

Growing Old in Old Age Home: Issues and Concern

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Abstract

Ageing is a natural process and no one can escape it. In developing countries like India, transition in the traditional family system and a rapid increase in the elderly population have turned ageing into a social cause. In this regard, various civil societies and state governments felt the need to build old age homes and shelter to provide support and care to the elderly. The present paper is based on the qualitative study undertaken at old age homes of Jammu province. The paper tries to weave narratives of old age people around frame of survival in day to day life at old age home. The paper documents case studies of inmates of the old age homes in Jammu. The narratives clearly reflect conditions of old age homes and their impact on the inmates. The paper is built in the phenomenological understanding of life in an old age home.

Key Words: Old age, Isolation, Urbanisation, Shelter home, Hopelessness

Introduction

Elderly or old age consists of ages nearly or surpassing the average life span of human beings. The boundary of old age cannot be defined exactly because it doesn't have the same meaning in all societies. The Government of India adopted National Policy on Older Person (NPOP) in January 1999 & the policy defines senior citizen or elderly as a person whose age is 60 years or above. Elderly population in India is increasing at a fast pace. According to Population Census 2011, there are nearly 104 million elderly persons (aged 60 years or above) in India and 923 thousands in Jammu & Kashmir (MOSPI, 2016). The population of elderly has increased at an increasing rate in the recent years and however it is still a low priority issue. The concern of elderly population has become graver under the current dominant capitalistic mode of production. In the present structure everything is being seen and evaluated from the prism of capitalistic production. It seems that even

emotions have been heavily marketed by the global capital. In such a condition, any kind of precarity is going to be a curse. In this sense, old age is becoming a major social issue and therefore increasing number of old age homes are coming up. What we see is more and more people landing in old age homes somehow signalling us the weakening of family support system which was seen as a safety net for older people. The advancement of medical science and technology has created a tremendous increase in life expectancy which resulted in an increase of grey population making it a social issue for the present society. The transition from joint to nuclear family system has made it inept to accommodate old people due to the pressures created by hassle of a modern urban and industrialized lifestyle. Emergence of the old age homes became an alternate option for the care of elderly.

OLD AGE HOME

Old age home is a place for those old people who have no one to look after or those who have been thrown out of their homes. It is an institutional care which provides support to people from different socio-economic backgrounds. There are various reasons for the elderly to move to the old age homes. Often they join the old age home because of the loss of a spouse, deterioration in health and the inability to look after oneself due to physical illness and disability, due to the rapid change in traditional family system and urbanisation. The word "home" no longer defines a building where older people go to end their days; it is now a place where older people go to make the most of the next phase of their lives. Older people want homes that give them independence, choice and the ability to maintain their friendships and family contacts. They do not see their homes simply as a place where they receive health or social care. They crave for place that gives them a sense of belongingness and attachment. They wonder to develop connections with which they can share their feelings and worries.

JAMMU & KASHMIR: AN OVERVIEW

Jammu & Kashmir is a state consisting of three major administrative divisions; Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. It is located in the northern part of the country and forms the northern boundary of the country. The state is spread over an area of about 220000 sq. km. making it the 10th largest state in the country in terms of area (Census 2011). As per details from

census 2011, Jammu and Kashmir has population of 1.25 crores, an increase from figure of 1.01 crore in 2001 census. Total population of Jammu and Kashmir as per 2011 census is 12,541,302 of which male and female are 6,640,662 and 5,900,640 respectively. The languages spoken in the Jammu and Kashmir includes Urdu, Kashmiri, Balti and Dogri.

Jammu

Jammu is the most populous district of the state. Having recorded a population of 1,529,958, it accounts for 12.16 per cent of the total population of the State and ranks first in terms of population. It encompasses an area of 2342 sq.km and thus the density i.e population per sq. km works out to 653. It has a sex ratio of 880 females per thousand males as per census 2011. The literacy rate of Jammu is 83.45%. As per census 2001, out of total population of Jammu and Kashmir, 6.7% are elderly that makes 675 thousand (309 thousand are males and 366 thousand are females).

