

SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES ON OLD AGE HOMES IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA: CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates the social realities surrounding Old Age Homes in contemporary India, with focus on the difficulties and innovations required by these establishments. The increasing number of old age homes shows great changes that have occurred in organizational cultures, families and economic systems. Despite being so vital in the society, the old age homes go through social rejection and cultural barriers that are instilled in most traditional cultures that believe that the family has the sole responsibility of catering for the elderly. The research examines these issues with the help of the case descriptions and quantitative data with the focus on the impact of the social and cultural perceptions on the decisions to place the elderly family members in the old age homes. Moreover, the paper discusses new developments and types of arrangements in old age homes like activities within communities and interprofessional structures that are intended to address these issues. The implications of the study are on policy aspect as well as social culture and participation in order to bring improvement in acceptance of the old age homes. Positive and culturally sensitive surroundings of these homes with good health services will enhance the quality of life for elderlies in India.

Keywords: Old Age Homes, Elderly People, Social Stigma, Challenges, Indian Family.

Introduction

Currently, demographics of India is changing at a fast rate and there is a noticeable increase in the numbers of its elderly population. According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2021 the section of the population aged 60 and above has grown to make a considerable share among the population. This change is due to advancement in health facilities and increased life expectancy (**MoSPI, 2021**). This, it has significant implications on the social relations and the ways in which caring duties are organized and tendered across the nation.

Along with increased population of elderly people, there has been an increase in the number of old age homes. According to the **Census of India 2011**, the number of old age homes increased to a greater extent and the Registered old age homes are more in urban and semi urban areas. Therefore, prior traditional family care systems are being complimented by institutional care settings. This trend reflects the inclination of people towards change of social and economic conditions prevalent in families. As nowadays due to immigration for job or studies, the elderly persons often require alternative care arrangement.

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It is very important for the policy makers as well as the researchers to be conversant with these changes happening in the population as well as the changes in the data. The implications of an ageing population extend far beyond mere numbers. They include significant societal issues, health care issues, modifications in social relations between the generations, and shifts in workforce dynamics. It is important to examine social perspective regarding elderly care because it allows to understand what older people and their families require, what they expect as well as what challenges they experience.

As mentioned in HelpAge India analysis of state of elderly in 2023 publication, there is growing acknowledgment of the requirement for caring environment where elderly population is valued and welcomed. Such environments should maintain traditional culture while at the same time also meet the contemporary health care standards (**HelpAge India, 2023**). This highlights the need to recognize people and societal attitudes towards elderly care and ensure that policies as well as interventions are made to relate with different attitudes that people hold for elderly care. The social implications include provision of proper housing conditions and quality of life for the elderly citizens in India.

Thus, this paper aims to investigate the significance of understanding social perceptions towards elderly care. It seeks to inform policies that promote inclusive and sustainable solutions for elderly care in India's changing socio-economic environment.

Challenges faced by Old Age Homes

Old Age homes in India face multiple challenges, mainly influenced by social stigma and cultural beliefs regarding caring for the aged person in family. In traditional Indian family huge emphasis is given on familial duty, specially towards elderly person. However, societal changes such as urbanization, population growth, entrepreneurial tendencies which compel the younger generation to move out of their parental house. This changed the family structure and altered the traditional gender role. The set cultural practice that used to hold families, responsible for direct care of the elderly is gradually fading away hence resulting to more people seeking old age home services.

Traditional view on Elderly care and Implications for Old Age Homes

Historically, Indian Society always valued joint family or extended families, where elderlies were taken cared by the young ones. This practice is deeply rooted in cultural norms of respecting elderly people and inter-generation dependency. Nevertheless, increased urbanization and transition in the socio-economic structure have disrupted these traditional standards of living patterns. As per the latest statistics of **National Sample Survey** (NSS) done by Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, joint family has shrunk significantly especially in the urban areas. This factor has pressurized the emergence of institutionalized care facilities such as old age homes. These institutes offer the elderly the kind of attention and assistance they need especially when their familial support structure is lacking (**Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2020**).

