Understanding Senior Citizens' Experience with Online Fraud

A Survey Based Assessment

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Executive Summary

Senior citizens are becoming an increasingly significant segment in the digital ecosystem. Their engagement on the internet is shaped by socio-economic status, health conditions, and familial support systems. It is becoming crucial for senior citizens to protect themselves from scams and frauds, and navigate the digital world securely. This is a pressing issue: **the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reports an 86 percent rise in cybercrimes targeting seniors between 2020 and 2022**, emphasising the growing prevalence of phishing, scams, and fraudulent advertisements aimed at this demographic.

There is a lack of comprehensive research on specific issues faced by the elderly on the internet and what should be the focus of interventions. We conducted a dipstick survey over January and February 2025 to assess online behaviour and fraud vulnerability among 100 individuals aged 60 and above. It targeted key aspects of digital engagement, exposure to fraudulent activities, financial and emotional consequences, and mitigation practices.

There are a number of barriers to elders' internet usage, including poor traditional literacy and physical aspects of aging (like poor vision).

We found the majority of respondents report daily internet use. Frequent users are more likely to be exposed to online fraud attempts but may also develop better awareness of risks. Conversely, infrequent users might be more susceptible due to a lack of familiarity with security practices. Respondents engage in various digital interactions, including social networking (29 percent), financial transactions (21 percent), entertainment (17 percent), and shopping (16 percent). Some activities, such as online financial transactions and shopping, put them at risk of financial fraud, whereas social media usage increases susceptibility to phishing and identity theft.

There are a number of barriers to elders' internet usage, including poor traditional literacy and physical aspects of aging (like poor vision). The complexity of digital interfaces acts as a compounding factor. As per our survey, seniors reported a variety of difficulties with digital tools:

- complex interfaces (24 percent)
- limited awareness about app/device functions (37 percent)
- security concerns such as fear of fraud (15 percent)
- limited awareness about the complaint process (17 percent)

Financial losses due to online fraud ranged from amounts less than ₹1,000 (21 percent) to above ₹100,000 (15 percent), with the median loss in the range of ₹10,000–₹50,000.

These barriers explain why India's elderly population is increasingly vulnerable, making them easy targets for scams such as phishing, identity theft, and financial fraud. Three key factors make seniors vulnerable to scams: cognitive decline and lack of digital literacy, loneliness and isolation which make them trust more easily, and their financial stability leading to the availability of large sums of funds. Beyond personal experiences, **a majority of respondents know friends or relatives who have fallen victim to online fraud; 8 in 10 such cases have a severe or a considerable impact.** This suggests that scams are affecting almost the entire networks of older adults, reinforcing the need for community-based mitigation measures.

We find that the impact of fraud varied depending on the type, with some scams leading to direct financial loss while others caused reputational damage or emotional distress, and eroded trust in digital platforms. Financial losses due to online fraud ranged from amounts less than ₹1,000 to above ₹100,000. But the impact of scams goes beyond monetary and can have cascading healthcare, macroeconomic, and societal costs, which have been explored in greater detail in the report.

Impact of Scams on Elders

| Healthcare Costs | Ripple Effects on Families | Broader Societal Costs | Macroeconomic Costs |
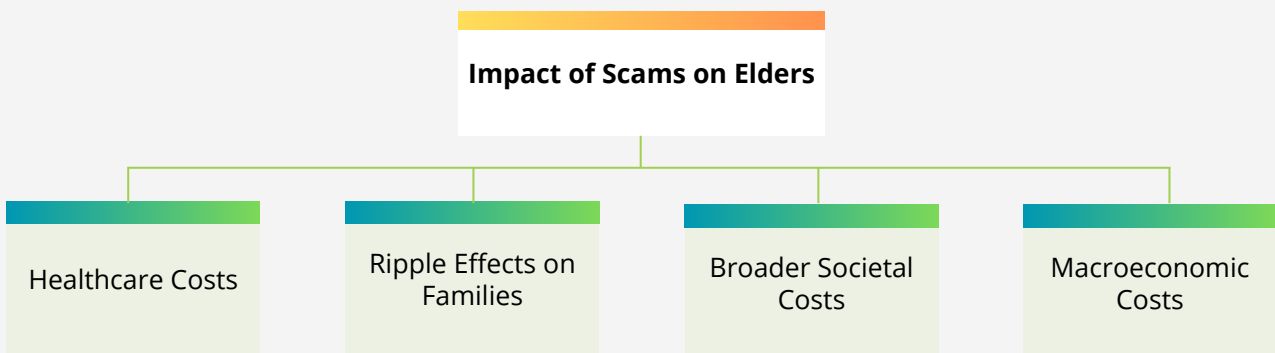
Despite the impact of online fraud, none of the existing regulations in India place special importance on senior citizen fraud prevention or recognise additional security needs of the elderly population. While sectoral regulators (like RBI, IRDAI, DoT, SEBI) identify senior citizens as vulnerable, they have not put forth specific measures for seniors' protection. And there is a glaring need for such measures: **45 percent of senior citizens are not confident in their capabilities to identify fraud and 72 percent are keen on taking part in capacity building workshops.**

None of the existing regulations in India place special importance on senior citizen fraud prevention or recognise additional security needs of the elderly population.

Based on a comprehensive review, we suggest some key steps that will improve the experience of senior citizens on the internet:

- Ensuring existing authentication and verification measures are enforced when senior citizens use online banking
- Rolling out capacity-building measures to ensure the digital skilling of senior citizens so they are empowered to deal with fraud
- Widening the functionality of existing local and state ID cards distributed to senior citizens
- Evolving consumer protection measures for senior citizens, such as giving them more time to report fraud under the RBI's zero-trust liability framework
- Adapting grievance redressal mechanisms to the needs of senior citizens

1   Introduction

Although internet adoption is traditionally led by younger generations, **senior citizens are becoming an increasingly significant segment in the digital ecosystem.** Their engagement on the internet is shaped by socio-economic status, health conditions, and familial support systems. India has a significant population of senior citizens - defined as those 60 and older - which was projected to rise to 163 million by 2026. This number is projected[1] to rise to 193 million by 2031. The population segment is estimated to grow over 40 percent each decade, and will be over a fifth of India's total population by 2050 as per the UN Population Fund. There is thus a **pressing need for a deeper understanding of their digital behaviour and technological engagement.**

Table 1
Demographics, 60+ age

Parameter	2021	2026	2031
Population, million	137.57	162.83	193.43
Proportion, percentage of population	10.10	11.40	13.10
Male population, million	67.00	78.81	93.10
Female population, million	70.83	84.02	100.32
Sex ratio, female per 1000 male	1061.28	1066.04	1077.57
Dependency Ratio	157.00	176.00	201.00

Source: National Commission on Population, 2020

1.1   Research Scope

The NCRB reports an **86 percent rise in cybercrimes targeting seniors between 2020 and 2022, emphasising the growing prevalence of phishing, scams, and fraudulent advertisements aimed at this demographic**.[2] Concerns over privacy violations and fear of falling victim to scams deter many from full digital participation.[3]

NCRB reports an 86 percent rise in cybercrimes targeting seniors between 2020 and 2022, emphasising the growing prevalence of phishing, scams, and fraudulent advertisements aimed at this demographic.

Despite this, there is a lack of concerted effort to overcome the digital literacy barrier for the elderly. Programs such as the National Digital Literacy Mission—which aims to empower at least one person per household with crucial digital literacy skills by 2020—leave the elderly population out of their purview. Non-government organisations that work with older adults undertake training initiatives on niche areas and are sometimes hindered by a lack of funds and technical know-how. More research is needed to identify what specific issues are faced by the elderly on the internet and what should be the focus of interventions.

To this end, **a dipstick survey was designed as a quick, exploratory assessment of online behaviour and fraud vulnerability among 100 individuals aged 60 and above.** Conducted over January and February 2025, it employed a structured questionnaire targeting key aspects of digital engagement, exposure to fraudulent activities, financial and emotional consequences, and mitigation practices. Given the evolving nature of online threats and the increasing digital participation of older adults, a dipstick approach was deemed suitable to capture timely insights without the extended timelines and resource intensiveness of large-scale studies. This method allowed for a rapid yet meaningful snapshot of trends, helping to identify key risk areas and inform the need for deeper investigations or policy interventions.

1.2   Online Footprint of India's Senior Citizens

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital adoption among seniors, as they turned to digital tools to mitigate isolation and maintain connections.

