Health status of the Elderly persons

Health problems are supposed to be the major concern of a society as older people are more prone to suffer from ill health than younger age groups. It is often claimed that ageing is accompanied by multiple illness and physical ailments. Besides physical illness, the aged are more likely to be victims of poor mental health, which arises from sanility, neurosis and extent of life satisfaction.

Health status and health behavior refer to the conditions of health, both perceived and actual as experienced or expressed by individuals in a population.

5.1 Feeling about health :

During the survey all the elderly were asked to state their perception of health as 'very healthy', 'fairly all right' and 'unhealthy'. They are indicated by VH, FH and UH respectively in the table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Feelings about Health by Age and Gender

Age group	Male				Female				Total
Below 70 yrs.	8 (6.9)	82 (71.3)	25 (21.7)	115	34 (20.9)	105 (64.8)	23 (14.1)	162 (58.4)	277 (100.0)
Above 70 yrs.	72 (61.5)	45 (38.4)	-	117 (59.6)	54 (68.3)	25 (31.6)	-	79 (40.3)	196 (100.0)
Total	80	127	25	232	88	130	23	241	473 (100.0)

Source : field study

Note : Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage.

The table 5.1 reveals that 168 elderly persons consider themselves as unhealthy (25.5 percent). It is quite evident that most of the elderly persons above the age of 70 years are feeling unhealthy while proportion of elderly women is higher in comparison to elderly men. Thus more of the elderly persons start feeling unhealthy as age increase.

5.2 Disease profile of the elderly persons:

The elderly are more vulnerable to disease because of decreased physiological reserves and defense mechanisms. It is observed from the following table – 5.2 that almost all the respondents have health problems. It is also observed that most of the respondents have more than one health problems (multiple health problems). The main health related problems among sample elderly persons are climbing upstairs (51.6 percent) whereas the problem of blood pressure is experienced by 39.3 percent elderly respondents. The other serious health problems which sample elderly persons are facing are forgetful, impaired eye sight, hand of hearing, urinary trouble and Asthema etc. (Table 5.2)

Table 5.2 Gender wise Health problems in two selected districts. :

Disease	Male	Female	Total	Nagaon	Kamrup (M)
Indigestion	27%	31%	29.2%	26.7	31.3
Urinary Trouble	22%	22.5	22.2%	22.2	22.2
Blood Pressure	40.5	38.2	39.3	38.0	40.5
Rheumatipain	7.8%	16.2	12%	14.5	9.9
Asthma	18.1	22.4	20.3	29.9	11.9
Heart Trouble	10.8	6.6	8.7	12.2	5.6

Impaired Eye sight	30.6	27.0	28.8	17.6	38.5
Total Blind ness	-	-	-	-	-
Diabetic	16.8	14.9	15.9	19.0	13.1
Hard of Hearing	23.3	21.6	22.4	28.1	17.5
Paralytic	4.7	5.8	5.3	2.7	7.5
Forgetfull	28.0	30.7	29.4	31.7	27.4
Climbing Stair	52.6	50.6	51.6	60.6	43.7
Walking uphill	58.2	60.2	59.2	69.7	50.0
Doing manual work	47.4	51.0	49.3	65.2	35.3

Source : Field Survey

Table 5.2 describes that irrespective of gender and residence, most common health problem that elderly persons face are physical disability to do regular manual work.

The proportion of reporting good health declined from among those aged 60 and above to the age of 70 and above.

5.3 Morbidity rate and Hospitalization rate, among the elderly respondents:

To explain the health condition of a population morbidity rate and hospitalization rates are the two important variables to be estimated. These can be measured by the following formula

$$\text{Morbidity rate} = \frac{\text{No.of persons hospitalized in the one year prior to survey}}{\text{Total population at risk during the same period}} \times 1000$$

$$\text{Hospitalization Rate} = \frac{\text{No.of persons hospitalized in the one year prior to survey}}{\text{Total population at risk during the same period}} \times 1000$$

Table 5.3: Hospitalization Rate of Elderly Persons in Assam according to background characteristics:

Characteristics	Hospitalization Rate
Total	150
Male	137
Female	161
Married	121
Widowed	228.3
SC	337.3
ST	60.24
Others	123.77
Illiterate	81.6
Literate	158.0
Income below 10,000	182
Income > 10,000	136
Age < 70 yrs	83
Age > 70 yrs.	244.8
Nagaon	153.8
Kamrup (M)	146.8

Source : Field survey.

