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**Morbidity Pattern Among the Elderly Population in the Rural Area of Tamil Nadu, India**

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**Abstract:** Globally there are an estimated 605 million people aged 60 years and above. From the morbidity point of view, almost 50 per cent of the Indian elderly have chronic diseases and 5 percent suffer from immobility. A major component of the burden of illness for the elderly derives from prevalent chronic disease. Hence a study was undertaken to assess the present morbidity pattern of rural elderly persons. A community based cross-sectional study was undertaken in the rural service area of Pondicherry Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) between october 1, 2002 to October 31, 2003. All persons above the age of 60 years residing in the four villages of the area were randomly selected for this study. They were interviewed and examined in their houses using a predesigned and pretested questionnaire. A clinical examination and a set of basic laboratory tests including ECG was taken for each individual by a team of Medical Officers and field health staff. Among 320 elderly persons studied, the average illness per person was 2.77. Pain in the joints and joint stiffness was the most common morbidity in 139 (43.4%), followed by dental and chewing complaints in 135 (42%), decreased visual acuity due to cataract and refractive errors in 182 (57%) and hearing impairment in 46 (15.4%). Other morbidities were hypertension in 42 (14%), diarrhoea in 38 (12%), chronic cough in 37 (12%), skin diseases in 38 (12%), heart illness in 27 (9%), diabetes in 26 (8.1%), asthma in 19 (6%) and urinary complaints in 18 (5.6%). The mean BMI was 19.02 kg/m<sup>2</sup> and below 18 kg/m<sup>2</sup> in 49.61% of the study population. Anaemia was found in 168 (52.5%), elevated ESR in 118 (37%), elevated blood sugar in 41 (13%) and abnormal ECG findings in 111 (34.7%). The average morbidity per person was 2.77. This highlights the need for their regular periodic medical examination and treatment at the primary care level, which will help prevent further deterioration of their health status.

**Key Words:** Elderly, morbidity, rural

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