There is low internet usage among the elderly; despite the rapid increase in the size of the aging population, older adults experience the lowest rates of the uptake of digital technologies. Even then, we can see that elderly use of the internet is on the rise. By 2023, phone usage (i.e. smartphones and basic phones included) among senior citizens increased to 61 percent for the 60-69 age group and 45 percent for the 70+ age group – a jump of six percent compared to 2020.[4] The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital adoption among seniors, as they turned to digital tools to mitigate isolation and maintain connections.[5]

This is borne out in the survey, **where the majority of respondents report daily internet use (88 percent), with only nine percent engaging infrequently (i.e. occasionally or rarely).** Frequent users are more likely to face online fraud attempts but may also develop better awareness of risks. Conversely, infrequent users might be more susceptible to fraud due to a lack of familiarity with security practices. It should be noted that the survey was limited to urban users who already have email addresses, and thus may not be a representative sample across India.

Graph 1
Frequency of Internet Usage
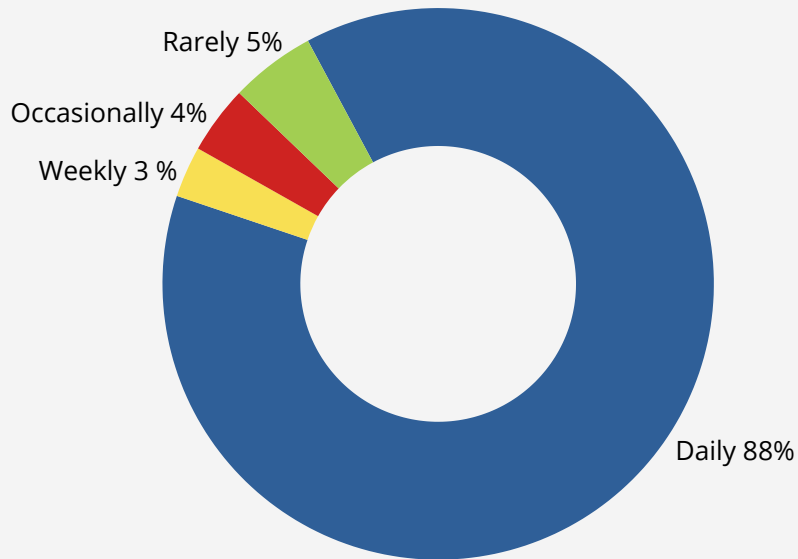
The range of devices senior citizens use includes smartphones (60 percent) and laptops/desktops (24 percent) as the leading devices. The type of device influences exposure to fraud - for instance, mobile users may encounter phishing scams via messaging apps, while laptop/desktop users might be more prone to email fraud.

Graph 2
Devices Used to Access Internet
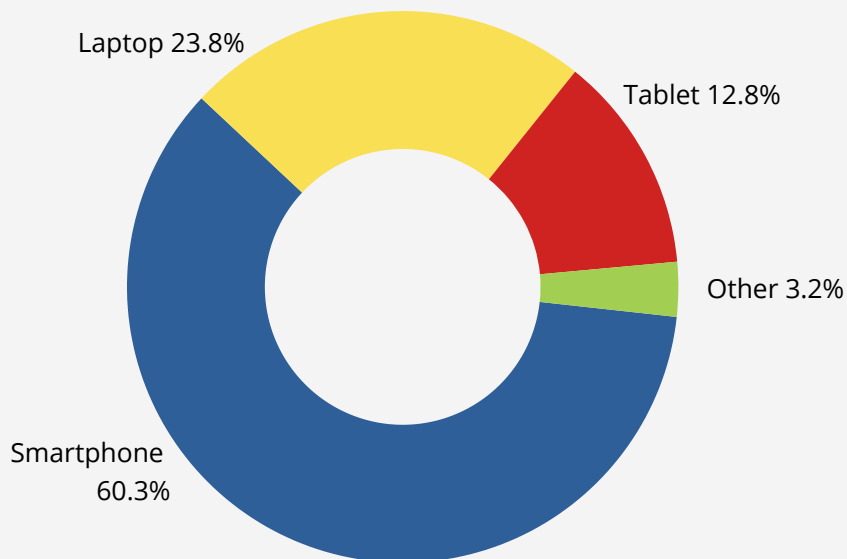
Many senior citizens also use digital platforms primarily for social connectivity - 68 percent engage with WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube.[6]

Figure 1
Activities of Seniors Online

91%
Staying in touch with friends and family

87%
Organizing Finances

73%
Improving Health and Wellness
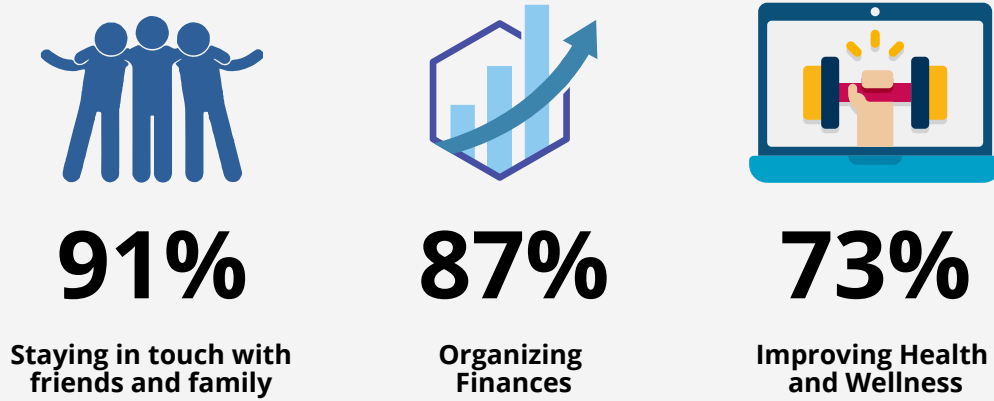
Source: Digital Habits of Seniors Online, 2021[7]

Survey respondents also engage in various digital interactions, including social networking (29 percent), financial transactions (21 percent), entertainment (17 percent) and shopping (16 percent). **Some activities, such as online financial transactions and shopping, put them at the risk of financial frauds, whereas social media usage increases susceptibility to phishing and identity theft.**

Graph 3
Primary Online Activity of Seniors

Financial transactions, 21%

Information, 13%

Health services, 4%

Other, 20%

Online shopping, 16%

Entertainment, 17%

Social Media, 29%
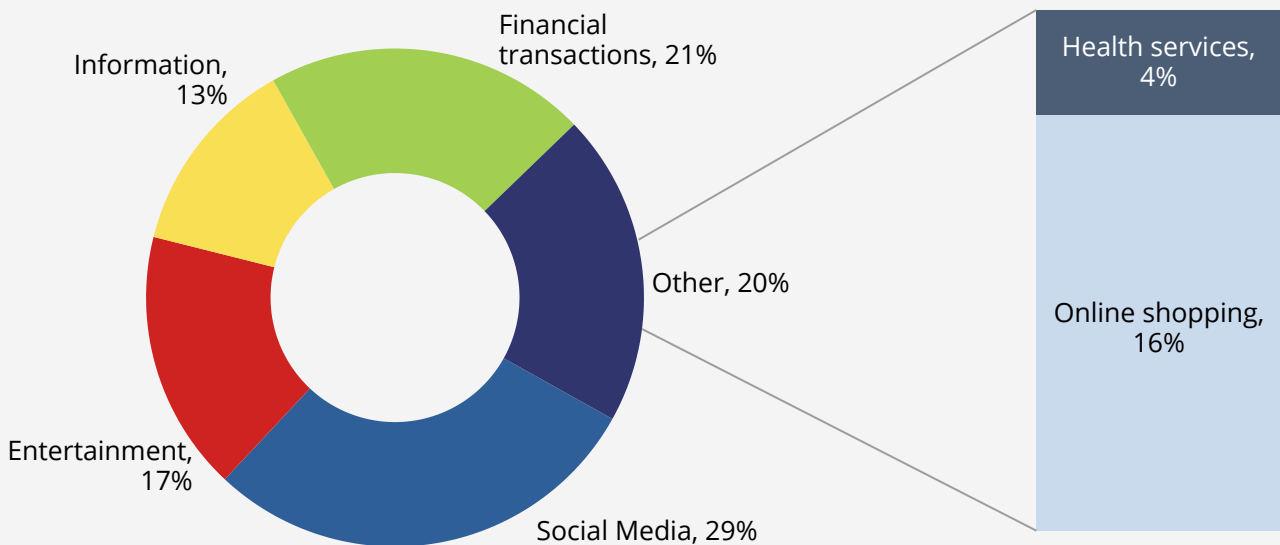
1.3 Challenges in Internet Use Amongst Senior Citizens

