

Protection of Elderly Rights in India: Analyzing Legislative Framework and Role of NGOs

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Introduction:

The multi directional process of ageing affects all humans. Age discrimination is becoming a norm due to declining social values and changed socio-economic situations. The aged people are one of the most abused sections of the society. Ageing is generally described as the process of growing old and is an integral part of the life-cycle. It is a multi-dimensional process and affects almost every aspect of human life. In general, with increasing age the process of aging is often associated with declining health, loss of independence, shrinking of social roles, isolation and feeling of loneliness, economic hardship, being labelled or stigmatized as a burden on the family and society, intergenerational conflicts, ill-treatment & abuse, desertion and need of shelter through institutionalized arrangements. On the family front, the condition and status of the older persons in the family is dependent on their physical health, employment and socio-economic situation, extent of availability of family care and social support systems.¹

Old age is not a definite biological stage, as the chronological age denoted as "old age" varies culturally and historically². Most developed-world countries have accepted the chronological age of 65 years as a definition of 'elderly' or older person. The United Nations has agreed that 60+ years may be usually denoted as old age. At the same time, the WHO recognized that the developing world often defines old age, not by years, but by new roles, loss of previous roles, or inability to make active contributions to society. Demographers have been cautioning us about the greying of our populations for quite some time now.³ Not very long ago, the issue of ageing was considered a matter of importance for only a handful of countries. Nowadays, the number of persons aged 60 and over is increasing at an unprecedented pace, anticipated to rise from its current 740 million to reach 1 billion by the end of the decade.⁴ Unfortunately the increase in numbers has also shed light on the lack of adequate protection mechanisms, and on the existing gaps in policies and programmes to address the situation of older persons. Today, two-thirds of the world's older people live in low and middle income countries. Developed and developing countries address the issues of the aging population in different ways. In developed countries, for example, a social security apparatus bears the strain of caring for the elderly. In developing countries, on the other hand, families traditionally care for the elderly. In the developing countries, the lack of a social security apparatus and the weakening of the family unit present obstacles to the provision of care for elderly family members. In spite of many international and national attempts, existing human rights mechanisms fail to adequately protect and promote the rights of elderly people and there is an urgent need to address the rights of old people specifically. Indian government has taken many initiatives, in line with international resolutions, for the welfare of aged people. However, much needs to be done to make the lives of aged people safe and secure at the twilight of their life.

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¹ S. Irudaya Rajan and Gayathri Balagopal (eds.), *Elderly Care in India: Societal and State Responses* 49 (Springer Nature, New Delhi, 2018).

² <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/ageing> (last accessed on June 20, 2026).

³ P.K. Kuruvilla, "Old-age insecurity: How far does the Parents and Senior Citizens Act of 2007 address the problem?", 52 *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 298- 310 (2010).

⁴ In 2050, for the first time in human history, there will be more persons over 60 than children in the world - more than one in five of the world's population will be aged 60 or older.

Challenges faced by Elderly:

Older persons are not a homogenous group, and the challenges they face in the protection or enjoyment of their human rights vary greatly. Age discrimination and ageism are tolerated across the world. While some continue to lead active lives as part of their community, many others face homelessness, lack of adequate care or isolation. Older women and men experience violations of their rights at family, community and institutional levels. Older people face very specific threats to their rights in relation to age discrimination, for example, in access to health care, in employment, in property and inheritance rights, in access to information and education and in humanitarian responses. Older people also face particular forms of violence and abuse. They face particular threats to their rights in care settings and as carers themselves. Multiple discriminations appears as an essential component of any analysis, particularly when considering that age-related discrimination is often compounded by other grounds of discrimination, such as sex, socio-economic status, ethnicity, or health status. The non-discrimination clause in international human rights treaties affords protection to all persons against discrimination on the basis of certain characteristics established in those treaties.⁵ In general, however, non-discrimination clauses in human rights conventions do not expressly mention age as one of the grounds for which illegitimate distinctions are prohibited. In recent years, there have been significant advocacy efforts calling for enhanced international thinking and action on the human rights of older persons. Various stakeholders have called for more visibility and increased use of international human rights standards to address the dire situation of millions of older women and men around the world.⁶ The rights of elderly can be divided into three main categories: protection, participation and image.⁷