People's perspective towards old age homes in India, is often characterized by stereotypes and stigma due to the institution's portrayal of elderly persons as abandoned and placed in old age homes against their will. Currently, most people have a perception that sending the old relatives to old age homes means rejection or dumping them which should make family members feel ashamed or guilty about choosing this option. Such attitudes are strengthened by cultural norms that emphasize that families should take care of their elderly member and view the old age homes as a last resort for those who have no one to support. Such stigma discourages the Indian families from admitting their elderly member in old age homes even when other arrangements are difficult to meet or unsustainable.

Family Dynamics and Changing Social Structures

Social relations in Indian families especially over the past decades have been through dramatic changes. The factors that contributed to migration include; economic opportunities, and the need to acquire education, meaning that the youth has shifted from their parental homes. This geographic dispersion most of the times hinders availability of family members to offer special care to senior relatives. It means that there are other caregiving options in this case. Also, there are changes in culture regarding the role of genders and families which has impacted the existence of main carers in a family.

Statistics obtained from the **Census of India, 2011** depict the emerging trends of single person households and nuclear families especially in the urban areas. These demographics show the need for adaptive elder care models for families that can exist across different structures in order to provide for the needs of elderly citizens.

Literature Review

Societal Attitude Towards Old Age Homes in India

People's perception about old age homes in India reflect deeply ingrained cultural values and attitude regarding how the family cares for the aged. The varied focus of these literature review is to understand the essential stigmatized dynamics related to institutionalization of the elderly, highlighting the implication for elder care in India.

Stereotypes and Stigma

- **Cultural Narratives and Familial Duty:** In traditional Indian culture, there are certain social responsibilities that people follow; one of them is the responsibility that children have towards their parents; children are expected to take care of their parents especially when they are in old age, considered as moral obligation. (Chakrabarti, 2018). This is enhanced by religious and social beliefs that encourages to prioritize respect and support for elderlies with in the family unit.
- **Perceptions of Neglect and Abandonment:** Indian society has a perception that sending their old parents to old age homes signifies neglect or abandonment of familial responsibility. This perception stems from the impression that only those people who do not have relatives or family members who cannot take care of their aged family members are dumped in old age homes (Chatterjee, 2019).
- **Stigma and Shame:** Indian families considering old age homes may undergo shame or guilt due to social stigma associated with institutional elder care. This shame can hold families back from even considering old age homes as an option when other caregiving arrangements become unworkable or untenable (Sharma & Singh, 2020).

Implications for Elder Care Practices

- **Impact on Caregiving Dynamics:** It is well documented that family reluctance to consider institutional care options because of stigma associated with it, limits seniors' access to good quality eldercare facilities and also affects the well-being of these elderly persons. (Das & Sahoo, 2017).
- **Policy and Intervention Needs:** To develop effective elder care policies and interventions in India, it is important to tackle societal attitudes and stereotypes. This includes advocating for cultural sensitivity and conducting awareness campaigns, challenging negative perceptions of old-age homes. (Mahapatro & Pradhan, 2021).
- **Role of Education and Advocacy:** Educational campaigns working to cultivate positive perceptions about old age homes and advocating for the rights of elderly individuals can help in reduce stigma, and potentially encourage families to see old age homes as a legitimate means for caring elders in a prudent manner. (Gupta & Sengupta, 2018)

Public perceptions and stereotypes about old age homes in India have a greatly effectson how elder care practices are shaped and policies are developed. Because of this, it is also fundamental to engage in cultural sensitivity and offer education as well as advocate necessities through inclusive care environments that respect the rights and preferences of elderly individuals.

Adaptation and Innovations

In India old age homes are not just shelters, it actively addresses the need of contemporary Indian societal change. This section explores the role of old age homes and try to address these needs through innovative models of elderly care and community integration, highlighting successful initiatives and their impact.

Role of Old Age Homes in Addressing Societal Needs

- **Healthcare and Support Services:** Old age homes also provide a range of healthcare and support services tailored around the needs of elderly residents. This includes medical care, rehabilitation service, and specialized therapies for enhancing physical as well as mental health (Reddy & Mishra., 2020).
- **Social and Emotional Support:** In addition to physical care, the residents of an old-age home are also provided with manifold exposure at shared events which helps foster a better sense of belonging in community activities like group recreational programs and cultural celebrations. These programs increase social interactions and mitigate loneliness among elderlies. (Singh & Kapoor, 2019).