Many seniors are unfamiliar with navigating websites or mobile apps, lacking the necessary digital skills to complete online forms or verify their identities.
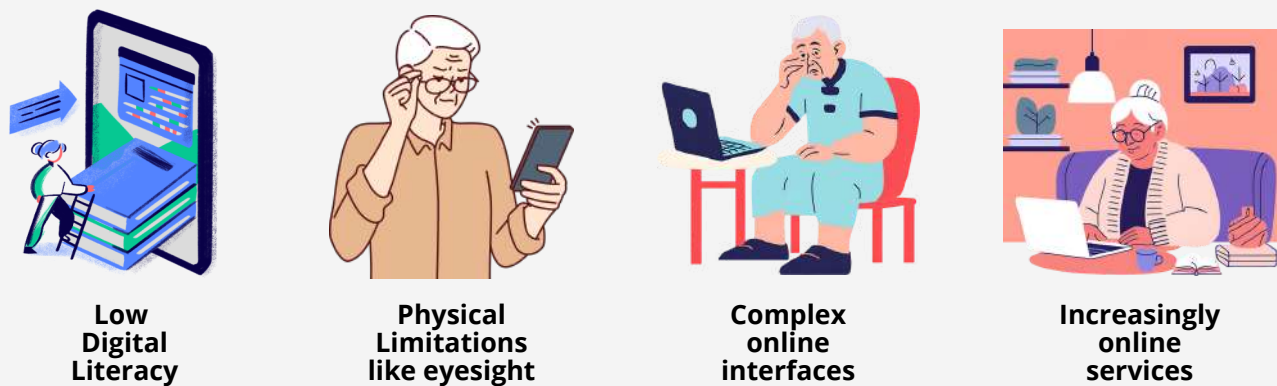
Limited studies on internet use challenges find that barriers to senior citizen's usage include poor traditional literacy and physical aspects of aging (like poor vision).[8] The complexity of digital interfaces acts as a compounding factor. Many senior citizens are unfamiliar with navigating websites or mobile apps, lacking the necessary digital skills to complete online forms or verify their identities.[9] They also struggle with complex interfaces, small fonts, and inadequate guidance, leading to errors or accidental disclosure of personal information.
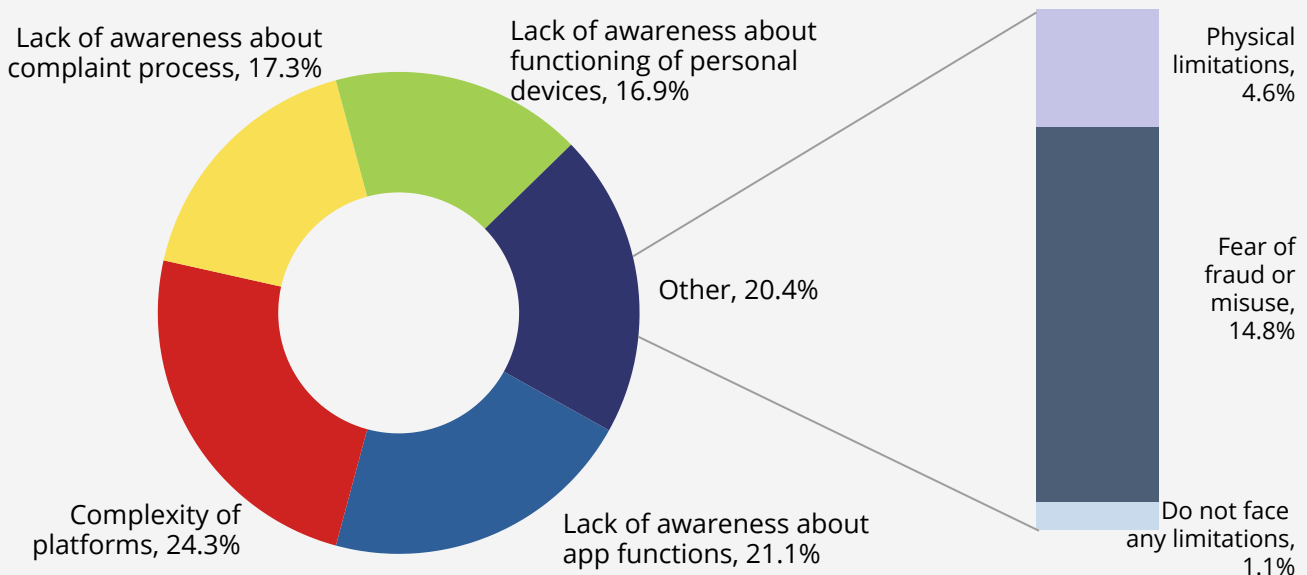
Research suggests that **seniors are not fully aware of online privacy or the need to use security measures such as strong passwords and multi-factor authentication**, leaving them open to fraudsters who exploit weak security practices.[10] Vision impairment, motor difficulties, or memory issues can also make online transactions frustrating. Public service portals often have confusing layouts, technical jargon, or security measures like one-time passwords (OTP), which further hinder digital access. Limited access to digital devices and unreliable internet connectivity, especially in rural areas, worsen these challenges, leading to digital exclusion.

Figure 2
Challenges in Internet Use Among Elderly

**Low
Digital
Literacy**

**Physical
Limitations
like eyesight**

**Complex
online
interfaces**

**Increasingly
online
services**

The push for digitisation of essential services like health and banking, which was heightened after the COVID-19 lockdowns, has added to the challenges faced by senior citizens.[11] Senior citizens particularly struggle with being able to use public facilities when they are placed online.

Graph 4
Challenges in Operating Digital Tools

Lack of awareness about complaint process, 17.3%

Lack of awareness about functioning of personal devices, 16.9%

Other, 20.4%

Complexity of platforms, 24.3%

Lack of awareness about app functions, 21.1%

Physical limitations, 4.6%

Fear of fraud or misuse, 14.8%

Do not face any limitations, 1.1%

In our survey, **many senior citizens report difficulties with digital tools (Figure 8), ranging from complex interfaces (24 percent) and limited awareness about app/device functions (37 percent) to security concerns such as fear of fraud (15 percent) and limited awareness about the complaint process (17 percent).** Such challenges can make them hesitant to adopt safer online practices or recognise fraud attempts.

The increasing proliferation of digital financial tools can be taken as a representative example of the challenges faced by seniors online. Senior citizens, including those in the 50-59 age group, accounted for 15 percent of Unified Payments Interface (UPI) users in 2023, up from 10 percent in 2022.[12] However, many lack adequate security awareness, leaving them vulnerable to phishing attacks, fraudulent calls, and deceptive financial schemes. A study by Vishwanath et al. found that 43 percent of users fell for simulated phishing emails, with older women showing the highest susceptibility.[13]

This report presents key insights from the survey, highlighting emerging trends, common vulnerabilities, and the financial and psychological impact of online fraud on the elderly. The findings are further contextualised by academic and industry research and government records, offering a comprehensive perspective on the risks and challenges faced by senior citizens in the digital space. It will then provide actionable recommendations on how to curb digital fraud and increase trust and safety on the internet for this demographic.

2 Frauds and Scams on Senior Citizens

India's senior citizens are increasingly vulnerable to online scams due to limited digital literacy and unfamiliarity with digital technologies, making them easy targets for scams such as phishing, identity theft, and financial fraud. Unlike younger users who have grown up with technology and mobile phones becoming a common part of their life, senior citizens often lack the awareness to distinguish authentic interfaces from fraudulent ones. For example, **45 percent of survey respondents are not confident in their capabilities to identify threats.**[14]

Societal ageist attitudes contribute to the stigmatisation of elderly victims. The stigmatisation perpetuates negative stereotypes and discourages seniors from seeking help or reporting crimes, further entrenching their vulnerability.[15] The economic consequences of such frauds extend beyond individual financial losses, affecting families, healthcare systems, markets and society.

2.1 Types of Scams Targeting Seniors

Figure 3
Types of Scams Targeting Seniors

Government Impersonation Scam

KYC Scam

Fake Investment Scam

Distressed Relative Scam

While common scams such as phishing disproportionately affect seniors, certain types specifically target seniors. **Three key factors make seniors vulnerable to scams: cognitive decline and lack of digital literacy, loneliness and isolation which makes them trust more easily, and, financial stability and availability of large sums of funds.**[16] Scams targeting the elderly prey on these vulnerabilities by impersonating government officials, distressed family members or tech support representatives.[17] Fraudsters also induce seniors through fraudulent investment schemes.

The economic consequences of such frauds extend beyond individual financial losses, affecting families, healthcare systems, markets and society.

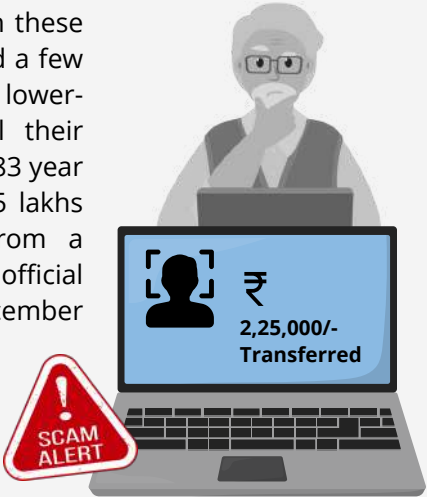⚠ Some common scams perpetuated on senior citizens are:

a. Government impersonation scam: Scammers call unsuspecting elders, informing them about their involvement in fraudulent activity and threatening them with arrest.