Rights of elderly– International perspective:

In recent years, there have been significant advocacy efforts calling for enhanced international thinking and action on the human rights of older persons. Various stakeholders have called for more visibility and increased use of international human rights standards to address the dire situation of millions of older women and men around the world.⁸ There are many international instruments that recognize specific rights of all persons and are clearly applicable to older persons as citizens of signatory states. But the rights of older persons have not yet received the international legal attention they deserve. There is no comprehensive international instrument that adequately addresses the specific protections required for the elderly. The elderly population remains a vulnerable group with no legal instrument tailored to its particular needs.⁹

The rights of the elderly, whatever that are available, are usually placed in human rights treaties that protect economic, social and cultural rights. This situation creates the perception that these rights are programmatic aspirations but not subjective rights which means that states are not immediately required to fully realize those rights in their jurisdictions, as they are only goals or aims that will be attained to the maximum of the states' available resources relieving the states of the obligations to secure the well being of aged

⁵. For example, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights refers to discrimination on the basis of "race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status".

⁶. <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/ageing> (last accessed on June 20, 2026).

⁷. Protection refers to securing the physical, psychological and emotional safety of older persons with regard to their unique vulnerability to abuse and ill treatment. Participation refers to the need to establish a greater and more active role for older persons in society. Image refers to the need to define a more positive, less degrading and discriminatory idea of who older persons are and what they are capable of doing.

⁸. United nations human rights, www.ohchr.org, (last accessed on June 20, 2026).

⁹. Rodriguez-Pinzon, Diego & Martin, Claudia, "The International Human Rights Status of Elderly Persons" 3 American University International Law Review 23- 33 (2002).

group. The fact that the elderly are considered a disadvantaged or vulnerable group enhances the protection that states are obliged to ensure them when complying with international human rights obligations. In addition to the elderly specific provisions, there are civil and political rights provisions that can be extremely important to protecting the rights of elderly. The right to a fair trial and the right to non-discrimination are fundamental guarantees that can be used creatively to protect elder persons from certain practices such as forced retirement, slow judicial proceedings regarding health or social benefits, receiving inhumane treatment in health facilities and the death penalty. Moreover, through the right to property, the elderly may protect their rights to pensions and social security benefits.

International Endeavours in the Protection of Rights of Elderly:

The question of ageing was first debated at the United Nations in 1948 at the initiative of Argentina. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights included in its Article 25(1)¹⁰ as the first reference to elderly people's rights. The issue was again raised by Malta in 1969.¹¹

In the year 1971, the General Assembly asked the Secretary General to prepare a comprehensive report on the elderly and to suggest guideline for the national and international action. In 1978, the General Assembly decided to hold a World Conference on the Ageing. Accordingly, the World Assembly on Ageing was held at Vienna in 1982 wherein an International Plan of Action on Ageing (Vienna Plan) was adopted. The overall goal of the Plan was to strengthen the ability of individual countries to deal effectively with the ageing in their population, keeping in mind the special concerns and needs of the elderly. The main concerns of the Plan were issues related to health and nutrition, protection of elderly consumers, housing, social welfare, family, income security, unemployment, and education. The Plan attempted to promote understanding of the social, economic and cultural implications of ageing and of related humanitarian issues. The International Plan of Action on Ageing was adopted by the General Assembly in 1982 and the Assembly in subsequent years called on governments to continue to implement its principles and recommendations.

Two other relevant United Nations documents address elderly issues are the General Assembly Resolution of Global targets on ageing for the year 2001¹² and the Proclamation on Ageing¹³. It revisited the Vienna plan during its conference on Ageing in Madrid during 2002, calling for the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development, the need to include ageing in global agendas, and the need to combat discrimination based on age.¹⁴

Existing human rights mechanisms fail to adequately protect and promote the elderly. A single instrument, a new international convention on the rights of older people, is the most effective way to make sure that all people enjoy their human rights in older age, and on an equal basis with others. We need a convention to establish legal standards that challenge and replace stigmatizing and dehumanising ageist attitudes and behaviour, ensure states understand their human rights obligations to old people, assert their rights, improve

¹⁰. "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control".

