



# Age Identity and Social Exclusion of Elderly Persons: A Cross Sectional Study

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The dominant social constructions of age identity are negative, leading to social exclusion in elderly persons through collective ill-representations. Hence, this study examines how age identity induces and sustains social exclusion in elderly persons.

**Method:** Using a cross sectional research design, this study measured the age identity and social exclusion in older persons. The sample is defined as elderly persons aged 65+ years and live with family of procreation. We selected 41 samples by using multi-stage cluster sampling procedure. Age Identity Measurement Scale and Social Exclusion Scale were used alongside with socio-demographic profile. We analyzed the data using descriptive and inferential statistics.

**Results:** As age identity increased, elderly persons negatively perceived self and subscribed negative social attribution of ageing. Age identity has lead to high level of material deprivation and overall social exclusion in elderly persons. The negative perception of ageing was associated with high level of social exclusion. Inadequate social participation and normative integration lead to high level of social exclusion. The regression model showed three significant predictors of social exclusion in elderly persons.

**Conclusion:** Elderly persons give importance to their age identity, though they predominantly perceive the ageing process negatively. Negative self-perceptions of ageing significantly increased social exclusion. The study concludes that alongside socio-demographic factors, the negative self perception of ageing lead to high level of social exclusion in elderly persons.

**Keywords:** elderly person, age identity, social exclusion

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Being second largest populace country in the world, India accommodates 76 million elderly persons aged 60 years and more (Census, 2001). This was a three times increase from 25 million during 1961 Census (Rajan 2003). The elderly persons' proportions showed a similar increase from just 5.6% in 1961 to 7.5% in 2001. The number of elderly above the age of 70 years was enumerated 28.3 million and 8 million were enumerated as above 80 years of age. Among 29 states in India including union territories, Kerala has registered the highest proportion of elderly (i.e., 10.5) (Census, 2011). Nearly 75% of Indian elderly live in rural areas. The statistical projections show that the elderly population aged 60 and more is expected to increase from 76 million

in 2006 to 179 million in 2031. The oldest old in India is (i.e., 80 and above) is expected to grow faster than any other age groups, 8 million in 2001 to 32 million in 2051 (Rajan 2003).

Ageing is a complex bio-psychosocial process that represents the accumulation of changes in a person over time. It is a multidimensional process of physical, psychological and social change over life course (Bowen and Richard 2004; Dillin, Gottschling and Nystrom 2014). Ageing is associated with development of age identity where an ageing individual internalizes and society ascribes ageing related attributes and qualities to an ageing person (Jose and Meena, 2015). Age identity refers to "the inner experience of a person's age and

ageing process while it is an outcome of a process, by which an ageing person identifies and distances self from different aspects of ageing (Barak and Stern 1986). Age identity belongs to the domain of the subjective experience of ageing, thus the key measures of age identity are subjected to personal biases and misinterpretations. The societies have diverse cultures and customs associated with ageing and elderly persons. The culturally influenced beliefs and norms have a great role in moulding the identity of a person (Barak and Stern 1986). Ageing is evidently associated with different societal ascriptions and self-perceptions, which are inherently negative, therefore excluding ageing persons in many aspects of their everyday life (Jose and Meena, 2015).

Social exclusion is a process by which individuals, groups and communities are systematically blocked from various rights, opportunities and resources, which are normally available to them in a society. Elderly persons are one of such vulnerable group to social exclusion. Historically, social exclusion of elderly persons have been occurring across many cultures. Generally, elderly persons have not been sufficiently integrated in their respective social groups.