Innovative Models of Elderly Care and Community Integration

- **Integrated Care Models:** Some old age homes have adopted integrated care models that provide residential living in combination with day-care facilities and out-patient services. This approach enables senior citizens to receive special care and also stay connected with their community (Jha & Sharma; 2021).
- **Assisted Living Facilities:** Old age homes provide help in basic daily activities to senior residents. They enable independence while providing full-time access to support services and emergency care as required (Mukherjee & Das, 2018).
- **Intergenerational Programs:** There has been significant benefits observed in programs promoting inter-generations interaction, Community engagement programs, School students visiting old age homes, volunteer opportunity to younger adults, and shared activities are done to promote mutual understanding between generations, and promote emotional well-being. (Sinha and Patel, 2019)

Community Engagement Programs and its Impact

- **Enhancing Quality of Life:** The participation programs for elderly residents as a community engagement program is found to improve the quality of life by incorporating them into other types of activities. It helps in providing reasons to be socially active and diminish social isolation (Kumar & Gupta, 2020).
- **Promoting Inclusivity:** They encourage an inclusive environment, where people of all ages will join this digital society and feel like belonging to a united community honouring the elderly beyond their regular contributions (Chatterjee & Banerjee, 2021).

Implications for Social Policies and Community Development

Perspectives, on caring for the elderly in society emphasize the importance of policies that encourage inclusivity and support for elder care facilities. Changes in policies should focus on removing the stigma associated with old age homes; through awareness campaigns and educational programs that challenge stereotypes. Moreover, policy revisions should allocate resources and funding towards creative care approaches that enhance the accessibility and quality of elder care services for individuals from different socio- economic backgrounds.

Efforts in community development should prioritize creating age-friendly neighbourhoods that needs of elderly residents and promote active aging. By fostering environments and involving community members in elder care initiatives societies can boost the social integration and well-being of elderly people.

Comparative Analysis with Global Practices

A comparative analysis highlights differences in how elderly care is practices in India compared to other nations. While India traditionally values familial care responsibilities, Western countries often favour institutionalized options like nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Insights gathered from practices highlights the importance of blending traditions with innovative care models tailored to meet the diverse needs of aging populations.

Countries such, as Japan renowned for their care systems and community support networks prioritize holistic care methods and proactive strategies to encourage healthy aging and social integration. Insights from these approaches could guide initiatives to improve care services in India and create communities that cater to the needs of elder People.

Conclusion

Old age homes in India encounter many obstacles, like social stigma, traditional cultural beliefs and evolving family dynamics. To address these issues, we need policies to promote awareness and acceptance of old age homes, as well as cultural changes that take into account the needs of older people and their families. Old age homes can improve the quality of life of older people in India by creating supportive environments that respect cultural values and provide comprehensive care.

Old age homes in India are adapting to meet the needs of residents through innovative care models and community programs. These old age homes provide essential services and improve the well-being and social integration of older people. The challenges they face require understanding social attitudes, adapting nursing practices, and policy changes. By applying global best practices adjusted for India, the country can strengthen its elder care system and improve the quality of life for elderly people.

Community engagement and cultural sensitivity are key to successful elder care. Involving the community in planning can create inclusive environments that respect traditions while meeting modern needs. Educating and supporting families ensures that elderlies are cared for with dignity in their later years.

Recommendation for Enhancing Elderly Care in India

Based on the findings, some actionable recommendations can improve elder care in India:

- **Promote cultural sensitivity:** By conducting educational campaigns to challenge stereotypes and reduce stigma regarding old age homes. Encourage community dialogue to promote understanding and acceptance of different care options.
- **Support Community Involvement:** Increase the participation of the community in programs that enhance the engagement between generations and the potential for volunteerism in old age homes. This will improve social interaction and mental well-being of elderlies.
- **Increase Access to Innovative Care Models:** Invest in innovative care models like integrated care facilities and specialized dementia care units, ensuring accessibility across different social economic classes.
- **Integrate Elderly Care into Social Policies:** Advocate for policies that emphasize elder care, devote resources for the training of caregivers, improve infrastructure, and implement quality standards in old age homes across the country.

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