¹¹. Dilipdeshmukh, "Laws for Senior Citizens in India", 10 Legal service India, 14- 28 (2006).

¹². UN General Assembly, Global targets on ageing for the year 2001, GA Res 47/339, GAOR, UN Doc A/Res/47/339 (September 10, 1992).

¹³. UN General Assembly, Proclamation on Ageing, GA Res 47/5, 47, GAOR, UN Doc A/Res/47/5, 47/49 (October 16, 1992).

¹⁴. The General Assembly stressed that older persons are to be viewed as contributors to their societies and not as a burden... During its Cairo Programme of Action, U.N.O. further stressed to develop a social support system ... with a view to enhancing the ability of families to take care of elderly people within the family.... Governments should seek to enhance the self-reliance of elderly people to facilitate their continued participation in society.

accountability of states for their human rights obligations towards them, provide a framework for policy and decision making. It must provide a comprehensive and systematic framework for the protection and promotion of all our human rights in older age, prohibit all forms of discrimination in old age in every aspect of our lives, articulate how each human right specifically applies to us in old age. Also, there is a strong necessity for a strong implementation, monitoring and accountability system.

Rights of Elderly- Indian Perspective:

It took more than 100 years for the aged population to double in most of the countries in the world, but in India it has doubled in just 20 years. It is estimated that the population of senior citizens in India will surge to 230 million by 2036 and it constitutes 15% of the total population¹⁵. Largely, over the years, India has developed into a complex society, with a wide mix of traditional values and modern lifestyle. Older people have acute sense of rights and wrongs, but they generally don't ask for specific provisions and applications for themselves. With fast changing socio-economic scenario of industrialization, rapid urbanization, higher aspirations among the youth and the increasing participation of women in the workforce, roots of traditional joint family system has been eroding very fast. In urban areas of the country traditional joint family system has become thing of past. In such changing situations, majority of older people, who have passed most part of their life with their joint/extended families are on the verge of isolation or marginalization in old age. With eroding social values in India, cases of elder abuse and mistreatment in every neighbourhood are daily routine. Ever increasing numbers of distress calls from older people clearly indicate disturbing condition of human rights of old people in India. While culturally and socially, elderly members of the family are treated with great respect in India, there is almost very little to nothing to ensure their welfare in the society.¹⁶

Legislative Framework on Elderly Rights in India:

The Constitution is the fundamental law of the land which shall consists of rules and regulations according to which a state has to be administered. The Constitution of India consists of provisions for protecting the rights of all the sections of the society including the elderly. For example, Article 21 of the Constitution of India guarantees the right to live with dignity, which includes protection from abuse, neglect, and access to healthcare for the elderly. Similarly, under Article 41, the State must provide public assistance in cases of old age, sickness, and disablement within its economic capacity, under Article 46, the state shall promote educational and economic interests of weaker sections including the elderly and also protect them from exploitation. Added to this, under Article 47, the state must raise nutrition, standard of living, and public health of all people, including the elderly. Thus, the State has committed itself to the rights of old people.¹⁷

Statutory Safeguards provided to Elderly in India:

¹⁵. Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment available at <<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2183196®=3&lang=2>> (last accessed on July 23, 2026).

¹⁶. Dipayan Paul, "A civilisational duty to care for the elderly", *The Hindu*, October 13, 2019, available at <www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page/a-civilisational-duty-to-care-for-the-elderly/article29667700.ece> (last accessed on June 22, 2026).

¹⁷. **Art. 41: Right to work, to education and to public assistance in certain cases:** The State shall, within the limits of economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want. However, these provision are included in the Chapter IV i.e., Directive Principles of the Indian [Constitution](#). The Directive Principles, as stated in [Article](#) 37, are not enforceable by any court of law.