Ageing is associated with reduced engagement in economic productive activities therefore; elderly persons are likely to expose to poverty while their physical, social and cognitive functioning suffer from gradual decline (Jose and Cherayi, 2015; Scharf 2001). Advances in age are a significant determinant of social exclusion. Elderly persons' dependence and deprivations during old age and pathologies leading to it, such as medical mistakes and late diagnosis of degenerative diseases have disposed elderly persons vulnerable to social exclusion. Besides, the limited economic resources and supports, living in solitude, restricted interpersonal relations, changes in family relations and friendships, poor social support, poor access to social and health services, educative and cultural reasons may cumulatively dispose elderly persons vulnerable to social exclusion (Giovedi 2014; Philipson 2000; Rowels 1976). Situating within this deficits accumulation during the old age, this study is designed to examine how elderly people accept their age and ageing identity and its influence on social

exclusion. Such level of knowledge is critical towards evolving inclusive policy strategies to address ageing related negative stereotypes, cultural images; thereby include elderly persons and improve their quality of life in later years of life.

## METHODS

Using a cross sectional descriptive research design, the present study examined the role of age identity on social exclusion of elderly persons. The universe formed all elderly persons aged 65 years and more who reside at Kozhikode district in Kerala. The sample was defined as "elderly persons aged 65 years and more who resided with family of procreation in Nanminda Village Panchayat at Kozhikode district". We selected 41 elderly persons using multi-stage cluster sampling procedure (Kish 1965, Polit and Hungler 1995). This sampling procedure helped to reduce the geographic size without compromising with the principles of probability. This Village Panchayat consists of 17 wards. Using lottery technique, we selected five wards out of 17 wards. From the selected five wards, we listed houses with elderly persons from the "voters list" as per Election Commission's Database. From the list, considering the time constrain, we approached 60 in which we could interview 41 elderly persons for the current study. We educated each study participant about the nature of his or her participation, while informed consent was orally obtained.

**Measurements:** First, we used a socio-demography profile sheet that contained age, gender, marital status, income, current living arrangement, current earning status, and social groups. Secondly, we used Age Identity Measure (Jose and Iyyar 2014). It is a 29 item instrument with four subscales, using a four point Likert type rating scale. It was designed to measure ageing identity. Exploratory factor analysis resulted in four subscales with significant factor loading viz., ageing identity experience, importance of age identity, self perception of age identity and social attribution of ageing identity. Reliability checks yielded Cronbha's alpha ranging from 0.68-0.79 among subscales with an overall alpha reliability coefficient of 0.72.

We used Social Exclusion Scale developed by Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vrooman (2007). It is a 15-item instrument to measure social exclusion. It consists of four sub-domains viz., material deprivation, inadequate access to social rights, insufficient normative integration, and inadequate social participation. The responses are rated on a 5-point Likert type rating scale with never (1)... to always (5). High scores on the scale indicate high level of social exclusion. Material deprivation subscale showed a reliability coefficient of 0.79 while access to social rights reported a reliability coefficient of 0.82. Social participation had a reliability coefficient was 0.77 and reliability coefficient of normative integration was 0.67. The reliability coefficient of the overall scale was 0.85 (Jose 2014; in press).

### Data analysis

We performed descriptive and bivariate statistics along with and step-wise linear regression analysis to examine the significant predictors of social exclusion in elderly persons.

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows the elderly persons' socio-demographic profile. Out of 41 study participants, 14 (34.1%) were women and 27(65.9%) were men.

**Table 1:** Shows the socio-demographic profile of the study participants

Gender	Number	Percent	Religion	Number	Percent
Men	27	65.9	Hindu	30	73.2
Women	14	34.1	Muslim	11	26.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100</b>
Social group			Marital status		
FC	8	19.5	Married	28	68.3
OBC	30	73.2	Unmarried	2	4.9
SC	2	4.9	Widower	3	7.3
ST	1	2.4	Widow	8	19.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Currently earning			Place		
Yes	7	17.1	Rural	41	100
No	34	82.9			
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100</b>			

	Number	Min-Max	Mean	SD
Age	41	65-94	7.98	7.6
Education (in years)	41	0-16	6.05	3.847
Monthly income	41	100-25000	4463.75	7071.421