A 77 year old lady was duped of ₹3.8 crores on fake charges of money laundering and was held under 'digital arrest' for over a month in November 2024.[18] Notably, the victim's children lived abroad and she lived with her retired husband, making them an easy target. Similarly, a Hyderabad pensioner was also duped of her life savings by fraudsters impersonating telecom officials claiming that her number was linked to money laundering activities in November 2024.[19]

b. KYC scam: Scammers pretend to be representatives from telecom companies or banking institutions, informing seniors about updating their 'know your customer' (KYC) details.

While the amount of money lost in these scams is not much - usually around a few lakhs - these scams tend to target lower-income senior citizens and steal their entire life savings. For instance, an 83 year old man lost his life savings of 2.5 lakhs and access to fixed deposits from a fraudster impersonating a banking official requesting for KYC details in December 2023.[20]

c. Fake investment scam: Scammers offer fake investment opportunities promising high returns with little risk.

A 63-year-old man from Hyderabad fell victim to a stock trading scam orchestrated through WhatsApp in November 2024.[21] The victim, lured by the promise of substantial profits, lost ₹50 lakh to the fraud. Similarly, scammers were employing deepfake videos of high-profile figures to add credibility to fraudulent schemes and a retiree lost ₹19 lakh in November 2024.[22]

d. Distressed relative scam: Scammers use AI tools to impersonate relatives or friends in distress and request urgent funds to help them.

Cybercriminals used voice cloning technology to extort ransom money for a kidnapped relative from an elderly man in December 2023.[23] To convince the victim, the criminals played a voice recording of the kidnapped relative, created using voice cloning technology.

Scammers employ deepfake videos of high-profile figures to add credibility to fraudulent schemes

Of the senior citizens who face online frauds, most tend to be victims of phishing or assorted scams such as identity theft and digital arrest.

Graph 5
Online Fraud Incidents by Type

- Financial fraud, 18%
- Others (include identity theft, digital arrest, fake loan fraud), 26%
- Fake investment fraud, 15%
- Personal/social engineering scams, 18%
- Phishing, 26%
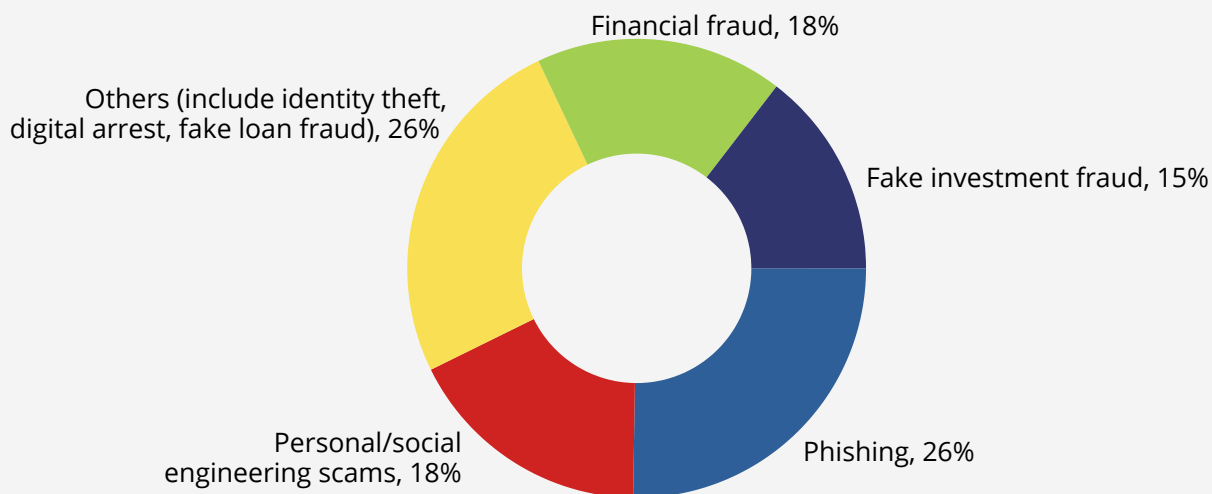
Beyond personal experiences, many respondents know friends or relatives who have fallen victim to online fraud, with 8 in 10 such cases having a severe or a decent impact. **This broader impact suggests that scams are affecting almost the entire networks of older adults, reinforcing the need for community-based mitigation measures.**

Graph 6
Online Fraud Incidents among Friends and Relatives by Severity of Impact

Serious Impact, 23%

Minor Impact, 23%

Decent Impact, 57%
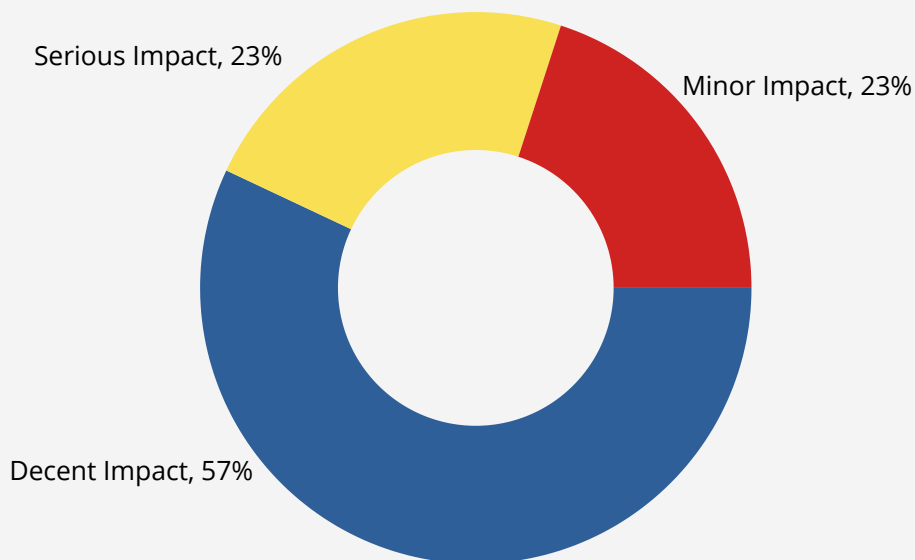
2.2 Impact of Frauds and Scams on Elders

Frauds and scams can drain senior citizens of their savings, leaving them financially vulnerable. They also cause emotional distress, leading to anxiety, loss of trust, and social withdrawal. Falling for scams can also make senior citizens hesitant to use digital services, limiting their access to essential online resources.

2.2.1 Healthcare Costs

The emotional toll of fraud also causes fear, paranoia, and cognitive decline.

Victims of online fraud face stress-related illnesses, cognitive decline, and higher healthcare costs. Fraud can trigger hypertension and weakened immunity, especially in the senior citizens who may avoid treatment due to expenses.[24] The emotional toll of fraud also causes fear, paranoia, and cognitive decline.[25] It worsens mental health, leading to insomnia and greater susceptibility to neurodegenerative diseases.[26] Elderly fraud victims often struggle to afford long-term care, medications, or treatment, worsening their health.[27] Chronic health deterioration in senior citizens coupled with reduced healthcare access puts further strain on government welfare programmes.
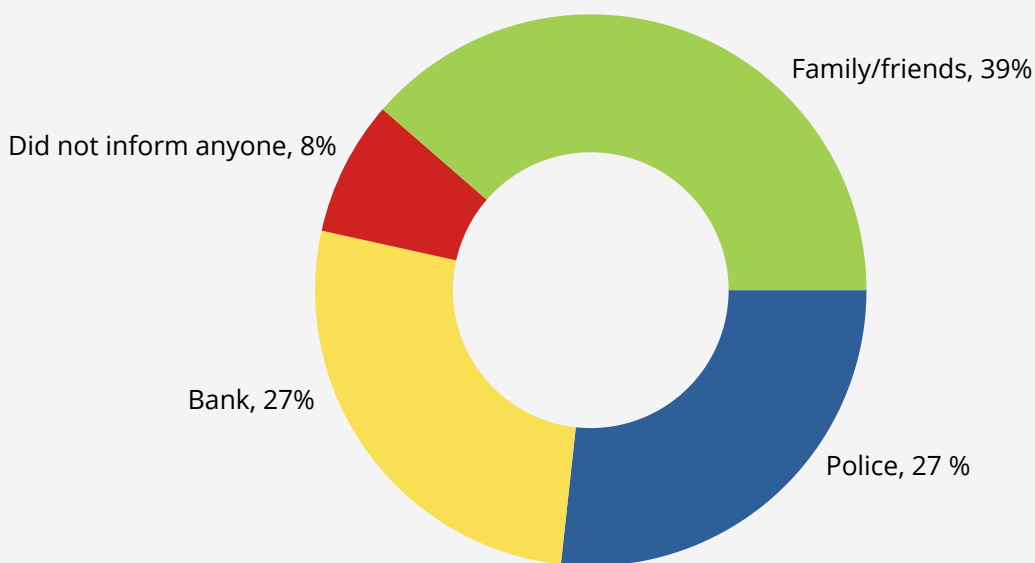
2.2.2 Ripple Effects on Families

Fraud worsens their dependency, forcing working-age family members to reallocate resources and reducing disposable income.