The law makers have incorporated various provisions and enacted legislations in India with the above Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles firmly in mind. Generally, the moral duty to provide maintenance to parents and elders are recognized by all people. However, so far as law is concerned, the position and extent of such liability varies from community to community.

A. Personal Laws:

A law could be said a personal law if it originates, develops and exists with beliefs, concepts, notions and ideologies of a person over a period of time. A personal law is one which is practised as a part of custom and is said to be tangible and palpable. A person cannot be separated from his personal laws and his customary practices which he has been following over a period of time.

(i) *Hindu Law:*

Amongst the Hindus, the obligation of sons to provide maintenance to their aged parents, who were not able to maintain themselves out of their own earning and property, was recognized even in early texts. And this obligation was not dependent upon, or in any way qualified, by a reference to the possession of family property. It is imbibed in the Hindu culture to provide care to the elders as a customary practice. Such practice continued for generations together without much legal battles. However, with the entry of Britishers in our educational and family set-up, the society started to witness lot of changes in each and every sphere of life. The elders who were the karta and traditional mooring of the family system lost significance and importance and were the worst affected in this changed scenario. With the loss of care takers during their old age, the greying population found itself in dire straits economically and emotionally.

In order to mitigate the sufferings of elderly and to protect their rights, the Parliament of India has incorporated a provision of providing maintenance to parents in the HAMA, 1956. HAMA is one of the earliest personal laws in the independent India. In the year 1941, The Indian Government appointed a Hindu Law committee to look into the Women's Right to Property Act, 1937 to make amendments, under the chairmanship of B.N.Rao. The committee made suggestions for the reforms in Hindu Law also. As a result, many personal laws were enacted after independence to introduce reforms as well as make it uniform throughout the country. The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act in the year 1956 was one among them. What was a moral obligation since from ancient times was converted into a legal one, after independence in the year of 1956, as a part of codifying Hindu customs and religious practices.

The statutory provision for maintenance of parents under Hindu personal law is contained in Section 20¹⁸ of the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956. This Act is the first personal law statute in India, which imposes an obligation on the children to maintain their parents. As is evident from the wording of the section, the obligation to maintain parents

¹⁸. S. 20. **Maintenance of children and aged parents:** (1) Subject to the provisions of this section a Hindu is bound, during his or her lifetime, to maintain his or her legitimate or illegitimate children and his or her aged or infirm parents.

(2) A legitimate or illegitimate child may claim maintenance from his or her father or mother so long as the child is a minor.

(3) The obligation of a person to maintain his or her aged or infirm parent or a daughter who is unmarried extends in so far as the parent or the unmarried daughter, as the case may be, is unable to maintain himself or herself out of his or her own earnings or other property.

Explanation — In this section "parent" includes a childless step-mother.

is not confined to sons only, and daughters also have an equal duty towards parents. It is important to note that only those parents who are financially unable to maintain themselves from any source, are entitled to seek maintenance under this Act.

(ii) Muslim Law:

Children have a duty to maintain their aged parents even under the Muslim law. Parents and grandparents in indigent circumstances are entitled to maintenance from their children and grandchildren who have the means, even if they are able to earn their livelihood. Both sons and daughters have a duty to maintain their parents under the Muslim law. The obligation, however, is dependent on their having the means to do so.

(iii) Christian & Parsi Law:

The Christians and Parsis have no personal laws providing for maintenance for the parents. Parents who wish to seek maintenance have to apply under provisions of the criminal law, i.e., Section 144 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (Section 125 of CrPC, 1973).

B. Criminal Law:

Prior to 1973, there was no provision for maintenance of parents under the code. The provision, however, was introduced for the first time in Sec. 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure in 1973, despite the reservations expressed by Law Commission. It is also essential that the parent establishes that the other party has sufficient means and has neglected or refused to maintain him, i.e., the parent, who is unable to maintain himself. It is important to note that Cr. P. C. 1973 is a secular law and governs persons belonging to all religions and communities. Daughters, including married daughters, also have a duty to maintain their parents. However, the parent needs to approach the court against an offspring, and the onus was on the parent to prove that the other party has sufficient means and has refused to maintain him i.e., the parent. The goal of all these provisions is to provide safety and security to the elderly citizens of the country. They should be financially assisted so that they live with dignity. The same provision of providing maintenance to parents which was incorporated under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973 is included under Section 144 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023.

