



CAG

Citizen consumer and civic Action Group

Elderly Indians are at a heightened risk of heart attack and stroke due to uncontrolled hypertension

Chennai

For immediate release

Cardiovascular disease (CVD), primarily ischaemic heart disease and stroke, is the leading cause of death worldwide, accounting for 17.7 million deaths annually. Undetected and untreated hypertension has been ranked as the highest risk factor for heart disease and related deaths. WHO estimates that India accounts for over a fifth of these deaths. The deadly second wave of Covid-19 has further revealed the extent to which untreated and unmanaged raised blood pressure can make an already ailing Indian population, further vulnerable.

Uncontrolled hypertension is a major cause for concern among elderly Indians. With more than 4 in 10 Indians aged 45 and above reporting that they suffer from high blood pressure, India has a crisis at hand. A fact sheet published by the Banaras Hindu University (BHU) raises alarm not just on the rising prevalence of hypertension in the elderly population but also on the significant treatment and diagnosis gap. Using data from the Longitudinal Ageing Study of India (LASI**, Wave 1, published in January 2021), the Community Health Department of this premier medical institute has undertaken a secondary analysis of the hypertension burden and control rates in the ageing population of the country.

Speaking at the release of this factsheet, Dr BR Mittal, Director, Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University said, “Even as lifespans have increased and survivorship is on the rise in India due to advancements in medical science, hypertension, the most prominent risk factor for heart attack, stroke and kidney disease, remains under diagnosed and under treated. Based on our analysis, we note with concern that 45 percent elderly Indians reported that they were hypertensive and 30 percent of those were found not to have their blood pressure under control.” Gender disparity in hypertension prevalence among the elderly of India is quite stark. Overall, women had a higher prevalence of HTN (45.5 percent) as compared to men (43.9 percent).

The analysis also reveals regional disparities with no set pattern - hilly states like Himachal Pradesh and Nagaland reported high prevalence, as did Punjab (one of the highest at 60 per cent) and coastal regions such as Kerala and Lakshadweep. The Tamil Nadu data reveals the prevalence of hypertension at 45.6 percent, which is no less!

Responding to the report, Dr. V. Mohan, Chairman, Dr. Mohan’s Diabetes Specialities Centre, Chennai said “India is currently facing a twin epidemic- hypertension and diabetes. One of the

problems in India is that both occur at much younger age groups than among white Europeans. Uncontrolled hypertension is a serious risk factor for heart attacks and stroke, given that Indians get hypertension and are prone to premature coronary artery disease. It is very important to launch a massive program in India to correct the rule of halves and see that we diagnose those who have undiagnosed hypertension, start treatment for those who are diagnosed, and see that the blood pressure targets are achieved in those who are treated. This can significantly reduce the risk of heart attacks and strokes in Indians”

Indians consume more than the daily recommended limit of salt intake and a lot of this salt comes from processed or packaged food. Unmonitored salt intake poses a significant threat to humans, especially salt, which is a severe risk factor for hypertension., said S. Saroja, Executive Director, Citizen consumer and civic Action Group.

**Envisioned to study India’s growing elderly population, LASI examines their wellbeing and needs to better inform policy measures and prepare for population ageing. The LASI is a nationally representative survey over 72,000 older adults aged 45 years and above across all states and union territories of India, undertaken by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare through the International Institute for Population Sciences, (IIPS).

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About Citizen consumer and civic Action Group (CAG):

CAG is a 35-year-old non-profit and non-political organisation that works towards protecting citizens' rights in consumer, civic and environmental issues and promoting good governance processes including transparency, accountability and participatory decision-making.

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