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Original Article

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GROWING ELDERLY POPULATION OF JAPAN AND INDIA

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ABSTRACT

India and Japan both are two quite different countries, generally from every aspect. Where India is a developing country and with a projected GDP growth rate of 6.5% in 2026, it is one of the fastest-growing emerging economies in the world. But as compare to India, Japan is significantly more advanced country from many aspects such as health care system, socio-economic status & growth, technology, etc. As per "International Monetary Fund (IMF)" 2026 projection, Japan's current GDP per capita income is 35.7 thousand U.S. dollars but in India it is only 2.81 thousand U.S. dollars. This means that in Japan average individual income is around 12 times more than that of India. Apart from all these significant differences between the economic status, there is a significant difference in both of these countries in terms of population also as both countries represent two totally different levels of demographic transition. Where the Japan has earned the title of a "super-aged society" in the world and is a home for world's most rapidly ageing population but at same time experiencing a continuous decline in its overall population, India is comparatively having young population but is ageing rapidly. As increasing elderly population carries many adverse implications with it, this research paper aims to offer a comparative analysis of the demographic transitions occurring in both India and Japan. Furthermore, it also tries to explore the policies and strategies which these countries are implementing to manage the challenges and opportunities presented by their shifting age structures i.e. growing elderly population.

Keywords: Elderly Population, Fertility Rate, Life Expectancy, Health System

INTRODUCTION

DEMOGRAPHIC COMPARISON OF INDIA AND JAPAN

As Japan is ageing very fast, it is considered as "Super-aged society" of the world and home of the world's most swiftly ageing population. As per Government's official data[1] of Japan, till October, 2024, Japan's total population was 123.80 million in which the share of elderly population (aged 65 and above) was 36.24 million that means 29.3% elderly population of its (Japan) total population. In October 2019, this share of elderly population was around 28.4% of its total population with majority of elderly women. Instead of it, currently, Japan has nearly 100,000 Centenarians (people aged 100+) and is projected to raise up to 440,000 by 2050. This demographic shifts of Japan is the result of the two major elements i.e. low fertility rate and high life expectancy. But as comparison to Japan, India has very low share of elderly population in its total population i.e. around 7% in 2024. Where the Japan is considered as the most elderly country in the world, India is considered as most populous country of the world. Although, India is currently one of the youngest countries in the world, but its population is also ageing rapidly.

[1] https://www8.cao.go.jp/kourei/english/annualreport/2025/pdf/2025.pdf

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COMPARISON OF FERTILITY RATE OF BOTH COUNTRIES

Total fertility rate represents "the number of children that would be born to a woman if she were to live to the end of her childbearing years and bear children in accordance with age-specific fertility rates of the specified year" [2]. Japan's fertility rate for the year 2025 was 1.38 children per woman which was 1.26 in 2021[3] . Despite, many governmental efforts, the Country's fertility rate is not increasing satisfactorily since 1974 and continuously remained below from the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman[4] because of which, Japan's population is shrinking continuously and dropped from 128 million in 2010 to around 123.80 million in 2024 and now projected by the "National Institute of Population and Social Security Research" to decrease to 88 million by 2065 in the case of medium-fertility scenario but if there will be the case of low-fertility scenario, then the population of Japan would drop to 82 million by 2065[5] with around 36% of elderly population share which will result into heavy shortage of labour force and heavy financial burden on working population. But on the other side, in year 2025, India's fertility rate was 2.11 children per woman which was 1.99 children per woman in 2021[6] .

COMPARISON OF LIFE EXPECTANCY OF BOTH COUNTRIES

From last few decades, the life expectancy of the Japanese has increased steadily. Current (2026) overall life expectancy of Japan is recorded as 85.15 years. For women it is 88.18 years and for males it is 82.13 years.[7] That means in total elderly population, the elderly women's share is higher than elderly men. Japan's life expectancy is increasing continuously due to healthy traditional dietary habits of Japanese, advanced health technologies, health wellness programmes, universal health insurance coverage, access to clean water, hygiene and sanitation, active lifestyles adopted by youth and elderly people, economic development and advanced life style of people etc. Because of all such major factors the life expectancy of Japanese population could not stop even at the time of economic recession of Japan in 1990s[8] . On the other side, the life expectancy of India is recorded as 70.82 years in 2025 which has decreased from 72.00 years in 2023[9] .

IMPACTS OF GROWING ELDERLY POPULATION IN JAPAN

Despite being a 'super-ageing country', Japan has successfully managed the high living standard of its citizens on the basis of its strong socio-economic securities and high technology but as per some analysts, the fastly growing elder population of it is hampering the economic growth of the country i.e. Japan. Growing elderly population and shrinking youth both combinedly affecting the economic growth of Japan in the following ways: -

- **Shortage of workers[10] : -** Declining fertility rate means declining number of young people that means shortage of labour force, which results into low production of goods, low global exports and high import of goods, slowdown of country's GDP (which has been recorded as 0.7% in 2026)[11] , reduction in investment rate, high pressure on labour market[12] .
- **High fiscal pressure on government: -** Growing elderly population also increases the fiscal pressure on government in form of social security provide to elderly population i.e. pension, long-term care facilities, health care expenditure etc. For example in 2018, the total health expenditure of Japan was around 10.9% of its GDP which as per IMF is projected to increase up to 12.1% by 2030[13].

