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A STUDY ON THE PROBLEMS OF ELDERLY PEOPLE LIVING WITH THEIR FAMILIES AND IN OLD AGE HOMES

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Introduction

Age is the biggest truth of one's life. This is the only aspect in one's life that is completely true to the person. It cannot deceive a person at all. Age is the time period marker. It cannot tell any one when the person was born, when he died and thus for how long was he alive. The only aspect that is common among all living beings is age. Even the plants age with time as do the humans; though this aspect may be different for all forms of life (Emerson 2010). Old age is a period when people move away from previous more desirable periods or time of usefulness. Age sixty is usually considered the dividing line between middle and old age. Old age has a dual definition. It is the last stage in the life processes of an individual and it is an age group or generation comprising a segment of the oldest members of a population. There is a general agreement on the age at which a person becomes old. The common use of a calendar age to mark the threshold of old age assumes equivalence with biological age. Yet at the same time, it is generally accepted that these two are not necessarily synonymous (World Health organization, 2007). As per 2001 census the

elderly population has raised to 7.08 percent that is 71.7million an aged population of 8.18 percent i.e.97, 86,907 persons. In 2020 A.D. China will have the first place in having 230 million senior citizens in the world and India will be in the second rank with 142 million aged people. Today there are 77 million aged people. This number is likely to rise to 177million by 2025.

Ninety percent of older people are from unorganized sector with no social security, 40 percent of them live below poverty line, 75 percent of old are from the rural areas, 55 percent of the women in 60+ ages, a staggering 19 million are widows and 77 percent of old are illiterates. Longevity has been one of the greatest achievements of the 20th century. There are older people today than ever before and their number is on the increase. The last century was also responsible for rapid industrialization and urbanization the report states that world wide in 1950, there were 12 persons of working age for every person of age 65 or older, by 2010 that number had shrunk to nine and by 2050 this elderly support ratio, which indicates levels of potential social support available for the elderly is projected to drop to four. The size of the elderly

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population in India increased from 20 million in 1951 to 60 million in 2011 and is expected to climb to 107 million in 2050. Population in India has been going up steadily but steadier has been the increase in the proportion of the population of elderly. Life span of the people has been increasing and therefore the number of old people are on the rise.

The joint family system has successfully integrated the aged into the family. The elderly people are regarded as symbol of the divine and given utmost respect. They are considered as the repositories of wisdom, carriers of tradition and transmitters of experience and ideas of group living (Devadas and Jaya, 2005). Urbanization and industrialization lead to the breaking up of the joint families and has eventually led to the degradation of status, authority, love and affection and kinship ties of the aged in different degrees resulting in manifold problems for the aged. In the Indian society, gradually the problems of the old age are becoming a social problem, with health, financial and socio-psychological problems being the major problems. As their emotional and psychological needs are not being fulfilled then listlessness, dejection and lack of interest in everything occur (Solly Bould, 2006).

The present social structure and social change have made the younger generation move away from the family, leaving behind their aged parents. Isolation in old age leads to poor health, poor personal adjustment,

feeling of being neglected and uselessness. A cordial family relationship, better health status, better economic condition and proper utilization of leisure time are some of the factors that influence the life satisfaction of the elderly people. Finance is the foremost economic problem in old age. Limited resources and increased cost of living tend to make the support of dependent parents burdensome and costly for an average urban householder. All these socio-economic changes create economic difficulties.

Old age is a period of physical and social loss, loss of spouse, friends, children, job, property and physical appearance. The aged have such characteristics as loss of general attractiveness and status because of loss of productivity in the matter of work and money, feeling useless may be the source of frustration, deterioration of sense faculties, loneliness, ill health, financial worries, decline in mental functioning which leads to think and learn slowly, to forget quickly, to be confused to have repetitive speech, to wander in attention and get fatigued quickly. Decline in companionship, withdrawal from social contacts and loss of interest in personal life and family responsibility, feelings of insecurity, selfishness, demanding attention and unwillingness to do his share of work, feelings of inadequacy, rejection, self pity, apathy, negativism, rigidity and regressive tendencies. The old age homes were started with the main purpose of providing facilities and services to older persons-

opportunities for companionship, recreation, healthcare, nutrition, security care and love (Help age India, 2010).

There are two types of old age homes in India. One is the free type, which cares for the destitute old people who have no one else to care for them. They are given shelter, food, clothing and medical care free of cost. The second type is the "paid" home where care is provided on payment. Nowadays such "retirement" homes have become very popular in India and they are well worth considering. It is supporting over 800 projects related to different aspects of age care. Age care India another voluntary organization was established in 1980 with the objectives of helping and serving aged above 50 years through domiciliary, residential and institutional services. It also started giving old age pension of Rs. 50/- per month to the economically weaker sections. The other renowned organizations involved in the care of aged are the Friends in need society, Little sisters of the poor-home for aged and Cheshire homes. Government of Delhi has brought out a policy for poor senior citizens, which are in consonance with national policy. At the same time addresses the specific concerns of senior citizens in Delhi. The policy considers persons of above 60 years senior citizens. The policy envisages ensuring welfare of senior citizens and improving quality of their lives. It aims at providing assistance to enable them to cope with the problems of old age. It also proposes affirmative action by the

government departments in collaboration with civil society for ensuring that the existing public services for senior citizens are made more friendly and sensitive to the needs of senior citizens (Sharma, 2001).