Old Age Homes in Jammu

Industrialisation, Urbanisation and Globalisation have cast their shadow on traditional values and norms. Growing culture of nuclear families and growing life expectancy has turned old age homes as the last resort for the elderly. In India many new cities are taking shape in terms of increased urbanisation and other characteristics. The increasing urbanisation has led to emergence of many new issues in the city itself and particularly in the state of Jammu and Kashmir per se. Concerns for old age population are growing in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The helplessness and the situation of homelessness is becoming visible in whole of the Jammu and Kashmir and particularly in the urban areas. In Jammu, there are 4 old age homes and the status of the old age people is not much different from what is in other part of the country and the concept of old age homes is gaining momentum in Jammu, like in other parts of the country. With the increase in population of elderly and with the rapid transition in family system, the need of old age home became a top most priority for the policy makers. Old age homes tell sordid tales of neglect by families, the drought of care and affection faced by parents who have outlived their utility and value to their children. As the elders are denied care, respect and dignity at their homes, Old age homes become the last resorts for such lonely and neglected elderly.

Keeping the present scenario in view, four old ages homes were also established in Jammu province by various NGOs or as a community initiative.

The old age homes in Jammu are listed below:

1. Home for Aged and Infirm, Amphalla
2. Seva Samiti Old Age Home
3. Jagriti Old Age Home
4. Home for Aged and Infirm, Kathua

1. **Home for Aged and Infirm, Amphalla:** Home for Aged and Infirm at Amphalla in Jammu was established by Shri Ram Nath Prahbakar in 1964 which is generally known as "Virdh Ashram". The old age home was started in one room at that time, and formally registered under J&K Registration of Societies Act VI of (Samvat) 1998, vide no. 66 of 1965. Having the motto of "Nar Sava is Narayan Seva" which signifies serving the humanities is to serve the God. At present, it has two fledged building with a capacity to accommodate 100 people. There are 60 rooms and total number of inmates at present in the home is 52, where 32 are male and 20 are female. The rooms are constructed by the philanthropists in the memory of their loving ones. The inmates are provided with all the basic facilities such as shelter, food, clothes, medical services and other basic amenities. Various National and Religious festivals are celebrated with the inmates. The home has 2 recreation centres in each block for reading and entertainment facilities, 2 dining hall in each block, and a physiotherapy section for the inmates.

2. **Seva Samiti Old Age Home at Akhnoor:** This home was founded in 1990 by Late Sh. Dev Raj Vadhere with an objective of social welfare. This old age home is run by a trust known as Seva Samiti. The motto of the trust is "Seva Parmo Dharma" which meaning serving the humanity is the prime & supreme task. Initially it was started with few rooms now its has a full-fledged building with a capacity to accommodate 25 inmates. At present, it has 7 inmates (3 Males & 4 females). Here the inmates are all provided with all essential items such as food, clothing, medical services and other daily needs.

3. **Jagriti Old Age Home:** Jagriti Old Age home is located at Udampur near district Hospital. It was constructed in the year 2000. It is constructed on the government land and is government recognised home, managed by a trust- Jagriti Trust. It has intake capacity of

25 inmates. At present, it has 10 inmates (6 males & 4 females). The home is well furnished and has a proper governing body. Most of the people in the old age homes avail old age pensions and are provided all the necessities of life. The home receives funds and grants from the government and also from the other people in the form of cash and kind both.

4. **Home for Aged and Infirm, Kathua:** Home for Aged and Infirm, Kathua popularly known as Vridh Ashram located in Main bazaar, Ram Leela ground, Kathua. It was established as the outcome of Community initiative in the year 1993 and started functioning in the year 1995. It has intake capacity of 50 inmates. At present, it has 28 inmates (23 males and 5 females). This home has a well-developed infrastructure including 8 rooms, dining room, office, kitchen and wash rooms. The construction of the building was funded by the philanthropists in the memory of their loving ones. This home caters to the needs of the inmates and proper care is provided to them. The old age home receives income and fund in the form of cash and kind from the various donors. This home has a defined organisational structure.