Participants' age ranged from 65-94 years with a mean age of 7.98 years and a SD of 7.6 years. About 73.2% were Hindus and 26.8% were Muslims. About eight persons (19.5%) were from forward castes, 30 (73.2%) were from OBC, two participants were from SC and one participant was from ST communities. About 28 (68.3%) of them were married and two (4.9%) were unmarried. Out of 41 elderly persons, eight persons were widows and three were widowers. The years of formal education ranged from 0- 16 years with a mean of 6.05 years and a SD of 3.8 years. About 17.1% of them were still earning and 34 (82.9%) were not earning. Monthly family income ranged from ₹ 100-25000 while the mean income was ₹ 4463 with a SD of ₹ 7071.421.

**Table 2:** Shows the sub-scale scores on age identity measurement and social exclusion scale

Variables	Numer	Range	Min-Max	Mean	SD
Age identity experience	41	5	3-8	6.5	1.2
Importance of ageing identity	41	7	9-16	13.2	2.1
Negative perception of ageing	41	22	19-41	28.4	5.8
Negative social attribution of ageing	41	25	11-36	23.5	5.8
Inadequate social participation	41	10	10-20	18.3	3.0
Inadequate normative integration	41	12	8-20	14.9	2.5
Inadequate access to social rights	41	7	8-15	13.3	2.3
Material deprivation	41	16	4-20	10.8	6.2

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Table 2 shows the sub-scale scores on age identity measurement and social exclusion scale. The descriptive analysis of age identity experience showed that the obtained scores ranged from 3-8 with a mean of 6.5 and

an SD of 1.2. Result reveals that elderly persons reported high level of positive ageing identity in their everyday life. The importance of age identity ranged from 9-16 with the mean 13.2 and the SD of 2.1. This result shows that elderly persons give importance to their ageing identity in everyday life. The self-perception of ageing range ranged from 19-41 with mean of 28.4 and an SD of 5.8. Elderly persons reported a high level of negative perception of ageing. Evidently, negative social attribution of ageing ranged from 11-36 with mean of 23.5 and the SD is 5.8. Result suggests that elderly persons validate societal ascription of ageing related stereotypes to a substantial level.

In inadequate social participation ranged from 10-20 with a mean of 18.3 and the SD of 3.0. It indicates that the elderly people experience substantial level of inadequate social participation. Inadequate normative integration range from 8-20 with mean of 14.9 and the SD is 2.5. The old age people experienced high level of inadequate normative integration. Inadequate access to social rights ranged from 8-15 with the mean of 13.3 and a SD was 2.3. Result shows that a substantial level of old age persons do not adequately enjoyed access to social rights. The material deprivation showed that the obtained score ranged from 4-20 with the mean of 10.8 and the SD is 6.2. It reveals that there is substantial level of material deprivation in old age people.

Table 3 shows the correlation matrix that details the inter-correlations of sub-domains of the age identity measurement and social exclusion. Pearson’s correlation reveals that there was a significant correlation between age identity experience and importance of age identity ( $r=.710$ ;  $p<.01$ ). Result indicates that when age identity experience is high, the importance to age identity is also high. Age identity inversely correlated with negative self perception of ageing ( $r=-.334$ ;  $p<.05$ ). Result indicates that when age identity experience of elderly persons increases, the negative self-perception of ageing decreases. The age identity experience negatively correlated with negative social attribution of ageing ( $r=-.309$ ;  $p<.05$ ). The result indicates that when age identity experience of elderly persons increases, the negative social attribution of ageing decreases.

There is no correlation between age identity experience and ageing identity. Age identity positively correlated with inadequate social participation ( $r=.360$ ;  $p<.05$ ). Result shows that when age identity experience increases inadequate social participation increases. Age identity positively correlated with material deprivation ( $r=.285$ ;  $p<.05$ ). Result reveals that when age identity experience increases, the material deprivation increases. Age identity experience positively correlated with social exclusion ( $r=.331$ ;  $p<.05$ ). The result shows that when age identity experience increases, social exclusion also increases.