Many elderly in India rely on pensions or family support, and fraud increases the financial burden on their relatives. It places an especially disproportionate financial and caregiving burden on middle-income families.[28] This causes frustration, conflict, and isolation, weakening the elderly's support systems. Alternatively, if seniors withdraw from online platforms due to fear or mistrust following a scam, their autonomy is eroded as they become substantially dependent on family members for daily tasks like banking or healthcare. Illustratively, respondent seniors predominantly rely on friends and family for support when defrauded.

Graph 7
Reach-Outs When Defrauded

Family/friends, 39%

Did not inform anyone, 8%

Bank, 27%

Police, 27 %

71 percent of seniors depend on pensions or family transfers for financial sustenance.[29] **Fraud worsens their dependency, forcing working-age family members to reallocate resources and reducing disposable income.** In low-income households, this strain can lead to deferred education, loan defaults, and compromised future savings.

2.2.3 Broader Societal Costs

71 percent of seniors depend on pensions or family transfers for financial sustenance.

Online fraud disproportionately affects senior citizens and reduces trust in digital services such as banking.[30] This increases cash dependency and undermines India's financial digitisation efforts. Fraud also causes social withdrawal, isolating seniors and reducing their community engagement.

Awareness Programs for Senior Citizens

- **Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA):** Users are cautioned about fraudulent pension schemes at the launch of the PFRDA website.[31] The authority also issued a public notice cautioning citizens against such schemes.[32]
- **Central Pension Accounting Office (CPAO):** The CPAO directed authorised banks to caution pensioners against malicious actors impersonating government officials in July 2024.[33] It also required such banks to raise awareness with pensioners about the modus operandi of these attacks and to guide them in not sharing sensitive details.
- **National Institute of Electronics & Information Technology (NIELIT)**: NIELIT proposed awareness campaigns for senior citizens in Maharashtra for digital empowerment, cybersecurity literacy and training them to use smartphones in 2020.[34]
- **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C):** I4C launched a social media campaign warning senior citizens about their vulnerability to cybercrime and advising them to stay cautious in 2020.[35]
- **Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In):** The CERT-In Cyber Security Awareness Booklet provides a taxonomy of frauds, scams targeting senior citizens, and safety tips.[36]
- **Information Security Education and Awareness (ISEA)**: Similar to CERT-In, ISEA's Cybersecurity Awareness for Senior Citizens Booklet contains information on scams targeting senior citizens and safety tips.[37] Like CERT-In, ISEA is also an initiative of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

2.2.4 Macroeconomic Costs

a. Reduced consumer spending and economic growth: Online fraud causes financial losses for seniors. This reduces their discretionary spending and negatively impacts sectors like retail, healthcare, and tourism, slowing economic growth.[38] Fraud also reduces senior's participation in the economy, leading to a contraction in aggregate demand.[39]

b. Increased fiscal burden on social welfare schemes: Fraud increases seniors' reliance on social welfare programs such as the Atal Pension Yojana and the Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana, raising government expenditure and straining public finances, which could limit funding for critical areas like education and infrastructure.[40] Over time, this reallocation could impede broader economic development and strain public finances.
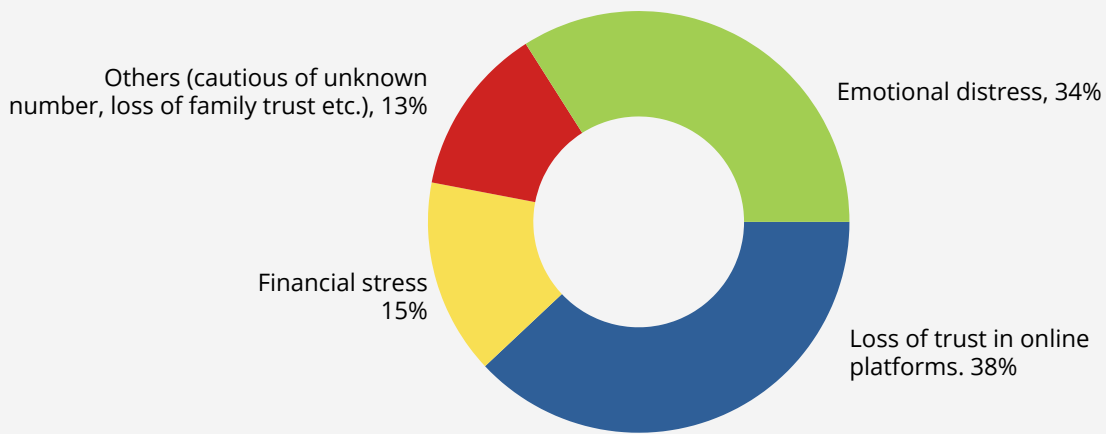
c. Loss of investment and financial market participation: Fraud erodes seniors' trust in digital financial systems, reducing their participation in investments, which lowers market liquidity, increases volatility, and hampers business growth.
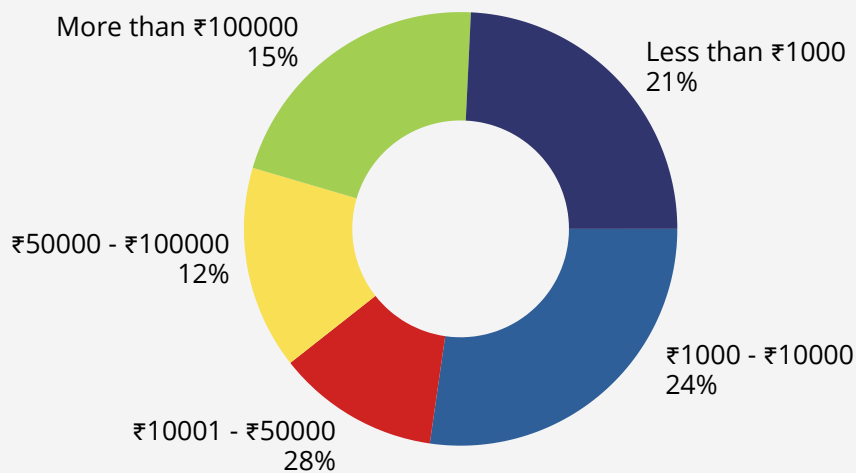
> **Fraud also reduces senior's participation in the economy, leading to a contraction in aggregate demand.**

We find that the impact of fraud varied depending on the type, with some scams leading to direct financial loss while others caused reputational damage or emotional distress, and eroded trust in digital platforms. **Financial losses due to online frauds ranged from amounts less than ₹1,000 (21 percent) to above ₹100,000 (15 percent), with the median loss in the range of ₹10,000-₹50,000.** These frauds resulted in financial losses and led to stress-related health concerns and emotional strain on families,indicating a deeper societal impact of digital scams.

Graph 8
Impact of Online Fraud by Type

Others (cautious of unknown number, loss of family trust etc.), 13%

Emotional distress, 34%

Financial stress 15%

Loss of trust in online platforms. 38%

Graph 9
Financial Loss Due to Online Fraud

More than ₹100000 15%

Less than ₹1000 21%

₹50000 - ₹100000 12%

₹1000 - ₹10000 24%

₹10001 - ₹50000 28%

Key Takeaways

- Seniors are susceptible to fraud due to a variety of factors, including cognitive decline, a lack of digital literacy, loneliness and isolation leading to gullibility, and the availability of large sums of funds.
- Elders are disproportionately targeted in scams such as phishing and identity theft, and financial fraud. Our survey suggests that scams are affecting almost the entire networks of older adults.
- Frauds and scams have a very detrimental impact, including adding to personal, familial and societal costs. Some scams lead to direct financial loss while others cause reputational damage or emotional distress, and erode trust in digital platforms. They also increase government expenses in the form of increased social benefits and fraud prevention infrastructure expenditure.

3 Addressing Digital Fraud Against the Elderly

This chapter examines India's policy framework for addressing digital fraud against senior citizens, encompassing financial and fraud regulations, digital skilling and cybersecurity regulations, and pension and social benefit welfare schemes. Understanding the current legal and regulatory landscape is essential to identifying gaps, strengthening enforcement, and ensuring effective consumer protection.

3.1 Regulations around Financial Fraud

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has released specific guidelines and schemes related to online financial fraud prevention over the years.

