile communities.

"Over the last 50 years, the world's Hindi-speaking population has increased from 260 million to 420 million. Over the same period, the English speaking population has gone from 320 million to 480 million. These figures indicate only those who say English is their mother tongue. It does not include those who speak English for professional use as a second language," said Ganesh Devy, Professor & Chair, PLSI.

The surge in Hindi speakers is largely due to population growth (260 million say Hindi is their mother tongue) in India's Hindi-speaking states and the Hindi-speaking diaspora scattered around the world.

According to US census 2011 data, south Asian languages experienced high growth between 2000 and 2011 in that country; Hindi grew 105% whereas Malayalam and Telugu grew by 115%.

The growth of Hindi, English and other

major languages within India has come at a price: Around 250 languages in India have disappeared in the last 50 years, according to PLSI. India now has 197 endangered languages, more than any other country.

India, one of the oldest civilizations in the world, is home to hundreds of languages that primarily belong to four families, namely Dravidian, Indo-Aryan, Austroasiatic and Sino-Tibetan. Sanskrit, a classical and the oldest literary language of India dating back to the Rig Veda, has also faded in recent centuries.

According to Prof. Devy, there are several ways of describing language endangerment (SEE BOX BELOW). According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), any language spoken by less than 10,000 persons is considered "potentially endangered". Not every potentially endangered language necessarily faces the threat of immediate extinction. However, that number indicates a threshold.

Let us now look at endangered languages in India and around the world.

According to UNESCO, 197 languages in India are reported to be endangered of which 81 are vulnerable followed by definitely endangered (63), severely endangered (6), critically endangered (42) and already

extinct (5).

Andaman and Nicobar, a union territory of India, tops the list with 11 critically endangered languages, mainly tribal dialects. Among the states, it is Manipur with seven languages, followed by Himachal Pradesh with 4 endangered languages.

The UNESCO Atlas of World's Languages In Danger 2010 lists around 2,500 endangered languages around the world.

India, as we said, tops the list with 197 endangered languages, followed by the US (191) and Brazil (190). The US, a country that mainly speaks American English, houses numerous indigenous languages and dialects that face extinction; 74 are "critically endangered" and 54 are already extinct. Spanish is the second-most spoken language in U.S.A. Papua New Guinea has more than 1,000 living languages, making it the country with the most spoken languages.

In India, English is thriving and is used widely by the emerging generation, which is one of the reasons leading to the threat of extinction of native or regional languages.

Dr. Deepak Pawar, Asst. Professor, Department of Civics and Politics, University of Mumbai, who is also the president of Marathi Abhyas Kendra, Mumbai (a civil society organization working for preservation and development of Marathi Language), said: "The spread of English has ... endangered the future of Indian languages and the languages of the world. English has become the language of knowledge and employability, as well as the primary language of the internet. The major content of the digital sphere is now in English, and, therefore, other languages have been marginalised. People have started considering these languages as kitchen languages."

Indians do not find it necessary to learn or write in their mother tongue. This means advanced knowledge is not produced in these languages. Therefore, other languages have essentially become languages of translation. The survival of a language depends upon how assertive a linguistic community is about creating a space for its language, Pawar said.

He said general discourse around Indian languages has been literature-centric, which must change because a language can contribute to literature even if it dies in the public domain.

## India Is A Nation Of Violent, Stressed Men

In a first of its kind study by Washington-based International Centre for Research on Women and United Nations Population Fund, the findings show the high rates of violence against women in marriages.

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- While more than half of Indian women said they had experienced some form of violence during their lifetime, 60% of men admit to violence against their wife or partner at some point in their lives.
- Higher education drastically increases the chances that men (and women) will be even-handed in their attitude towards women.
- Economic stress threatens more than half of India's men, makes them more controlling and is the major cause of violence against partners.
- More than 60% of Indian men and women have a moderate to high preference for a son.
- The good news: roughly the same percentage of people believes it is important to have at least one daughter.

These are some of the key findings of a first-of-its-kind study by Washington-based International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The report, Masculinity, Intimate Partner Violence and Son Preference in India: A Study, is a comprehensive survey of gender-related outlook of men and women across various ages and social strata. **Masculinity and Gender Equality** The findings show that men who were graduates were 2.5 times more equitable in their attitude towards women. And women who were graduates were four times more likely to be reasonable. This emphasises the value of higher education for both men and women. Economic stress among men to be providers for their families has been identified as the major cause for perpetrating violence towards their partners. Economic stress threatens men's belief in their own abilities and may lead them to be more controlling and violent to-



Photo: Flickr

wards their partners, according to the study.

Educated men and women who were 35 years old or more were less likely to perpetrate or experience violence, highlighting how much economic pressure young Indian men are under to establish themselves financially as the "head of the household".

## Intimate Partner Violence

The most important finding of the study has been that 60% men and 52% women have reported perpetrating and facing domestic violence.

A higher proportion of women reported experiencing physical violence (38%) followed by emotional violence (35%), compared to other forms like sexual violence (17%) and economic violence (16%). Nearly one in five respondents said their husbands had been sexually violent against them.

The study has comprehensively examined the causes of intimate partner violence in India. Childhood experiences of gender inequality have been central in shaping people's views and behaviours in their later life according to many studies. So, the researchers also looked at this variable.

Again, 60% women as against 36% men reported to having often faced gender discrimination during childhood. Also, according to the report, men who experienced frequent violence as children were four times more likely to perpetrate violence than men who never experienced childhood discrimination.

## Son Preference

The major cause for low sex ratios and female foeticide in India is because of high son preference among people. The report has clearly stated the high preference for sons and discrimination towards daughters. Yet, families want daughters, not as much as sons but close enough.

(Indiaspend.org is a data-driven, public-interest journalism non-profit)