C. The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007:

Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 is a legislation enacted to provide more effective provision for maintenance and welfare of parents and senior citizens. This Act makes it a legal obligation for children and heirs to provide maintenance to senior citizens and parents, by monthly allowance. This Act also provides simple, speedy and inexpensive mechanism for the protection of life and property¹⁹ of the older persons. The main attraction of this Act is there are provisions to protect the life and property of such persons. This Act also provides setting up of old age homes for providing

¹⁹. S. 23. Transfer of property to be void in certain circumstances: (1) Where any senior citizen who, after the commencement of this Act, has transferred by way of gift or otherwise, his property, subject to the condition that the transferee shall provide the basic amenities and basic physical needs to the transferor and such transferee refuses or fails to provide such amenities and physical needs, the said transfer of property shall be deemed to have been made by fraud or coercion or under undue influence and shall at the option of the transferor be declared void by the Tribunal.

maintenance to the indigent senior citizens and parents. Children -include son, daughter, grandson, and granddaughter but do not include a minor. Maintenance includes provision for food, clothing, residence, medical attendance and treatment. Parent-means father or mother whether biological, adoptive or step father or step mother, whether or not father or mother is a senior citizen. If such children or relative is not maintaining his parents or senior citizen respectively, then the parents/senior citizen can seek the assistance of Tribunal constituted under this Act, to enforce the remedy of maintenance. Such application for maintenance can be filed by the senior citizen or a parent himself, or if such person is incapable, then by any other person or any registered organization authorized by him. The Tribunal can also suo motu take cognizance of the case. The application under this Act can be filed before the Tribunal in any district, where the applicant resides or last resided or where children or relative resides. if such respondent is wilfully avoiding service of summons or neglecting to attend the Tribunal, the Tribunal may proceed and determine the case ex parte. If the Tribunal is satisfied that such children/relative against whom such application for maintenance is pending, neglect or refuses to maintain the parents/senior citizens as the case may be, may order such children/relative to pay monthly allowance to such applicant. The maximum amount of maintenance that can be allowed by the Tribunal is Rs.10, 000 per month the tribunal has power to alter, modify or cancel the order in appropriate circumstances.

Role of NGOs in the welfare of Elderly:

The term, 'NGO' includes a wide category of groups and organizations. An NGO operates independent of government or any other authority. It is registered as a Trust, company or a Society depending upon its aspiration and functioning. NGOs have become an indispensable part in the progress as well as defence of poor and downtrodden section of the society. The World Bank has defined NGOs as, "private organizations that pursue activities to retrieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services or undertake community development"²⁰.

Almost one third of the people belonging to deprived and impoverished sections of the people are 'Capability poor' which roughly means that they lack even minimal health care and education to earn for a decent livelihood. Taking into account of the large population, the government machinery is found incapable of attending to their every needs. During their initial days of growth, NGOs used to zero in on this lower income and dependent strata of society and ill-treatment of women. However, once the changing demography of Indian population came to light and also the distress calls of elderly increased to alarming levels, NGOs understood that elderly are also an equally vulnerable section, along with women and children, of the society. Once the concept of joint family system withered due to social circumstances, neglect of elderly had become more rampant. 'Friend in Need Society of Madras' established during the year 1840 was the first organization to provide dedicated service to the elderly in India, followed by 'Little Sisters of the Poor' in Kolkata after four decades. Several NGO groups concentrating on the welfare of senior citizens proliferated during the last few decades. It is an undisputable fact that the NGOs played a crucial role in bringing the issues of the senior citizens to the attention of the society at large and created many forums to heed the concerns and problems of the elderly and also made sure that they are addressed to the extent possible.