Guideline	What it does	Example of Implementation
Master Directions on KYC, 2016	Provides guidelines for financial institutions to verify the identity of a customer and prevent unauthorised actions	Prevent banks from allowing customers to change their mobile ID for transaction authentication unless done through a predetermined policy.[41]
The Customer Liability Limitation For Unauthorised Transactions Circular, 2017 (RBI Zero Liability Framework)	Guarantees zero liability of customers for unauthorised transactions	If a bank contributes to a transaction through a deficiency in service,[42] or if there is a third-party breach where neither the bank nor the customer is at fault, and the customer reports such a transaction to the bank within three working days of receiving communication from the bank regarding the transaction, the customer will suffer no liability. Banks are also liable for any unauthorised transaction that occurs after a customer has notified the bank about any negligence, such as sharing payment information with scammers.

RBI Integrated Ombudsman Scheme, 2021	Simplifies grievance redressal process by enabling customers to register their complaints at a centralised reference point	Customers can file complaints related to 'deficiency in service', including if such deficiency led to financial fraud.[43]
Master Directions on Digital Payment Security Controls, 2021	Require minimum security standards for payment providers	Mandate measures such as customer data confidentiality controls and multi-factor authentication for digital payments.[44]

However, none of the existing regulations place special importance on senior citizen fraud prevention or recognise additional security needs of the elderly population. While not directly comparable, vulnerable groups have received protections in the past - RBI guidelines for minors require banks to set specific transaction limits for independent operation of the account by users above the age of 10.[45]

The RBI has, however, recognised special care must be provided to senior citizens, and requires banks to provide facilities like doorstep banking services to senior citizens.[46] **RBI's National Strategy for Financial Inclusion also identifies senior citizens as a vulnerable group** that requires dedicated efforts for financial awareness.[47] The Report of the Committee for Review of Customer Service Standards also recognises senior citizens as a vulnerable group of people that the RBI provides special services and flexibilities to but does not delve into particular vulnerabilities faced by senior citizens for online fraud or provide recommendations to address the same.[48]

Similarly, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) prohibits fake investment schemes,[49] but does not have any regulations for investor awareness or any initiatives targeted specifically towards senior citizens. However, it does have the capacity to undertake awareness programmes through its portals that helps potential investors identify if an offered scheme could be fraudulent based on a short survey.[50] SEBI also sent notices to asset management companies that sold small-cap funds to individuals above the age of 80 years in March 2024.[51]

The Insurance Regulatory Development Authority of India's (IRDAI) draft guidelines aim to enhance fraud detection in the sector and require insurance providers to conduct regular fraud awareness programs.[52] While it does not explicitly target senior citizens, it can be used to create specific awareness programs for the elderly. The insurance regulator has also recognised senior citizens as a vulnerable group and issued specific guidelines and measures in the past. For example, insurance companies cannot increase premiums for senior citizens by more than 10 percent in

However, none of the existing regulations place special importance on senior citizen fraud prevention or recognise additional security needs of the elderly population.

a year, and they must set up grievance redressal systems specifically for senior citizens.[53]

The Ministry of Communications (MoC) has undertaken multiple fraud prevention measures the Department of Telecom (DoT) requires telecom operators to undertake KYC measures and block fraudulent numbers when directed by the government.[54] The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) also cautioned users about fraudulent calls impersonating its officials in August 2024, and the Sanchaar Saathi portal allows users to report fraudulent numbers.[55] **However, there are no targeted initiatives to aid senior citizens and raise their awareness about fraudulent communication.** TRAI released recommendations to make ICT accessible for persons with disabilities in 2018,[56] indicating the regulator's authority to explore regulations for special categories of subscribers like senior citizens.

I4C's Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting and Management System (CFCFRMS) stopped fraudulent funds transfers of ₹3431 crores between 2021 and 2024.[57] The Centre also undertook a brief awareness campaign to warn senior citizens about online fraud, which can be expanded for additional senior citizens awareness and training programmes. Illustratively, I4C's principal organisation, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), issued advisories on the need to protect vulnerable senior citizens in 2020,[58] indicating the government's ability to undertake specialised campaigns for senior citizens.

3.2   Other Central Schemes

3.2.1. Skilling Initiatives

The National Digital Literacy Mission, which imparts IT training, does not offer targeted initiatives towards senior citizens and effectively excludes them from its scope.[59] While National Institute of Social Defence (NISD) offers outreach programmes related to digital literacy, the scope is limited to day-long events on unrelated issues such as geriatric healthcare.[60]

There have been recent attempts made to address the digital skills gap for the elderly. NIELIT proposed awareness campaigns for senior citizens in Maharashtra for digital empowerment, cybersecurity skills, and training of seniors to use smartphones in 2020.[61] However, there is limited follow-up information on this project. Skill India Digital Hub (SIDH) also has general introductory cybersecurity courses to educate users on online safety.[62] While these have been used by senior citizens,[63] no courses specifically tailored towards empowering senior citizens are available on the platform.

3.2.2. Pension and Social Benefits Related Initiatives

India's pension regulators like PFRDA and CPAO have cautioned citizens against fraudulent pension rackets and directed them towards resources against fraud.[64] However, the PFRDA's Retirement Adviser Regulations do not address the prevalence of fraudulent pension rackets and the responsibility of retirement advisers to caution users against such practices. The regulations aim to increase awareness on pension prospects for all senior citizens, including at a grassroots level.[65] Such provisions can be utilised for fraud-prevention awareness as well. Similarly the Ministry of Labour and Employment's (MoL&E) pension scheme for unorganised workers does not caution them against pension fraud.[66]

From a social benefits perspective, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE) devised an action plan for senior citizens focusing on financial security, healthcare, food, and dignity of life in 2021.[67] It also underscored the need to ensure speedy disposal of complaints by senior citizens related to fraudulent dealings. **However, this responsibility is passed onto relevant financial regulators,**[68] **indicating a lack of fraud-related initiatives from the country's principal ministry for senior citizens**. Similarly, the Ministry for Women and Child Development (MoWCD) aims to protect women against violence and digital crimes and has a round the clock helpline number.[69] However there is no specialised scheme to aid elderly women and provide them with fraud prevention resources.

Table 2
Snapshot of India's Seniors-Related Initiatives

Entity	Targeted Senior-fraud Related Initiative	General Regulations/ Initiatives for Senior Citizens
RBI	✖	✔
IRDAI	✖	✔
SEBI	✖	✔
PFRDA	✔	✔
CPAO	✔	✔
MoSJE	✔	✖
MoWCD	✖	✖
SIDH	✖	✖

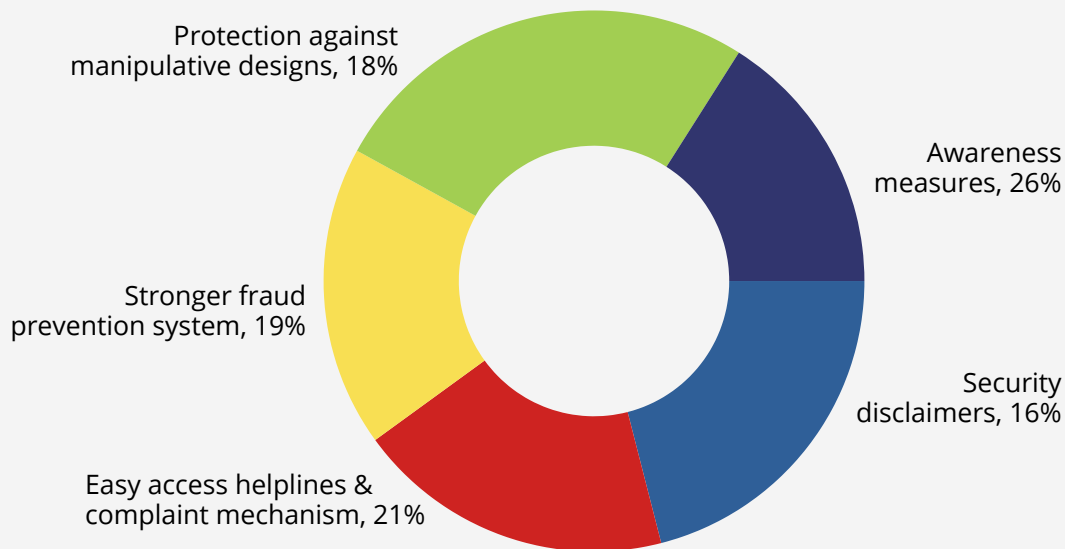|		
NIELIT	✔	✔
MoC	✖	✖
MHA	✔	✔
MoL&E	✖	✔
MeitY	✔	✔

Key Takeaways

- Most regulators and line ministries do not have targeted fraud prevention initiatives for senior citizens.
- However, they recognise senior citizens as vulnerable groups requiring special consideration, indicating the authority to take measures to prevent senior-citizen fraud.

