

Meaning and Concept of Aged

The concept of "aged" or "old age" is not as straightforward as it may appear. It is a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon that has been understood differently across disciplines, cultures, and historical periods. Before defining who the "aged" are, it is essential to first understand the nature of the ageing process itself. The term "**Aged**" refers to individuals who have reached an advanced stage of life, typically characterized by biological decline, social role changes, and increased vulnerability. In common usage, it denotes **old persons** or the **elderly population**.

Meaning of Ageing

Ageing is a **continuous, irreversible, and universal process** that begins at conception and continues until the death of an individual. It is not a sudden event but a gradual biological and social transition that every human being undergoes. Since it is universal, no individual, society, or culture is exempt from it.

However, from a social and economic perspective, ageing takes on a more specific meaning. The age at which an individual's **productive contribution begins to decline** and they become **economically dependent** on others is generally treated as the onset of the "aged" stage of life. In this sense, old age is understood as the **last phase of the human life cycle** — a phase that is again universally experienced, though its timing and nature vary widely.

In the **Indian context**, the **age of 60 years** has been adopted by the **Census of India** to classify a person as old. This coincides with the **age of retirement in the government sector** and reflects India's socioeconomic realities, where physical and economic decline may begin earlier than in more affluent countries.

The Indian classification of old age is:

Category	Age Group
Young-Old	60 - 69 years
Old-Old	70 - 79 years
Oldest Old	80 - 89 years

2. Concept of Ageing — Key Dimensions

A. Biological Ageing

- Progressive decline in physical functioning
- Reduced immunity, sensory loss (vision, hearing)
- Chronic diseases (arthritis, diabetes, hypertension)

- Decreased muscle mass and bone density

B. Psychological Ageing

- Changes in memory, cognition, and learning speed
- Emotional adjustments — grief, loss, loneliness
- Mental health issues: anxiety, depression, dementia
- Ego integrity vs. despair (*Erikson's 8th stage*)

C. Social Ageing

- Role transitions — retirement, widowhood, empty nest
- Loss of social status and power
- Changing family relationships and dependency
- Social isolation and marginalization

D. Economic Ageing

- Loss of income after retirement
- Dependency on family or pension
- Vulnerability to poverty and financial exploitation

Summary

The concept of "Aged" is multidimensional — it is not merely a biological reality but also a **social, psychological, economic, and cultural phenomenon**. Social work with the aged focuses on enhancing their dignity, ensuring rights, and promoting active and healthy ageing.

In conclusion, the concept of "aged" is **relative, contextual, and multi-dimensional**. While there is no single universally agreed definition, most international bodies and the Indian government use **60 years** as the baseline for classifying a person as elderly. What is important for social work practice is to recognize that older persons are **not a homogeneous group** — they differ in health, gender, economic status, social support, and cultural background. Social workers must approach each elderly individual with sensitivity to these differences, rather than treating "the aged" as a uniform category.