Table 5.3 reveals higher hospitalization rate among the age group above 70 years. The higher hospitalization rate among the low income group (<10000) indicates that the elderly persons from poor family often fall sick than the persons from high income group. Similarly the hospitalization rate of female elderly and specially the widowers are found to be higher. The higher

hospitalization rate among the literates reflect their tendency to seek treatment more frequently than those who are illiterate. The different in treatment seeking between elderly persons belonging to different communities is also reflected in the table 5.3.

5.4 Disabilities among the Elderly persons in Assam:

The NSS probed into five types of disabilities of the elderly. These were visual impairment, hearing problem, difficulty in walking (locomotor problem), problem in speech and senility, (Rajan, 2006). Detailed information regarding the nature of ailments from which the elderly persons reported to be suffering, the disabilities and the difficulties faced by them are recorded at the time of the survey which are presented in table 5.4.

Table 5.4 Disabilities among the Elderly Persons in the survey area (in %)

	No. of Respondents.		Total
	Male	**Female**	
Visual	30.6	207	28.8
Hearing	23.3	21.6	22.4
Locomotor Problem	4.7	5.8	5.3
Speech	0.5	1.1	0.8
Amnesia/ Senility	28	30.7	29.4
Total	**87.1**	**85.5**	

Source – field survey

Table 5.4 reveals that more elderly men (30.6) suffer from visual disabilities as compared to elderly women. They suffer from poor eye sight, Blindness etc.

Again comparatively a larger proportion of elderly male suffer from hearing problem. The difficulty in moving or walking is higher in case of elderly women than men. Moreover table 5.4 shows that larger proportion of female elderly suffers from the loss of memory or senility in comparison to the elderly men.

5.5 Factors affecing health status of elderly respondents

An indicator of health status is essential for analysing and prioritizing of health care initiative and policy prescription. But a universally acceptable health status index has remained elusive due to unavailability of data and other conceptual difficulties (Srinivasan, 1998). For present purpose, to study health status in the sample area, multiple regression analysis is necessary. In order to assess the causative factors influencing health status of elderly respondents, the variable such as gender, age, economic status, level of education, engaged in work and living with spouse are taken into consideration. Since the variables indicating different factors are of both quantitative characters, a logit estimate of the dependent variable has been done.

The equation is formulated as-

Logit (HS) = b_0 + b_1 (GR) + b_2 (AR) + b_3 (ES) + b_4 (LE) + b_5 (EW) + b_6 (SA) + U

Where, HS = Health status indicated as fairly Healthy = 1 and unhealthy = 0.

GR = Gender of respondents coded as Male = 1, Female = 0.

AR = The age of the respondents coded as below 70 years = 0, above 70 years = 1.

ES = Economic condition of the respondents coded as APL = 1 and BPL = 0.

LE = Level of education of respondents coded as literate = 1, Illiterate = 0.

EW = Engagement in work coded as working = 1, not working = 0.

SA = Spouse alive or not coded as alive = 1, not alive = 0.

Table 5.5:

Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	427.887ᵃ	.335	.459

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 5 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

Table 5.6: Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	GENDER	.384	.260	2.192	1	.139	1.469
	Age_grp2	-1.958	.260	56.533	1	***	.141
	Economic Status	.168	.306	.303	1	.582	1.183
	Literate-illiterate	-.302	.501	.363	1	.547	.739
	Working-not working	1.753	.287	37.278	1	***	5.772
	Spouse-alive	1.062	.286	13.762	1	***	2.893
	Constant	.182	.500	.133	1	.715	1.200

Source: Field Study

A Variable(s) entered on step 1: GENDER, Age-grp2, Economic Status, Literate-illiterate, Working-not working, Spouse-alive.

Note: *** denotes significance at 1% level of significance.

Comments on SPSS output:

The result shows that under this model 100 per cent variation in dependent variable not explained by the explanatory variables. Only 33 Per cent of variation in dependent variable is explained by the independent variable. Therefore we can conclude that these explanatory variables are not sufficient enough to explain the explained health variable.

In determining health status, factors like age, engaged in work and living with suppose are significant. The factors are found to be significant at 1% level of significance. Other factors like gender, literacy, economic status of elderly respondents are found to be insignificant in influencing health condition of the respondents.