



## Social participation of elderly population in India- A brief review

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### Abstract

**Background:** The concept of social participation is highly valued in old age. However, it differs among the elderly. Also based on the culture and ethnicity, levels of affection also vary. This study aims to clarify the concept of social participation and different factors contributing in order to achieve social participation among elderly people.

**Methods:** For literature, comprehensive computerized search was done on WOS, Science direct, National Library of Medicine (Pubmed), DOAJ, Google Scholar, CINAHL, Pubmed central and Oxford Press. The published papers from 2006 to 2019 were searched. 18 articles related to the social participation and factors affecting it were included in the study and accordingly, the data were extracted after reviewing the resources.

**Results:** The factors affecting social participation included emphasis on community-based activities and interpersonal interactions, based on resource sharing, active participation and individual satisfaction. Social participation among the elderly people had individual, environmental, social and environmental consequences.

**Conclusions:** The present study provided an objective and understandable picture of factors affecting social participation among elderly. The study has implications for finding the factors affecting social participation based on contextual background for health promotion of elderly population.

**Keywords:** Social participation, community-dwelling older adults, factors affecting social participation

### Introduction

Elderly/old age consists of ages meaning or surpassing the average life span of human beings. In India, proportion of elderly (above 60 years) has been shown to increase from 5-6% in 1961 to 7.5% in 2011. (Census 2011) According to 2016, report by ministry of statistic and programme implementation, India has 103.9 million elderly, above age 60, about 8.5% of the population and it is expected to be increase more than 10% by year 2021<sup>[1, 2]</sup>. India is undergoing remarkable demographic changes with increasing durability and decreasing mortality which is resulting in a dramatic increase in the population of older adults over age of 60.

Social participation is an important factor for healthy aging<sup>[3]</sup>. The ICF had given a concept of participation in health care which defines participation as an involvement in a life situation<sup>[4]</sup>, however, definition for social participation doesn't explain in ICF nor there description in ICF in and / or social participation. Authors are frequently using the concept of social participation with participation<sup>[5, 6]</sup>. Social participation is interpreted in terms of social / civic life such as engaging in professional, charitable, or social organization; recreational and leisure activities such as informal play and sports, physical fitness, visiting museum, park, gallery, theatre, mall, traveling etc.; religious or spiritual activities such as visiting temple, mosque, church or any spiritual activities; political and social life like right to vote, forming political association, rights and freedom of citizen<sup>[4]</sup>. Social participation has benefit for elder adults in well being. It is associated with lower level of death risk for older citizens. It has positive effects on all the aspect of health and participation<sup>[7]</sup>. so the older adults should be encouraged to engage in all these social activities. The participation in some productive activities in elder life might give personal positive self image and increase the confidence. Moreover level of functioning or ability to

perform necessary and desired activities of daily living is also a key to life satisfaction and healthy aging among older adults.

One specific component of aging is how older adults managed themselves and their environment for being involved in social participation. The balance between person and environment in known as person environment fit<sup>[8]</sup> which affects directly or indirectly to the participation. Aging itself has different types of challenges. Aging includes various changes in different systems of body with age, which in turn leads to health issues. It is affecting the role of elderly in society. Moreover, type of participation also differs among community and facility available surrounding them. Religion plays an important role with this in form of activities they do in later life as in India people believe that old age is for the devotion. However, participation totally depends upon interest and personal choice also.

The magnitude of different factors and participation is extremely important. Also what type of social participation is most engaged by elder people? This study aims to review the prospective studies or potential reviews, with data on factors affecting social participation. This paper extends current knowledge to correlates actual determinants on social participation in older adults, to better understand a recurring concern about the potential vulnerability of older people to constraints on their choices in healthful aging.

### Methodology

The first author searched and assessed literature and second author reviewed and revised manuscript. It was done by comprehensive computerized search on WOS, Science direct, National Library of Medicine (Pubmed), DOAJ, Google Scholar, CINAHL, Pubmed central and Oxford Press. The key words "social participation" AND/OR "community participation" was used in combination with

following terminologies: determinants of social participation in elderly OR older people OR elder people, factors affecting social participation in old age. Additionally, reference lists of most pertinent articles were searched to

increase the search accuracy, as much as possible. By searching we found total 87 records. Selection of articles in the review is shown in Figure 1.