**Table 3:** shows the correlations between sub-dimensions of identity and social exclusion of elderly persons

Sl. No	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Age identity experience	1								
2	Importance of age identity	.710**	1							
3	Negative self perception	-.334*	-.472**	1						
4	Negative social attribution	-.309*	-.490**	.761**	1					
5	Ageing identity	-.110	-.274*	.903**	.904**	1				
6	Social participation	.360*	.550**	-.425**	-.499**	-.388**	1			
7	Normative integration	.197	.290*	-.383**	-.276*	-.305*	.154	1		
8	Access to social rights	-.062	.058	-.278*	-.226	-.294*	.150	.227	1	
9	Material deprivation	.285*	.306*	-.588**	-.343*	-.452**	.227	.388**	.258	1
10	Social exclusion	.331*	.457**	-.673**	-.500**	-.559**	.535**	.606**	.506**	.871**

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed). \* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

There is a negative correlation between importance of age identity and negative self-perception of ageing ( $r = -.472$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Result shows that when the importance of age identity increases, the negative perception of ageing decreases. The importance of ageing inversely correlated with negative social attribution of ageing ( $r = -.490$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Result indicates that when the importance of age identity increases, negative social attribution of ageing decreases. Importance of age identity negatively correlated with ageing identity ( $r = -.274$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Result shows that when the importance of age identity of elderly persons increases, ageing identity decreases.

There is a significant correlation between importance of age identity and inadequate social participation ( $r = .550$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Result reveals that when the importance of age identity increases, inadequate social participation increases. Importance of age identity positively correlated with inadequate normative integration ( $r = .290$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Result shows that when the importance of age identity increases, inadequate normative integration increases. The importance of age identity positively correlated with material deprivation ( $r = .306$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Result indicates that when the importance of age identity increases, the material deprivation increases. Importance of age identity positively correlated with social exclusion ( $r = .457$ ;  $p < .01$ ). It shows that when the importance of age identity increases, the social exclusion increases.

There is a significant correlation between negative self and social perceptions of ageing ( $r = .761$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Result indicates that when the negative self-perception is high, the negative social perception is also high. There was a positive correlation between negative self-perception of ageing and ageing identity ( $r = .903$ ;  $p < .01$ ). The result conveys that when the negative perception increases, the age identity increases. Negative self-perception of ageing negatively correlated with inadequate social participation ( $r = -.425$ ;  $p < .01$ ). It indicates that when the negative self-perception ageing increases, the inadequate social participation also decreases. The inverse correlation between negative self-perceptions of ageing and inadequate normative integration ( $r = -.383$ ;  $p < .01$ ). It reveals that when negative self-perception of ageing is high, the inadequate normative integration is low.

The negative self-perception of ageing inversely correlated with inadequate access to social rights ( $r = -.278$ ;  $p < .05$ ). The result reveals that when the negative self-perception of ageing increases, the inadequate access to social rights decreases. Negative self-perception of ageing inversely correlated with material deprivation ( $r = -.588$ ;  $p < .01$ ). The result shows that when the negative self-perception of ageing increases, the material deprivation decreases. There is a negative correlation between negative self-perception of ageing and social exclusion ( $r = -.673$ ;  $p < .01$ ). The result shows that when the negative self-perception of ageing increases, the social exclusion decreases.

Table-3 shows that there is a significant correlation between negative social attribution of ageing and ageing identity ( $r = .904$ ;  $p < .01$ ). The result reveals that when the negative social attribution of ageing is high, the ageing identity is also high. Negative social attribution of ageing inversely correlated with inadequate social participation ( $r = -.499$ ;  $p < .01$ ). It indicates that when the negative social attribution of ageing increases, the social participation decreases. Negative social attribution of ageing negatively correlated with inadequate normative integration ( $r = -.276$ ;  $p < .05$ ). The result shows that when the negative social attribution of ageing increases, the inadequate normative integration decreases. There was a negative correlation between negative social attribution of ageing and material deprivation ( $r = -.343$ ;  $p < .05$ ). This indicates that when the negative social attribution of ageing increases, the material deprivation decreases. Negative social attribution of ageing was negatively correlated with social exclusion ( $r = -.500$ ;  $p < .01$ ). The result reveals that when negative social attribution of ageing of old age persons increases, the social exclusion decreases.

