

## Welfare of Elderly in India

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### Abstract

The size of elderly population in India is increasing over time. Long term care, elder abuse and retirement are some of the special concerns of old adults. Government of India has taken many initiatives for welfare of elderly. These initiatives envisage State support to ensure financial and food security, health care, shelter and other needs of older persons, and protection against abuse. Many social, economic and familial factors have triggered the need for old age home facilities for the older adults. Many states in India have provided for old age homes run by either government or non-governmental organisations. However, these are not adequate to cater to the large and growing population of elderly. There are now many retirement colonies, resorts coming up, which are a far cry from the old age homes synonymous with charitable institutions for the helpless elderly.

**Keywords:** Old Age Homes; Elderly; Old Adults; Retirement Township; Welfare.

### Elderly People-India at a Glance

Elderly or old age consists of ages nearing or surpassing the average life span of human beings. The boundary of old age cannot be defined exactly because it does not have the same meaning in all societies. According to 'National Policy on Older Persons' (1999), 'senior citizen' or 'elderly' is a person who is of age 60 years or above [1].

According to Population Census 2011 there are nearly 104 million elderly persons (aged 60 years or

above) in India; 53 million females and 51 million males. Both the share and size of elderly population is increasing over time. From 5.6% in 1961 the proportion has increased to 8.6% in 2011. For males it was marginally lower at 8.2%, while for females it was 9.0%. The life expectancy at birth during 2009-13 was 69.3 for females as against 65.8 years for males. The old-age dependency ratio climbed from 10.9% in 1961 to 14.2% in 2011 for India as a whole. Most common disability among the aged persons was locomotor disability and visual disability as per 2011 census [2].

### Special Concerns of Elderly

- *Retirement:* Retirement has both social and economic implications for elderly individual. Because retirement is generally associated with reduction in personal income, the standard of living after retirement may be adversely affected [3].
- *Long-Term Care:* The concept of long-term care covers a broad spectrum of comprehensive health and wellness and support services to provide the physical, psychological, social, spiritual and economic needs of elderly people with chronic illness or disabilities. Older population is often viewed as an important long-term care target group. Women are at greater risk of being institutionalized than men are, not because they are less healthy but because they tend to live longer and thus, are usually older and more likely to be widowed [3].
- *Elder Abuse:* Abuse of elderly individual may be psychological, physical, financial, sexual and intentional or unintentional neglect. Another type of abuse involves abandoning elder individual at emergency departments, nursing homes or other facilities [3].

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### Government of India's Initiatives for Welfare of Elderly

#### ▪ *Integrated Programme for Older Persons (Ipop)*

The Scheme launched in 1992, was revised with effect from 01.04.2008 and 01.04.2015. The objective was to improve the quality of life of elderly by providing food, shelter, medical care and entertainment opportunities. The following are some of the projects under this scheme:

- Maintenance of old age homes, respite homes
- Mobile medical care unit
- Day care centres, physiotherapy clinics
- Helplines and counselling for older persons [2]

#### ▪ *The National Policy on Older Persons (Npop)*

NPOP was announced in 1999 to ensure well-being of the elderly. The Policy envisages State support to ensure financial and food security, health care, shelter and other needs of older persons, equitable share in development, protection against abuse [2].

#### ▪ *The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007*

The act provides for:

- Maintenance of Parents/ senior citizens by children/ relatives made obligatory through tribunals
- Penal provision for abandonment of senior citizens
- Establishment of Old Age Homes for Indigent Senior Citizens[2]

### Old Age Homes

Old age homes are meant for senior citizens who are unable to stay with their families or are destitute. States in India such as Delhi, Kerala, Maharashtra and West Bengal have developed good quality old age homes. These old age homes have special medical facilities for senior citizens such as mobile health care systems, ambulances, nurses and provision of well-balanced meals. Apart from food, shelter and medical amenities, old age homes also provide yoga classes to senior citizens. Old age homes also provide access to telephones and other forms of communication so that residents may keep in touch with their loved ones. Some old age homes have day care centres. These centres only take care of senior citizens during the day. For older people who have nowhere to go and no

one to support them, old age homes provide a safe haven. These homes also create a family like atmosphere among the residents. Old age homes have two kinds of facilities:

- Independent living
- Assisted living

The need to have old age homes-some reasons

- Disintegration of joint family system in India
- Life expectancy is steadily increasing, thus increase in elderly population
- Cities are no longer safe
- Unfriendly neighbours
- High cost of living
- Scanty returns on savings
- Insecurity, loneliness, lack of companionship
- Abuse, neglect by children, grandchildren
- Children moving abroad or other states for education, career
- Elders have started moving out of their homes in search of peace, joy, celebration of life with a group of people who share the same concerns
- Financially independent senior citizens prefer to stay in retirement homes/resorts instead of languishing in the old fashioned old age homes [4]

National survey has indicated that nearly 5% of the senior citizens in the country have no one to look after them as they either do not have children or are neglected by them. Only 32% of the senior citizens get pensions, while 38% of the age group do not stay with their children [4].

Almost 15 million elderly Indians live all alone and close to three-fourths of them are women. In some states like Tamil Nadu the proportion of such 'single elders' is even higher with one in eleven of those aged above 60 living alone. One in every seven elderly persons in India lives in a household where there is nobody below the age of 60. In states like Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, a quarter of the elderly population lives in such all-elderly households [5].

There are more than 1000 old age homes in India (as per govt. of India). Detailed information of 547 homes is available. Out of these, 325 homes are free of cost, while 95 old age homes are on pay and stay basis and 11 homes have no information. A total of 278 old age homes all over the country are available for the sick and 101 homes are exclusively for women. Kerala has 124 old age homes, which is maximum in any

state [4]. However, as per daily newspaper, The Hindu (20<sup>th</sup> Sep, 2015), this number is not adequate to cater to the large and growing population of elderly in the state [6].

#### *Retirement Townships/Colonies/Resorts*

- Financially independent elderly want to live independently. From an era where old age homes were synonymous with charitable institutions for the helpless elderly, we have moved to far more refined paid homes like retirement townships.
- Three out of four senior people are open to move to an assisted senior living community [7].

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