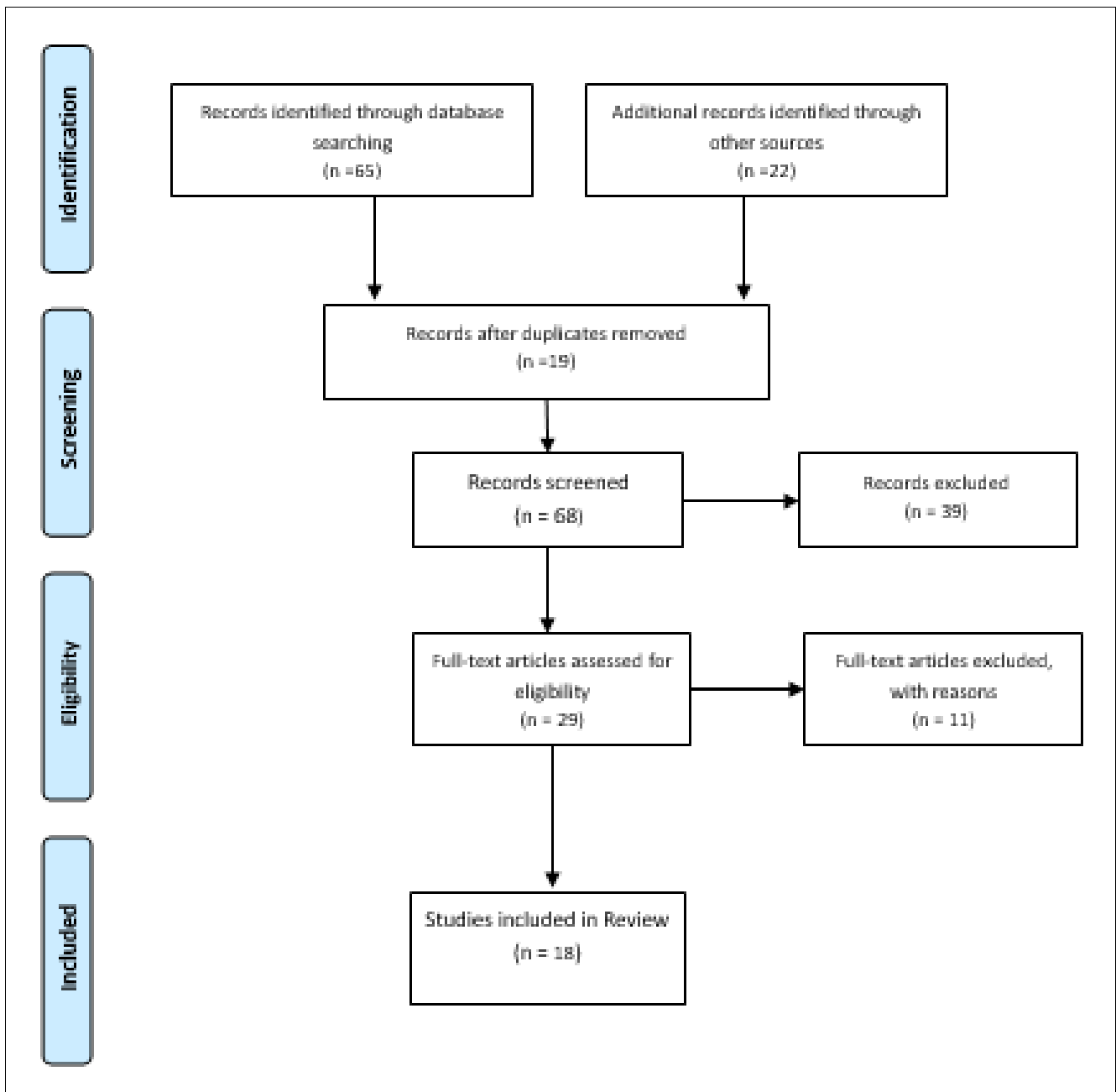


Fig 1: Flow diagram of review

The search for published papers from databases was undertaken in February 2020 those published from 2006 to 2019. Articles were independently screened for the relevance of the titles and abstracts from the studies. Studies that were not retrievable were excluded. The following were the inclusion criteria applied to the studies examined: 1) samples were older people aged  $\geq 50$  years; 2) research objective was to examine the correlation between influencing factors and social participation; 3) research design was quantitative, using a cross-sectional or longitudinal design; and 4) Written in English. Qualitative studies, case studies, literature reviews, and expert opinion papers were excluded for the review. Non-refereed articles, abstract, and dissertations were also excluded. I collected

data on Author name and year of publication, study aim, participants’ characteristics, variables used, statistical test used and results. Table 1 shows the summery of it.

**Results**

Efforts were done to include the maximum available studies done on the factors affecting the social participation among elderly.

**1. Does age affects the social participation?**

The association between age and social participation can explained by patient characteristics associated with such as additional disability or other co morbidities. As age increases, social restrictions increase [9, 10]. A positive associations found between age and social participation.

Though oldest old and aged above 75 or more have decrease social participation <sup>[11, 12]</sup>. Over 80 years or more, elderly don't perceive themselves restricted in most areas of life <sup>[9]</sup>.

## 2. Does gender affects social participation?

Gender may affect the participation but findings are contradictory. Older men more have more social participation than females <sup>[11, 12, 13]</sup>, but have less social participation those who are living alone and less interactive with others <sup>[9]</sup>. In opposite there is no difference between social participation among men and women <sup>[9]</sup>, but for certain activities, participation may differ with ethnicity <sup>[14]</sup>. Even no activities found socially among men <sup>[15]</sup>.

## 3. Does relationship with friends, neighborhood or relatives affects the social participation?

Social support is strongly influencing the social participation <sup>[10]</sup>. Level of non kin social network influence the participation <sup>[16]</sup>. Large network of friends <sup>[17]</sup>, neighborhood relations <sup>[18, 19, 20, 21]</sup>, having large network of non relatives <sup>[15]</sup> are significantly associated with participation in old age. The activities like going to movie/event, church/temple with friends, relatives or neighbors have positive influence on physical and psychological health.

