

Letter to The Editor

## **Hindrance to Swachh Bharat-Problems unanswered for the elderly**

\*Rashmi Agarwalla<sup>1</sup>, Ankur Khandelwal<sup>2</sup>, Prakash Agarwalla<sup>3</sup>

- 1) Senior Clinical Research Coordinator, Centre for Health Research and Development, New Delhi, India.
- 2) Senior Resident, Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences, New Delhi, India. email id:
- 3) Physician. India

\*Corresponding author: Rashmi Agarwalla

**Sir,**

Elderly population is growing rapidly, and India will soon have a big percentage in the coming years. Most of these elderly are residing in rural areas. Elderly females are living longer than their male counterparts.<sup>1</sup> The elderly are suffering from many problems, some of which are considered as part of normal aging process while they may not be so.

Swachh Bharat will be a dream turned into reality, but some issues and which are very practical may have been neglected. The above 60 population as defined by United Nations as elderly<sup>2</sup> are suffering from problems like arthritis, stroke and have morbidity conditions which act as major barriers to the use of toilets, especially the Indian squatting types. Construction of elderly friendly toilets and proper training of the care givers remains a challenge for the developing countries.

As per studies done by Ajit et al<sup>3</sup> prevalence of knee osteoarthritis (as per American College of Rheumatology classification) was found to be 54.1% in the rural area of Bangalore. Functional disability is an area of concern for the elderly. As per the report of the status of elderly in selected states of India, 2011 found the prevalence of locomotor disease in elderly to be 60% for vision. About 4% of elderly needed assistance with toilet while ADL functioning was assessed.<sup>4</sup> Falls is a major problem in elderly, as per Prudham et al at least 28% of elderly suffer from one episode of fall in a year.<sup>5</sup>

Incontinence is a major issue in elderly. Morbidity problems in elderly are also compounded by mental problems like dementia.

One-third of surveyed households with elderly persons have no toilet facilities, forcing them to defecate in the open.<sup>4</sup> Toilet constructions have been carried under the Total Sanitation Campaign, but are they being useful, especially for the elderly population and the question arises whether they can be made elderly friendly in some way.

Studies have not been done to address such issues in elderly and actions cannot be taken until problems and their extent are known. Elderly population cannot be neglected as they will soon surpass the percentage of under five children. Its better to have a vision wide enough to address such issues now than late. The dream of Swachh Bharat can be a reality when problems are looked as more practically.

### References

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