[2] https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/Countries/jpn/japan/fertility-rate; Japan Fertility Rate (1950-2025)
[3] https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/Countries/jpn/japan/fertility-rate; Japan Fertility Rate (1950-2025)
[4] https://ms-researchhub.com/home/resources/the-global-economy-this-week/the-economic-and-social-effects-of-japan-s-aging-population-lessons-for-germany-and-europe.html
[5] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/659419/EPRS_BRI(2020)659419_EN.pdf
[6] https://www.macotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/ind/india/fertility-rate; India Fertility Rate (1950-2025)
[7] https://www.worldometers.info/demographics/life-expectancy/worldometer; Life Expectancy of the World Population
[8] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/659419/EPRS_BRI(2020)659419_EN.pdf
[9] https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/ind/india/life-expectancy; macrotrends; India Life Expectancy (1950-2025)
[10] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/659419/EPRS_BRI(2020)659419_EN.pdf
[11] https://www.worldometers.info/gdp/japan-gdp/; Worldometer; Japan GDP (2026)
[12] https://ms-researchhub.com/home/resources/the-global-economy-this-week/the-economic-and-social-effects-of-japan-s-aging-population-lessons-for-germany-and-europe.html
[13] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/659419/EPRS_BRI(2020)659419_EN.pdf

- **Increasing rate of poverty among elderly: -** Due to increasing elderly population, the poverty rate is also increasing among elder Japanese of aged 65 and over. In 2018, poverty rate among elder Japanese was 19.6% which is much higher among elderly women[14].
- **Old age dependency ratio: -** Currently, Japan is facing the problem of highest old-age dependency ratio in world. As per United Nations, World Population Prospects (2022) the old-age dependency ratio of Japan has already surpassed 50% in 2021. That means in Japan currently there are only two working age people for each elderly person. In 2024, this age dependency ratio has recorded as 50.66%[15] . Now, the Japan Government is projected that by 2060 this old age dependency ratio will increase up to high level and then for one elderly person there will be one working age person to maintain.
- **Shrinking farming population[16]: -** As the consequences of its new demographic transition, currently Japan is also facing the grave issue of shrinking farming population within the country as it has shrinked at its critical level from 5.42 million in 1985 to 2.09 million in 2015. Agriculture sector of Japan is facing the severe shortage of farming labour force and in some rural areas it is even at the risk of disappearance because the farming population is also ageing and the youth is shifting to cities.
- **Adverse impact on education[17]: -** Because of shrinking child population, Japan's education system is also the risk of collapse. Many local government schools has already closed for not having minimal strength of students. In 2018, more than 200 elementary and junior high schools has been closed across Japan. Instead of it, Universities and collages of Japan are also struggling to deal with the challenges arisen due to shrinking students population. This declining students strength has also reduced the competition among the students or young people which is very necessary to enhance the talent of students.

Instead of the above mentioned implications there are some other adverse effects also such as higher wages due to shortage of labor, pressure on social security system as public pension expenditure is also rising i.e. 7.9% of GDP in 2000 to 10.2% in 2020 due to growing population of retirees and pensioners, heavy demand of Geriatric health care services and caregivers networks, deterioration of intergenerational relationship, social isolation among elderly etc.[18]

GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES AND STRATEGIES TO TACKLE THE PROBLEM OF DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION IN JAPAN.

- **Silver economy: -** Japan is the world forerunner of the silver economy which encompasses all economic activities market products and services towards the needs of the elderly population, their health care and raising life standard and independence. "Silver economy refers to the economic activities and opportunities associated with ageing population, particularly the market and industry related to goods and services aimed to senior citizens".
- **Robot revolution in Japan[19]: -** To manage the need of labour force of caregivers to pace with the care needs of the increasing elderly population, the artificial intelligence (AI) and new industrial revolution driven by robots have taken place in Japan. For this new industrial revolution, the Government of Japan, in 2014 set up a "Robot Revolution Realisation Council" and adopted a new robot strategy to encourage productivity, and handle some specific social challenges related to ageing demographic studies.
- **Family Policies to increase fertility rate[20]: -** To increase the fertility rate of Japan in 1994, the government came with 'Angel Plan' to encourage couples through some specific strategies to raise to number of children i.e. parental leave up to 24 months, monetary assistance, child allowance. This plan was revised by government of Japan for several times. In 2019, the government also introduced free primary and secondary education, day care services for 3 to 5 age children. Further, in May 2020 the government announced a new strategy to reduce financial burden of fertility treatment, raising child allowances, higher allowances for paternity leave, programme for free higher education etc. Along with this, the big challenge before the government was regarding the management of finances to implement these strategies. So the government identified the coverage of some of such expenses on public health insurance.