## 4. Does mental health affects social participation?

Mental health or self related health is significantly related to participation <sup>[22, 21]</sup>. Even depression <sup>[10]</sup> and dementia <sup>[23]</sup> leads to reduce participation among elderly. On other side loneliness and depression <sup>[24]</sup> shows no significant association with participation. Negative social attitudes also influence participation. To control negative stressful pathway, it is essential to increase the participation in the form of social interaction.

## 5. Does religious activities affects social participation?

Religiosity has a crucial role influencing well being of Indian elderly <sup>[25]</sup>. Role of religion, spirituality and/or belief plays an important role in positive aging which increase the participation <sup>[26]</sup>. Participation in terms of religious activities improve mental status of elderly <sup>[22]</sup>.

## 6. Does education affects social participation?

Education is associated with improved participation in later life <sup>[26]</sup>. Literacy has important role in influencing social participation <sup>[16]</sup>. Both men and women with high level of education shows more participation among elderly specially secondary and high school/more education <sup>[11]</sup>.

## 7. Does employment and socio economic status affects social participation?

In Indian context, degree of dependency varies according to economic situation of elder people in general which limits participation <sup>[21, 27]</sup>. Higher socio economic status also affects participation <sup>[28]</sup>. But women who are not employed are more likely engaged in social activities due to free time <sup>[15]</sup>. Even family income and literacy of family also affects social participation <sup>[10]</sup>.

## 8. Does health affects social participation?

Health status is significantly associated with level of social participation among elderly in different activities <sup>[12, 16]</sup>. Different co morbidities show significant clinical relevance

and have strong influence on participation in later age of life <sup>[21, 29]</sup>. Deterioration of physical and mental health leads to functional disability and decrease participation <sup>[30]</sup>. Physical mobility, functional ability and good mental health <sup>[31]</sup> are predictive of high social participation among men and women in old age.

## 9. Does environment affects social participation?

Participation exclusively depends on participation environment association. Building and supportive environment increase physical activities and in turn participation <sup>[17, 32]</sup>. Participation didn't differ across the living area <sup>[33]</sup> but with controlling some confounding factors, environmental variables affect participation. Among these public transport is identifies as a main barrier for participation <sup>[28, 34]</sup>. Even level of physical accessibilities and information also limits the participation <sup>[35]</sup>.

## 10. Does ethnicity/culture affects the social participation?

No association is found between culture/ethnicity and participation among older people. But cultural norms set by the family have influence on participation among Indian elderly as they are dependant more on their children or family members. For both genders participation is altered at a small extent by socio demographic factors with ethnicity <sup>[14]</sup>.

## 11. Does marital status/widowhood affects social participation?

Widowed have higher level of participation than non widowed, in fact social participation decrease before death of spouse <sup>[36]</sup>. Indian widowed women are more tend to spare their time in upbringing of their grand children rather than outside social activities.

## 12. Does a family or family responsibility affect social participation?

Family responsibilities in later life affect the participation. Moreover those who are living in old age home, their participation in social activities may differ from those who are living with family.

## 13. Do all these factors have impact on outcome of society?

Participation in old age is a key for healthy aging despite of their health limitations. Finding these factors will be helpful to set the realistic goals and proper future planning to anticipate them in community/social/civic life. By doing modifications for home adjustments, community supports and other variables, one can promote the rehabilitation for elderly.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to review and evaluate the existing literature for factors affecting social participation among elderly population. Social participation is often defined as community participation as well. Study finds various factors that are influencing social participation directly or indirectly. Among all factors personal health is most important barrier for participation though few studies told despite of health limitations also they are active. On other hand with these limitations support from family, friends, relatives or neighbors are facilitators for

participation in society for different activities. That may be due to support given by them give positive self image physically as well as mentally.

Demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status and education level also potentially affecting the participation. However some studies give contradictory findings with age and gender. Ethnicity, culture and religion also play important role for participation for some social activities. Moreover studies in these areas are still in exploratory stage, so they are not able to find the direction of association.

Participation in different types of activities leads to active life in later age. Literature proves it is essential for healthy life. As health is important factor, health promotional programmes should be conducted better health in community. Even transportation and physical barriers hinder participation, so these can be alleviated by certain modifications or adaptations or with help of assistive devices that may promote independency. Relations with friends/relatives help in positive self perception for participation. Education and support group can aid this.

However most studies are conducted in western countries, due to social and cultural differences, some findings may not be apply to all the populations and also people who are living in urban, semi urban and rural areas. So in depth research is required to explore the factors affecting social participation among Indian elderly. Especially study investigating the interventions to improve participation socially. Planning and implementing interventions for social participation is an important aspect for service delivery to community dwelling older adults.

## Conclusion

A review highlighted the most common types of factors influencing the social participation among older adults. These factors includes health, socio demographic factors (age, gender, marital status, education), environment, relationship with others, ethnicity and employment.

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