Currently studies show, three quarters of those who remain in their homes depend solely on family and friends to meet their day-to-day needs with no professional support whatsoever. It is important that research in the field of problems, care and welfare of the aged is felt more as there is inadequate scientific data. Hence the study was undertaken with the objectives of eliciting information about the elderly in households and old age homes, the socio-economic background of the elderly, special activities provided to the elderly and assessing the effect of activities on the stress level of the aged.

Methodology

Erode district was selected for the conduct of the study. One paid home namely Lions club of Erode Mid town home for the elderly and a free home namely Little Sisters Poor Home for the aged were selected. The elderly from the households were selected from Karungalpalayam, Sivagiri, and Singampettai. The sample of the study comprised 40 elderly (12 men and 28 women) from the households, 35 from paid home (14 men and 21 women) and 25 from free home (11 men and 14 women). The tool selected for the study was interview schedule to elicit background information of the elderly and details about

their stay in households and in old age homes. A stress inventory designed and developed by Dr.Hemalatha Natesen and Dr. Nandhimenon (2005) was used to find out the problems of the elderly and a questionnaire was used to elicit information about old age homes. The preliminary data was collected from the elderly people and the authorities of the old age home and then special activities were conducted for a period of one month and the effect was assessed by administering the same stress inventory.

A preliminary interview schedule was developed to collect general information of the aged people, details about their stay in the house holds and old age homes, care of elderly and their problems. Purpose of the

study was explained to the authorities of the aged home and their co-operation was sought. The aged people were then approached and a rapport was established with them. Similarly the aged people in the families were also approached, purpose of the study was explained and their cooperation was sought. Then the data was collected from the aged persons using the interview schedule and problem inventory. The recorded information were consolidated and statistically analyzed using paired 't' test and percentage analysis was carried out wherever necessary.

Results and discussion

Reasons for joining the old age homes are depicted in Table 1:

Table 1. Reasons for joining the old age homes

Reasons *	Paid home (N: 35) (%)		Free home (N: 25)(%)	
	Men (N=14)	Women (N=21)	Men (N=11)	Women (N=14)
Lack of care and support	81	86	100	100
Fear of death	100	58	100	100
Loneliness	50	43	100	100
Loss of spouse	21	14	91	64
Lack of money	-	-	82	36
Lack of facilities at home	-	-	55	21

*Multiple response

Lack of care and support and negligence by the family members and fear of death were the reasons expressed by majority of the inmates from paid home and all from free homes to join the old age homes followed by loneliness and loss of

spouse. Lack of money and lack of facilities at home were also mentioned as other reasons by the inmates of free home.

Health problems of the elderly people are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2. Health problems of the elderly of the households and old age homes

Problems*	Households (%)		Paid home (%)		Free home (%)	
	Men (N=12)	Women (N=28)	Men (N=14)	Women (N=21)	Men (N=11)	Women (N=14)
Poor vision	92	82	100	100	100	100
Loss of teeth	17	18	4	29	64	79
Loss of hearing	50	25	21	14	64	50
Digestive problem	33	71	36	19	-	-
Body pain	19	21	71	43	55	64
Blood pressure	58	32	57	61	91	79
Diabetes mellitus	67	46	79	43	82	50
Skin diseases	-	14	10	24	28	21
Asthma	50	7	-	33	55	29
Arthritis and Rheumatism	-	4	-	14	-	-
Heart problem	75	21	43	33	55	43

* Multiple response

The commonly observed health problems among the elderly irrespective of sex and type of home were poor vision, blood pressure, diabetes mellitus and heart problem. Asthma and loss of hearing were found among 50 per cent of men in households whereas women experienced digestive problems and skin diseases. Body

pain was common among the inmates of paid and free homes, which might be due to their involvement in various activities in the homes. Arthritis and rheumatism were observed among women of paid homes (14%) and households (4%).

The common worries expressed by them are depicted in Table 3.

Table 3 Worries of the elderly people of the households and old age homes

Worries*	Households (%)		Paid home (%)		Free home (%)	
	Men (N=12)	Women (N=28)	Men (N=14)	Women (N=21)	Men (N=11)	Women (N=14)
Nobody understands	58	71	43	62	100	100
Unhappy family life	-	54	14	14	100	100
Poor finance	42	57	-	-	82	64
Insufficient sleep	58	43	57	48	27	50
Poor living condition	50	57	-	-	82	93
Fear of old age and death	100	89	100	100	100	100

* Multiple response

All most all the elderly had the fear of old age and death. Compared to the elderly in paid homes and households, the free home inmates had more problems. Cent percent each of the inmates from free homes expressed that no one understood them and this has lead to an unhappy family life.

Poor finance and poor living conditions in the old age home were other problems experienced by majority of the inmates of free homes whereas no one in the paid homes had that problem which might be due to the fact that they had better economic resource. Insufficient sleep was experienced by the inmates of households and paid homes than those from free homes. Majority of them kept their mind pleasant through prayer and meditation (80%) and listening to music (65%) and reading newspapers and magazines (55%).