[14] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/659419/EPRS_BRI(2020)659419_EN.pdf
[15] https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/SPPOPDPNDOLJPN
[16] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/659419/EPRS_BRI(2020)659419_EN.pdf
[17] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/659419/EPRS_BRI(2020)659419_EN.pdf
[18] https://ms-researchhub.com/home/resources/the-global-economy-this-week/the-economic-and-social-effects-of-japan-s-aging-population-lessons-for-germany-and-europe.html
[19] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/659419/EPRS_BRI(2020)659419_EN.pdf
[20] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/659419/EPRS_BRI(2020)659419_EN.pdf

ELDERLY WELFARE GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND STRATEGIES IN INDIA

Currently, the adverse effects of the growing elderly population are on their initial stage in India. So, the Government's main focus is on the welfare of its senior citizens and on the protection of their rights. By keeping in mind, the welfare of senior citizens, the Government of India has launched various health and social security oriented policies and programmes such as NPHCE, Senior Citizens Savings Scheme (SCSS), IGNOAPS, PMVVY, RVY, IPSrC, Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY, Varishtha Pension Bima Yojana, Vayoshreshtha Samman etc. These policies has been launched by the Government mainly to enhance the living standard of the elderly population within India and to reduce their socio-economic vulnerability, to reduce their dependency ratio on other working people or family members, to provide them accessible and affordable health care facilities & support and to promote silver economy etc. But due to weak implementation of these policies and lackness of awareness among the senior citizens about such policies and programmes and their benefits, the Government has remained fail to achieve the real objectives of these policies. Today, the issue of growing elderly population is seeming small because of low elderly share in total population i.e. around 10% of India's total population and its small scale implications, but what will happen tomorrow when the elderly population of India will cross 20% of its total population in 2050 and will reach up to 36% till the end of this century i.e. 2100 and then this issue will become a very serious problem for Indian society difficult to handle. Today, we have a lot to learn from the countries like Japan that how severely this problem can affect any country's socio-economic structure and can affect its economic growth. Through a balanced and systematic case study of countries like Japan we can better understand this problem's main causes, its implications and the tactics and strategies through which this problem's implications can be reduced or controlled in time.

CONCLUSION

India which is one of the youngest countries in the world and currently ranked as the most populous country, surpassed China in 2023 and is projected to share around 17.79% of the world's total population in 2026[21] and Japan with its most ageing and shrinking overall population, both represent two totally different demographic realities. India's old age dependency ratio in 2024 was only 11.90% but at the same time in Japan the old age dependency was over 50%[22] . Japan is facing the problem of world's highest old age dependency ratio which is one of the major causes of its slowing down GDP growth rate. Where Japan has already trapped in vicious cycle of its high elderly population rate and its adverse implications, the issue of growing elderly population is new for India. Where high elderly population rate and shrinking youth population are already putting severe adverse impacts on the social, economic and health structure of Japan and which has already reduced the growth rate of the country, the Government of Japan has continuously trying to reverse its population structure to the replacement level from last few decades, but it has failed repeatedly. Now, it is the time to think about and take a lesson from the condition of Japan that when the problem of demographic transition can affect a developed country like Japan to such a high level that it has become a very big task for it to come out from this trap, then what will be the condition of the developing countries like India.

SUGGESTIONS

- The Indian Government should ensure the proper availability of manpower in health sector of India such as doctors, nurses and caregivers etc. and should try to achieve the doctor-people and nurse-people ratio standard provided by the world health organization (WHO) i.e. one doctor for 1000 people and one nurse for 300 people.
- Government of India must ensure the proper participation of female population in labour market so that in upcoming future the shortage of labour force can be properly handled.
- Government of India must enhance the age limit of compulsory retirement age according to the increasing life expectancy of the country so that dependency of elderly population can be reduced from working young population as well as from the government.
- To enhance the working age of elderly population, it is necessary for the government to set and achieve the target of healthy ageing as done by the Japan. By improving the health of elderly population we will get a healthy older working population which will reduce the old age dependency ratio, which further automatically will reduce the fiscal pressure from government related to social securities provided to senior citizens and financial strain from young working population.
- The government should enhance the nutritional level of its all citizens and must ensure the easy availability of pure eatable foods, fruits and vegetables so that the health of citizens of India may not be compromised. This small but effective step will help the government to achieve the target of healthy ageing which is the need of the hour as today's youth generation will be tomorrow's elderly population.
- Access to pure drinking water to all citizens which directly affect the health of public.

[21] https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/; Countries in the world by population (2026)
[22] https://ourworldindata.org/data-insights/japan-has-the-highest-ratio-of-elderly-people-relative-to-working-age-people-globally; 8 April, 2024

- Effective implementation of all senior citizens oriented policies and schemes.
- Time bounded frequent researches on the issues of senior citizens should be done by the government so that exact situation of elderly population's growth and its implications can be timely detected.