4   Recommendations

The need for robust policies and initiatives to protect senior citizens from financial fraud is well recognised. **NITI Aayog recently called for protecting the elderly from financial fraud by increasing awareness and literacy as part of senior citizens reforms recommendations.**[70] Some recommendations that build on this imperative follow.

Graph 10
Measures Believed to Prevent Online Fraud

Protection against manipulative designs, 18%

Awareness measures, 26%

Stronger fraud prevention system, 19%

Security disclaimers, 16%

Easy access helplines & complaint mechanism, 21%

4.1   Tightening existing financial protocols

As discussed in the previous chapter, there are generalised protocols in place to protect against financial fraud. However, these are often not implemented correctly. For example, a recent National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC) decision found that lax internet banking protocols led to the defrauding of senior citizens in 2024.[71] Similarly, a senior citizen fell victim to the digital arrest scam because the scamsters used fraudulent apps with lapsed KYC in 2025. [72]

These instances highlight **the need for better enforcement of existing techno-legal measures for the elderly**, such as ensuring authentication and verification measures are assiduously followed during customer onboarding. A robust process for recognising authorised third-party

representatives for elderly customers can also be set up and such representatives will have to approve transactions above a certain limit.[73] However, since trusted aides can also defraud vulnerable senior citizens, it is important to incorporate stringent KYC, authentication and identification measures while appointing such representatives.[74]

It is also important to recognise that while stringent KYC and authentication measures such as one-time passwords (OTPs) can prevent fraud related to identity theft, their unchecked proliferation can also create new avenues for cybercrime. Capacity building measures and awareness programmes, discussed in the next section, should focus on making senior citizens aware of these nuances.
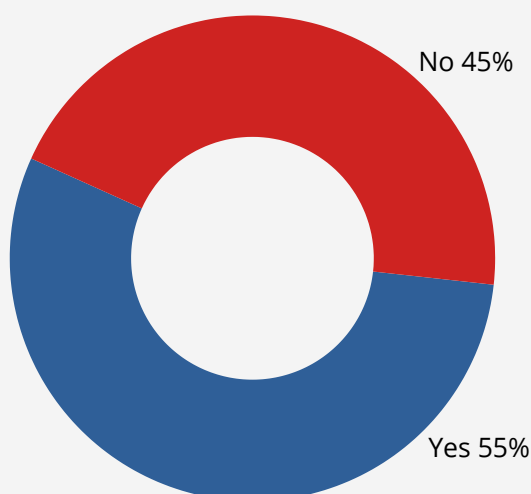
4.2   Capacity building measures

Indian government agencies must urgently undertake **capacity building measures for senior citizens to empower them against digital fraud**. We can look to other nations for best practices. For instance Singapore launched multiple awareness campaigns to increase cybersecurity literacy of senior citizens. Their Police-RSVP Anti-Scam Engagement Avocates (PRAISE) conduct anti-scam outreach engagements with elderly citizens.[75] These events are held at community centres, old age homes and other local venues. The Singapore government also devised the ScamShield App which lets users check suspicious calls, websites and messages for scams and block and filter them.[76]
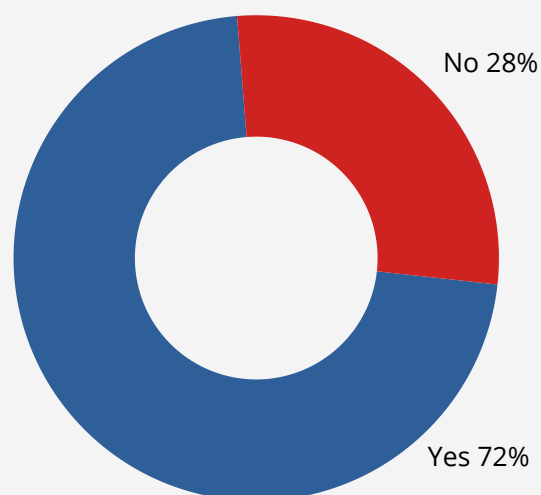
Graphs 11 and 12
Senior's ability to Identify Online Threats and Willingness to Participate in Capacity Building Measures

Do Responders Feel Confident In Identifying Online Threats?

No 45%

Yes 55%

Would you be willing to participate in a digital safety training programme?

No 28%

Yes 72%

The need for capacity building measures is also corroborated in the survey, **where 45 percent of senior citizens in India are not confident in their capabilities to identify fraud and 72 percent are keen on capacity building workshops.** Public-private collaborations can be undertaken to increase public awareness, as has been done in nations like Singapore.[77] Existing instructional mechanisms like the aforementioned NISD training programmes, National Digital Literacy Mission, and ULLAS Scheme for basic digital literacy of Indians without formal education can also be used for such training campaigns.[78]

These capacity building measures should extend to multiple stakeholders in the value chain, and not just the senior citizens. For example, the Bombay High Court found that the state police's investigation of an elderly fraud case to be lax.[79] Such instances highlight the need for capacity building of law enforcement agencies for senior citizen digital fraud, which can be led by the I4C's LEA training wing.

4.3 Expanding on Existing Infrastructure

Several state government issue identity cards or certificates to senior citizens, granting them access to various concessions and benefits.[80] These include discounts on railway travel, free health check-ups and banking incentives like higher interest rates on fixed deposits. However, t**he limited utility offered by these cards or certificates remains insufficient in offering senior citizens any fraud preventive measures**.

Existing mechanisms and schemes can also be reimagined: the data collected about senior citizens through such cards can be utilised to offer heightened security benefits. For instance, these cards can incorporate QR Codes or Near-Field Communication (NFC) to provide quick and specialised access to resources in cases of fraud. Illustratively, the Delhi Police announced smart ID cards for senior citizens that offer healthcare-related emergency readiness.[81] Such initiatives can be expanded to include specialised fraud-related preparedness.

4.4 Consumer Protection Measures

Consumer protection measures for senior citizen internet users can be put in place by enforcing stricter cybersecurity regulations, mandating fraud awareness campaigns, and promoting user-friendly digital literacy programs.

The **RBI's zero-trust liability framework** attempts to bring relief to victims of online fraud. However the time limit is notifying the bank within three days of the fraudulent transaction. This can be **increased in the case of vulnerable populations like senior citizens,** and they should be provided shadow credit in all instances of fraud. Similar to India's KYC fraud, a common fraud plaguing UK's senior citizens is authorised push payment (APP) fraud where scammers trick victims into transferring

money by impersonating government officials. To aid seniors, the UK requires payment service providers to necessarily reimburse senior citizen victims of APP fraud, and they have a 13-month time frame to file their claims against such fraud.[82] Additionally, the RBI can consider creating specialised guidance that provides **standard operating procedures for financial institutions while servicing elderly customers**.

Other steps that could be taken include the creation of specialised helplines. For instance, the Elder Line is a national helpline (toll-free number 14567)[83] set up by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. The helpline provides information on nearest hospitals and activity centres, assistance in case of elder abuse and legal advice for maintenance or pension queries. The scope of services offered by the Elder Line can be expanded to include advisory against financial fraud.

4.5 Adapting grievance redressal mechanisms for the elderly

Expedited consumer grievance redressal mechanisms are crucial for senior citizen fraud victims since they often face financial, emotional, and technological challenges in seeking justice. Quick resolution minimises monetary losses, prevents further exploitation and restores confidence in digital platforms. A streamlined process ensures timely assistance, reducing stress and safeguarding seniors' digital participation. The Indian experience with dispute resolution has been traditionally poor: for example, the aforementioned NCDRC case took six years to provide relief, emphasising the need for faster grievance redressal mechanisms.

All touchpoints for senior citizens' interaction - including law enforcement agencies and specialised regulators - should undertake targeted measures to aid senior citizens, like training helpline staff to deal with specific issues and complaints of senior citizens.