There is a negative correlation between ageing identity and inadequate social participation ( $r = -.388$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Result shows that when the ageing identity is high, the inadequate social participation is low. There is a negative correlation between ageing identity and inadequate normative integration ( $r = -.305$ ;  $p < .05$ ). It indicates that when ageing identity increases, inadequate normative integration decreases. Ageing identity was found to be inversely correlated with inadequate access to social rights ( $r = -.294$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Result indicates that when

ageing identity increases, the inadequate access to social rights decreases. There is a negative correlation between ageing identity and material deprivation ( $r = -.452$ ;  $p < .01$ ). This reveals that when the ageing identity increases, the material deprivation also decreases. Evidently, ageing identity was inversely correlated with social exclusion ( $r = -.559$ ;  $p < .01$ ). The result shows that when positive ageing identity increases, the social exclusion decreases.

Inadequate social participation was found to be positively correlated with social exclusion ( $r = .535$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Result reveals that when inadequate social participation increases, the social exclusion also increases. It is visible in the table that there is no correlation between inadequate normative integration and inadequate access to social rights. But inadequate normative integration is positively correlated with material deprivation ( $r = .388$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Result shows that when inadequate normative integration increases, the material deprivation also increases. There is a significant correlation between inadequate normative integration and social exclusion ( $r = .606$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Result indicates that when the inadequate normative integration increases, the social exclusion also increases. Inadequate access to social rights was found to be positively correlated with social exclusion ( $r = .506$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Result indicates that when inadequate access to social rights is high, the social exclusion is also high. There is a significant correlation between material deprivation and social exclusion ( $r = .871$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Result shows that when material deprivation increases, the social exclusion also increases.

**Table 4:** Shows the gender wise difference of age identity and social exclusion (sub-dimension wise)

Variables	Attributions	N	Mean	SD	t' vale	Df	Sig.
Negative social attribution	Men	27	21.8	5.5	-2.696	39	$p < .05$
	Women	14	26.6	5.2			
Age identity	Men	27	68.8	9.5	-2.752	39	$p < .01$
	Women	14	77.0	8.2			

Table 4 shows gender differences on negative social attribution of ageing using independent sample t' test. The result reveals that women were more likely to experience negative social attribution than men. The mean value was 21.8 for men while it was 26.6 for

women. The result suggests that women experienced high level of negative social attribution of ageing as compared to men ( $t = -2.696$ ;  $df: 39$ ;  $p < .05$ ). The mean value of age identity of men was 68.8 and for women, it was 77.0. The result indicates a statistically significant gender difference between elderly men and women on age identity ( $t = -2.752$ ;  $df: 39$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

Table 5 shows the significant predictors of social exclusion using stepwise linear regression analysis. The linear regression model examined the factors significantly predicted social exclusion of elderly persons. The results show that three variables significantly predicted social exclusion. These were self-perception of ageing, monthly family income and current earning status of the elderly persons. Standardized Beta coefficients of self-perception of ageing shows that when self-perception of ageing increases, social exclusion increase ( $\beta = .440$ ). It shows that self-perception of ageing highly leads to social exclusion. Monthly family income increases social exclusion also increases ( $\beta = .365$ ). Standardized Beta coefficient of current earning status increases social exclusion decreases ( $\beta = -.224$ ).