METHDOLOGY

The basic objective of the study was to document the lived experiences of the people who are growing old in the old age home itself. The study tried to capture the experiences of people living in old age home through their narratives. A qualitative methodology, with a descriptive exploratory design, was chosen for the present study, because of its capacity to explore the narrative accounts of the life experiences of the older adults who come to live in the old age homes. A qualitative approach with descriptive exploratory design explores the life experiences from people's perspective to get a new insight and understanding of the phenomenon. Data was primarily collected through formal one-to-one in-depth interview using a semi-structured interview guide. During the process, the researcher utilized different strategies like field notes, observations, to assure the validity of what is heard and observed during the encounter with the participants. In-depth interviews captured complete and detailed information about individuals' thoughts, feelings, and genuine lived experiences. Field notes were taken before, during, and after the interview session to record the participants' nonverbal clues, mood and attitude, gestures, and facial expressions. Field notes are primarily the observations and assumptions captured by the

researcher of what is heard and observed during the encounter with the participants. These notations played a significant role during the data analysis process, as they served as a valid justification for interpreting data and highlighting crucial emerging notions. Formal one-to-one in-depth interviews were conducted, using a semi-structured interview guide. Participants were assured for the confidentiality of the gathered data. Depending on the willingness of the participants, the interview lasted from 35 to 40 minutes. For analysis, the researcher used thematic analysis approach to identify and analyze patterns of themes within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As Braun and Clarke (2006) explain thematic analysis is a flexible research method. It can be regarded as an essentialist method which 'reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants' or a constructionist that examines 'the ways in which events, realities meanings, experiences and so on effects the discourses operating within society'.

Narratives from the old age homes

Most of the cases in these old age home are similar to one another. The cause of their being in old age home is that, they are thrown out by their children or relatives after being beaten up by them. Some of the cases reveal that their children sold their property, without their consent and at the time of shifting they ask their parents to go where they want to go. Some of the cases are because of financial issues. Due to poor financial conditions they had to come to the old age home for their survival. And in many cases their children had to rear their own family and they don't want to be burden to their children and come to live in the old age home.

Some of the narratives are discussed below

Case narrative 1

Name: Geeta Devi (Name changed)

Age: 64 years

She has no children. She used to work as a teacher. Her husband died at the age of 55 years, after that she started living with her brother and his family. After her brother's death, she was physically abused and pushed out of the house. Geeta Devi told that as long as her brother was alive, the family members were treating her well. After her brother's death,

they just turned different and no share was given to her in the property. She felt that she is single so she didn't claim anything and came into the old age home.

Case narrative 2

Name: Neha Sharma (Name changed)

Age: 60 years

She has been staying in old age home at Amphalla Jammu for the last two years. Earlier, she works in a wine factory at Palloura (Jammu) and as a house-maid. She has a son and two daughters. Her son is married and has a child. After her son's marriage, the family dynamics got changed. Her daughter in law didn't treat her well. There is always a fight over petty household matters such as cooking, cleaning and managing household etc. She said that it was very stressful for her. Many times, she tried to discuss all this matter with her son but she never had that guts and courage to tell him about his wife. To avoid that chaos, after two year of his son's marriage, she deliberately left her home and came to stay in old age home. She said that her son visits her sometimes. She says, "I miss him and my grandson a lot".

Case narrative 3

Name: Kunti (Name changed)

Age: 86 years

She was married in Panjthriti (Jammu City). She has two sons & after her husband's death, she had divided her property into three parts. One for each son, and one part for herself. Her elder son cheated her and sold the property without her consent. When Smt. Kunti asked her son, he pushed her out of the house. After that, she came back to her native place/ maternal house at Akhnoor. Since then she is living at seva samiti old age home. At seva samiti old age home, she is popularly known as 'bovva'. She says, "*Apnone dokhadiyehai, baharwalopekyabaroosakare*". In her words, "when our loved ones cheated us so to whom we should trust".

Case study 4

Name: Smt. Asha (Name changed)

Age: 65 years

She studied till 10th standard. She has four children – two daughters and two sons. Her elder son is an auto-driver and younger son is no more. Her husband owns a factory that went into loses. He was a drug addict and lost his life. After her husband death, all household responsibilities were on her. She has to take care of her children. She has the responsibility of marrying her daughters. She didn't receive any help and support from her in-laws and were always trying to take her property. She sold that property and got her children married. Her daughter-in-law was also suffering from cancer of which they were unaware before marriage. Her daughter-in-law's condition went from bad to worst. Initially, her daughter-in-law asked smt. Asha to live separately because she is not in a condition to take care of her. Smt. Asha worked as a cook at some doctor's home. After that she started working in some pencil factory. But due to age, her body got weak and fragile and she was not in a position to work. She has no source of income then the doctor where she used to work as cook suggested her about the old age home. Then she came to the old age home. After one month her daughter-in-law expired. She went to home for 15 days and returned to home.