Annexure 1:
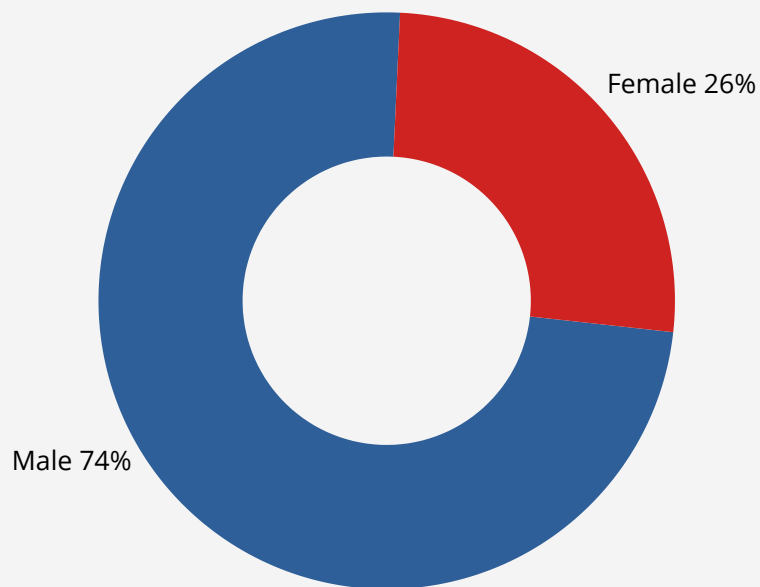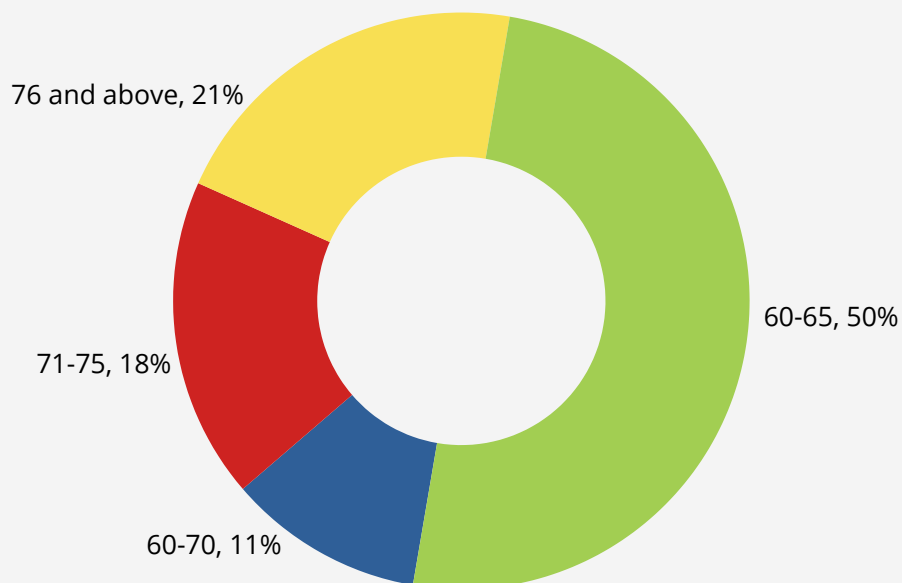# Survey Demographics

Figure 1
Respondents by Gender

Figure 2
Respondents by Age-group

Figures 1-4 present the basic demographics of the survey respondents. The survey sample included a mix of male (74 percent) and female (26 percent) respondents, reflecting a balanced representation of seniors. The majority of respondents belonged to 60-65 age-group (50 percent), had education levels of under-graduation or above (88 percent), and relied on pension (47 percent) and savings/investments (23 percent) as the main income source. Overall, the figures portray a diverse demography.

Figure 3
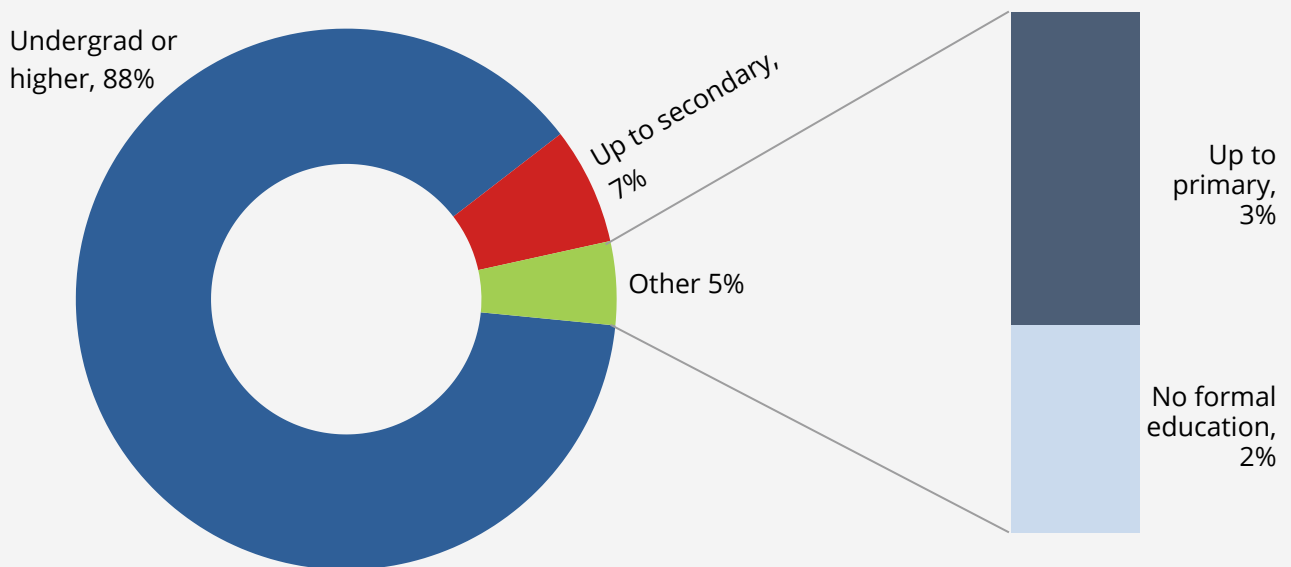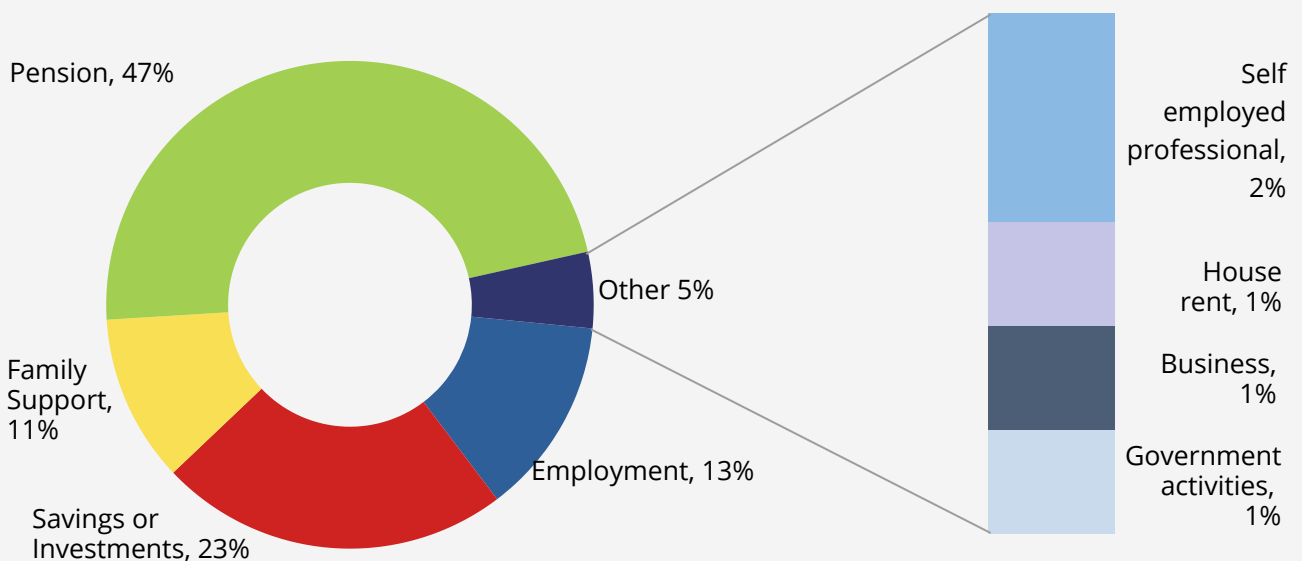**Responders by Highest Level of Education**

Undergrad or higher, 88%

Up to secondary, 7%

Other 5%

Up to primary, 3%

No formal education, 2%

Figure 4
Responders by Income Source

Pension, 47%

Family Support, 11%

Savings or Investments, 23%

Employment, 13%

Other 5%

Self employed professional, 2%

House rent, 1%

Business, 1%

Government activities, 1%

Annexure 2:
List of Acronyms

CERT-In	Indian Computer Emergency Response Team
CFCFRMS	Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting and Management System
CPAO	Central Pension Accounting Office
DoT	Department of Telecom
I4C	Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IRDAI	Insurance Regulatory Development Authority of India
ISEA	Information Security Education and Awareness
KYC	Know Your Customer
MeitY	Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology
MHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MoC	Ministry of Communications
MoL&E	Ministry of Labour and Employment
MoWCD	Ministry for Women and Child Development
NCDRC	National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission
NFC	Near-Field Communication
NIELIT	National Institute of Electronics & Information Technology
NISD	National Institute of Social Defence
OTP	One-Time Password
PFRDA	Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority
RBI	Reserve Bank of India
SEBI	Securities and Exchange Board of India
SIDH	Skill India Digital Hub
TRAI	Telecom Regulatory Authority of India
ULLAS Scheme	Understanding of Lifelong Learning for All in Society
UPI	Unified Payments Interface

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