**Table 5:** Shows the significant predictors of social exclusion using stepwise linear regression analysis

Unstandardized coefficients	Standardized coefficients		t' value
	Beta	Std. error	
(Constant)	86.407	7.141	1
Self-perception of ageing	.736	.202	-3.642**
Monthly family income	.000	.000	3.086**
Current earning status	-5.668	2.700	-2.099*
$R^2 = .605$ ; Adjusted $R^2 = .573$			
NB: Negative self perception of ageing = $-.440$ + monthly income = $.365$ + current earning status = $-.224$ = Social exclusion = 86.407			
*** significant at .000 level; ** significant at .001 level; and * significant at .05 level			

## DISCUSSION

This study was conducted among 41 elderly persons aged 65 years and more. Among them, 34.1% were

women and 65.9% were men. The scores on age identity scores evidenced that elderly persons experienced a substantial level of positive ageing identity wherein they place much importance to their ageing identity. Interestingly, elderly persons have also reported high level of negative perception of ageing. It means that elderly persons subscribed societal perceptions of ageing such as age associated stereotypes, and cultural images of elderly persons. The study found inadequate social participation and inadequate normative integration among elderly persons. Most elderly persons did not enjoyed adequate access to social rights while they also experienced high level of material deprivation.

Evidently, as age identity increased, elderly persons negatively perceived self and subscribed negative social attribution of ageing. Age identity experience has lead to high level of material deprivation and overall social exclusion in elderly persons. When the elderly persons negatively perceived their age, it was associated with high level of social exclusion. But negative social attribution of ageing helps to decrease social exclusion. Inadequate social participation and inadequate normative integration lead to a high level of social exclusion. Inadequate access to social rights is another cause which leads to social exclusion. The amount of material deprivation during old age has accelerated the social exclusion in elderly persons. The regression model found that three significant predictors variables of social exclusion in elderly persons. They were self perception of ageing, monthly family income, and current earning status of the elderly persons. Most significantly contributing variable to social exclusion was self perception of ageing.

Identities are socially constructed through public discourse and discursive construction of age identities occur in association with other identities, including gender and race, and certain identities get foregrounded, such that one identity gets privileged over another (Ainsworth and Hardy 2007, and Madil 2006, p. 36). Evidently, the present study showed that society has a significant influence on the formulation of age identity in elderly persons. Elderly persons value their age identity but at the same time, they perceived age identity negatively. When the society attributes negative image

on ageing, the old age people tend to perceive ageing negatively (Ainsworth and Hardy 2007). Further, other identities such as gender and race influence the age identity while the present study evidenced the gender difference on the experience of age identity.

Elderly persons are likely to be socially excluded because elderly have few material resources. It means what can happen when people suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low income, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown (DFID 2000, Giovedi 2014, Byren 1999, Dillin, Gottschiling and Nystrom 2014). Further, lack of contact with other people, poor access to services and lack of involvement in civic and neighbourhood activities dispose elderly persons vulnerable to social exclusion. For some older people, those forms of exclusion have persisted from earlier in life, and for others, the experience of ageing has led them to become excluded (Barak and Stern 1986, Bowen and Richard 2004).

The present study indicates that when the people experience age identity, it leads to social exclusion. Like the earlier studies, the present study also indicates that lack of social participation, inadequate access to the social rights and material deprivation are responsible for social exclusion of older people. Negative self perception of ageing and inadequate normative integration has lead to high level of social exclusion. Economic status was an important element that influenced the social exclusion of the older people. Consistent with previous studies, adequate family income would substantially reduce social exclusion (Pain, 2001). Evidently, the present study reported a lower level of social exclusion among the people those who are still earning.

## CONCLUSION

Most elderly persons give much importance to their ageing identity as an elderly person. But they predominantly perceive their ageing process negatively. Negative self-perceptions of ageing significantly increase the level of social exclusion. Therefore, we conclude that alongside other factors, the negative self perception of ageing lead to high level of social exclusion of elderly persons. However, the present study results

are preliminary in nature since it was based on relatively small sample size. But these results evidently provide some initial insights into the significant role of ageing identity towards social disability experience.

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