Cent percent of the elderly people of the paid home and free home were of good opinion about their old age homes. All of

them found their institutions comfortable to stay. Compared to paid homes, all the elderly from free homes mentioned that the food and shelter was good and there was more social contact. The inmates of the free home had friendly and affectionate relationship with the authorities, fellow beings and attenders of the home, compared to those of paid home. Walking was an activity undertaken by majority of the men (75%) in the households, followed by gardening (33%) and washing clothes (25%). In the paid old age homes women served foods, cut the vegetables and went for walking while half of the women did not do any activity, whereas men involved in walking (71%) followed by cutting vegetables (57%). All men washed their clothes in the free homes which was followed by serving food (73%), cleaning (64%), gardening (55%) and walking and cutting vegetables (36% each).

Activities of the elderly people are indicated in Table 4.

Table 4. Recreational activities undertaken by the elderly people

Recreation	Households (%)		Paid home (%)		Free home (%)	
	Men (N=12)	Women (N=28)	Men (N=14)	Women (N=21)	Men (N=11)	Women (N=14)
Praying	100	100	100	100	100	100
Listening radio	70	29	43	19	36	29
Singing bhajans	25	25	36	52	100	100
Reading books	67	39	43	43	55	36
Watching TV	75	57	86	43	55	57
Reciting slogan	42	46	50	86	100	100
Reading news paper	25	18	21	33	64	43
Gardening	50	39	21	38	36	64
Cleaning their room	17	68	71	66	36	71

Differences are seen in the recreational activities of the aged of the households and old age homes, except prayer which was mentioned by all of them. The percentage of men of households watching TV, listening to radio, reading books, and gardening was more than that of women whose recreation was reciting slogans and cleaning. Similarly the percentage of men watching TV, listening to radio and cleaning their room was more than that of women in both the types of old age homes. On the other hand gardening and reading newspapers were found more among men of paid homes and cleaning their room and gardening was done by more women of free homes.

The inmates of the free homes pointed out that they were taken to churches every Sunday as their free home was a Christian institution, while the inmates of the paid home were taken to temples whenever they desired and also they went to their own homes. Those who were living with families went to their relative's house and temples.

Stress affects every one regardless of age and culture but elderly have a higher risk of developing it than any one else. The incidence of depression is higher in older people who are in poor health, living in care

homes or otherwise isolated. The five D'S of depression in elderly are disability, decline diminished quality of life of, demand on care and dementia.

Effect of special activities on stress reduction of the selected elderly people

Stress affects every one regardless of age and culture but elderly have a high risk of developing it than any one else. The incidence of depression is higher in older people who are in poor health, living in care homes or otherwise isolated (Ranjit and Mahesh, 2010).

The stress levels are assessed by using the designed interview schedule upon the scores the levels are assumed. One month programme was conducted to relieve the stress of the 40 selected elderly. In this programme the investigator concentrated mainly on stress relieving techniques like yoga, meditation, deep breathing practices and music therapy. Each activity was taught to them for 5 days. After that the investigator asked the elderly to practice the same activities. After 30 days of practicing by the subjects the same stress inventory was administered and data collected. After completion the data was analysed statistically and the details are shown in table 5.

Table 5. Effect of intervention programme on the stress level of the selected elderly

Details	Mean (N:40)	S.D	Mean difference	S.D	't'
Before education	20.43	1.879	13.45	2.755	30.88**
After education	6.98	2.2013			

** p(<0.01).

The stress level of the selected elderly before the intervention programme was much higher with the mean level of 20.43 but after which the stress level came down quite significantly with the mean of just 6.98 showing high statistical significance, (0.01). Provision of activities always helps the aged to keep them engaged where they do not think of their problems. The findings indicate the need for provision of day care for the elderly living in the households so that they have a chance of moving with the peers of their own age, companionship, discussing various issues of common concern and engaging themselves in different recreational activities. This is the need of the hour where the lonely, neglected and frustrated life of the aged at households can be broadened and useful programme could be provided to them in the day care centers .

Conclusion

An action plan that would ultimately lead to the formulation of national policy is to be evolved for older people which would seek inter alia better support and encouragement of care giving relationships with the old by providing incentives and social recognition schemes. National

council for the aged should be established to act as a focal agency to promote, coordinate, monitor, review and appraise various welfare activities for the elderly persons in the old age homes. Efforts must be taken to introduce recreational activities in the existing old-age homes which would keep them active and reduce their problems. The government and non-governmental organizations should take suitable measures to appoint the counselors in the home for the aged and geriatric care centers in order to develop good personal relationship between the inmates, and to help in stress reduction of the elderly. The state government can give subsidies to non-governmental organizations to enable them to start day care centers for the aged with adequate recreational facilities. Mass media could be used to its maximum to create awareness among the younger generation on the problems of elderly and sensitize them in the care of the elderly. The best option could be to strengthen the family system and try to motivate the family members to take care of the aged. This could not only help to improve the situation of the aged but also to keep intact our traditional and cultural values.

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