She says, "Abgharjaungitoh beta khegameripatnichligiyabyehayihain ,jbzarroratti tab nhiayin." "Usneaage hi itnakharchkiyahaibahukeillaz par aabbête kizimmavari b haiusspr, issliye main nijatighr, potaayathaekbaarmilkechalagya".

She talks about her grandson and most of the time use to talk about her husband and his business.

Case narrative 5

Name: Smt. Prabha (Name changed)

She was married to a Gujarati guy and went to Gujarat after her marriage. She has completed Masters in Hindi before her marriage. She has no child. Her husband had a cycle repairing shop. After some years, because of some disease, his body paralyzed. In order to run her household she started working as a cook in different households. After few months, her husband passed away. Then she shifted to Jammu and went to her brother's home. Her sister-in-law left her alone for a month and went to Bombay and locked the whole house. Then she decided to leave her brother's home and went to a rented room at Sangrampur, Jammu. She was not able to pay the rent as she had no source of income so she shifted to the old age home, Amphalla. She says, "Whenever I listen stories of abuse

from other inmates, it hurts me.” She says it’s better to have no child because those who were having children were also abusing their own parents. She adds, “what’s the fun of having children if they do not care their parents”.

FINDINGS & OBSERVATIONS

Old age homes are expected to have various facilities and services that are necessary for daily living. The services and facilities provide opportunities to enhance the quality of life in these settings. After visiting different old age homes in Jammu province, different issues and challenges were identified. It is observed that to grow & live in old age homes is a challenge for the elderly people. The reasons stated by inmates are there is no one with whom they shared their feelings and are not getting love & care in old age homes, an emotional void is there. They always miss their children and always live in fear of death. One of the challenges they primarily face is with regard to the structure of homes. The structures are not elderly-friendly. Not every has access to resources, the condition of elderly people in old age homes is very critical. At Amphalla old age home, it was found that resources and manpower are sufficiently available and whatever they need is made accessible to them. The inmates don’t share cordial relations among themselves & often used bad language and have ill-feeling for one another. Akhnoor old age home faces the challenge of lack of manpower and resources. The inmates lack basic facilities & thus most of the inmates run away from Akhnoor old age home and seek shelter at some other place. At Kathua and Udampur, the condition of old age home and inmates is same as that of Seva Samiti old age home at Akhnoor

Various challenges faced by the elderly are categorised under various themes:

Theme- 1: The circumstances of leaving home

This theme emerged when the participants were inquired about the reasons and circumstances for their relocation in old age homes. Two main categories emerged under this theme:

a. Lack of support system and

A majority of respondents share their experiences and incidents when they didn’t receive any support from their families. In most of the cases, it happened after the demise of their partners and was not provided with any emotional and financial support. The children were unwilling to care and deprived their parents from basic necessities of life.

A participant narrated, "My husband passed after few years of marriage and have no children. After the demise of my husband, I was living with my brother's family but after the death of my death, the family just turned different and no share was given to me in the property. I didn't receive any emotional or financial support. I was forced to leave the home so I came here."

b. Insensitive behaviour of children and abuse: This category sheds light on the children's insensitive behaviour towards their parents.

One of the participants shared his feelings with a heavy heart, "I had a very challenging time during the initial years of my life. I worked really hard for her children. I used to work as house-maid. After my son's marriage, the family dynamics got changed. My daughter-in-law didn't treat me well. There is always a fight over petty household matters such as cooking, cleaning and managing household etc. She used to abuse me. The narrator said to maintain family peace and happiness; I decided to leave the home. My grandson visits me sometimes; I miss my family and kid a lot."

Another participant shared her story stating she was cheated by her own children for. Her children sold all her property without her knowledge. *She says, "Apno ne dokhadiyehai, baharwalopekyabaroosakare."*

Theme 2: Life experiences before relocating to shelter home

This theme emerged when the participants were asked to describe their life experiences which led them to relocate into old age homes. The negative experiences emerged significantly. Those bitter experiences are categorized under two broad heads

c. Feelings of loneliness and helplessness: The elderly people face numerous physical, physiological, and social role changes which challenge the sense of self and capacity to live happily. In the conversations, it was found that elderly in order to avoid any disrespect and misbehaviour prefers to remain alone, way from the families. They want their kids to remain happily and don't want to burden them with their presence.

One participant stating her helplessness, "Abgharjaungitoh beta khegameripatnichligiyabyehayihain jbzarroratti tab nhiayin." "Usneaage hi

itnakharchkiyahaibahukeillaz par aab bête kizimmavari b haiusspr, issliye main niijatighr, potaayathaekbaarmilkechalagya”.

Other participant says, “I am living a far more peaceful and homely stay at this old age home than stay at my home. Despite being surrounded by my family, I have no one to talk. Here, in old age home, I am living with great ease.”

d. Poverty: Low income or no source of income is one of the reasons of the elderly shifting to old age homes.

One participant mentions, “After the marriage of my children, I used to live in a rented accommodation. There was no source of income and I was unable to pay the rent, it was challenging for me to manage domestic expenses, health and other costs of living, and was in a complete helpless state and then voluntarily decided to shift to the old age home.”

Theme: 3 Decision to live in old age home

The participants were asked to express their feelings when they made the decision to move to a shelter home, whether voluntarily or against their wishes. They were also asked about how they felt about living and adjusting in a new environment, away from their families and their loved ones.

e. Decision voluntary or forced: Majority of participants shared that it was their own choice to leave their homes.

One participant mentions, ‘After the death of spouse, the children got busy in their lives and I don’t want to be a burden on them so I decide to leave my home. I am happy here and my grandson comes to see me often’.

Another participant shares, “Everyday fight and rift with daughter-in-law is an emotional drainage. I can’t handle the stress so I voluntarily decided to come at this old age home.”

f. Adaptation with the new environment: This category presents adjustment concerns when relocated into old age homes. These elderly people were emotionally attached with their home where they lived their entire life. These elderly participants also encountered difficulty in adjusting with the old age home environment. The new surroundings, changed physical location, different daily routine and pattern affected their comfort and adjustment level.

One of the participants mentions, “In this new environment basic necessities of life such as

food, cleanwater, shelter etc are fulfilled and whatelse do I need. I am happy because my children are also happy living alone and away from me.

Another participant mentions, "There is lack of trust and understanding among the people and it sometimes gives stress and tension."

With the recent transition infamily system, migration, an increase in urbanisation, and industrialisation, the elderly people remain unwanted and isolated.After spending long year of active family life environment, it becomes difficult for these elderly to live in shelter home and they suffer from many psycho-social problems that hinder their quality of life. At this stage, they become more dependent, socially isolated and immobile or bed ridden not only due to chronic health condition but also due to psycho-social factors.The elderly are generally respectable in the society, their wisdom and experiences act as an asset for the family as well as for the community. Hence it was natural that the elderly were accorded a high status. But now things have changed the grip of our socio-culture and traditional values are losing. Old age is rapidly emerging as a serious problem that they weretreated as burden to the family. Parents are beaten up by their own children and forced them to leave their home with no place to go and the lost hope elderly have to resort in old age homes.

Conclusion

The life of the aged people are becoming more and more miserable that thereis a growing dissatisfaction among the older generation that they are not taken care of, as they deserve. In earlier time societygave prime value and respect to thewords and decisions of the elderly people. In the present times, old age person are considered as a burden. This study is about the issues and concern of the elderly citizens who are residing in an old age home. The old age homes although tried to provide them all the basic and essentials but that emotional void makes their life miserable. From the study the authors have developed an understanding like how it is difficult to grow old in an old age home because they were separated from their own one's whom they love and care. It is very difficult for that parent to live in an old age home who sacrificeseverything for their family and children and their children have the old age homes became a home for the elderly in their final stages of life. Along with basic needs, an emotional balance is very necessary that one can attain only in

his/ her family environment. It's becomes very important in today's scenario to teach the children about the issues and challenges of the elderly and also make them realize that they will get old. We should raise an awareness programme through which the younger generation should be considering the value of elderly as a role model.

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