The services of voluntary agencies in the welfare of senior citizens have become dominant during the last two or three decades. They operate with a vision to bring a change in

²⁰. A. Seshu Kumar, "Role of Non-Government Organization in taking health care of old people" 6 *Global Journal for Research Analysis* 18 (2017).

the way people look at the elderly and their mission is to enable the elderly to live a safe, fun filled, contended and fulfilled life with dignity at the end of their life spectrum. They employ multidimensional and multifaceted line of action for the welfare of senior citizens and strive to improve various aspects of the elderly, including their livelihood, healthcare, shelter as well as policies and programs of government for the elderly. And they are unrelenting, persistent, resolute and spirited in their quest of elderly care and in their principle of enabling and empowering them. Governments alone could not shoulder the responsibility and its machinery is not competent enough to tend to the requirements of the elderly without these voluntary organizations. The role and the importance of these organizations have been mentioned in the both 8th and 9th Plan documents. In the National Policy of Older Persons which was launched in 1999, the Government has contemplated the ministrations of these organizations in the spheres of the non-institutional care, establishment and functioning of old age homes, short term care, day care and multi service centres, home visits by volunteers, identification of disabled elders and distribution of equipment like walking sticks, hearing aids etc. The government started to give grants to these organizations, starting from the year 1983-84, for the provision of welfare activities like counselling, healthcare, vocational training, income generation, establishment of old age homes, day care centres and other related activities concerning the senior citizens.

Agewell Foundation which is one of the oldest organisations that involve itself in uplift of senior citizens. its team comprises of professionals, social workers and a network of volunteers which handle many schemes and projects aimed at the promotion of overall welfare of the elderly. The maxim of the foundation says, "The foundation seeks to reach out to a larger audience of older persons and act as a catalyst of change in bridging the gap between generations and ensuring a respectful and comfortable life for old people." It is one of the largest NGO that reach out to over 25,000 elderly on a daily basis through its network of social workers and volunteers. As an acknowledgement of its service to the elders, ECOSOC conferred on the foundation a Special Consultative Status at the United Nations in 2011.

HelpAge India is perhaps the oldest professionally run organization striving for the welfare of the elderly in various fields. It says, "Our programs are focused on direct interventions in the areas of Healthcare (mobile healthcare units, cataract surgeries), Agecare (helplines, senior citizen care homes and day care centres, physiotherapy), Livelihoods (elder-self-help groups; linkages with government schemes), Disaster Response (e.g., covid19 relief response), as well as Advocacy and Awareness on rights and policies relating to elders." Since its inception, over 45,000 cataract surgeries per year are done on its behalf. It was presented with the 'UN Population Award 2020' as a recognition of its sterling services during the pandemic, commendable work done in the welfare of senior citizens, meritorious assistance to elders to their rights and admirable contribution in the field of ageing and to population issues in general²¹.

Some of the bigger NGOs like HelpAge India are primarily funding organizations and collaborate with the partner agencies for the execution of their schemes and projects²². They identify the projects, chart out methods of implementing, encourage and use the services of local and regional voluntary organizations by providing the needed financial assistance and technical help. They also motivate, through their schemes, other sections of the society to

²¹. <https://www.helpageindia.org> (last accessed on June 22, 2026).

²². The NGO's commitment to the Elderly in India, Silver Innings, <https://www.silverinnings.com> (last accessed on June 22, 2026).

care for the elderly. They also identify areas of action, wherein elders are abused and prejudiced, that need to be targeted by both the government and the society in large.

The poor elderly are in want of long term solutions for their subsistence and to live with dignity. Short term relief will obviate the immediate problems; but will always keep them on tenterhooks worrying about the next day. What is the need of the hour is income generating solutions, that would be suitable for their age, physical condition and community in which they live, to lead an independent life. This was facilitated by distributing high quality seeds to boost the agricultural yields, providing live stocks to generate income by selling the milk and meat, setting up of small-scale poultry farms which will fetch income by sale of eggs and meat. Another advantage is that their health also will improve by consuming milk, meat and eggs. NGOs have successfully organised the lonely, deprived and deserted elderly, especially in rural India, into elder self-help groups (ESHG) and trained them to a livelihood activity to generate income for their sustenance and pool their resources to help other members of the group. These ESHGs are then clubbed with higher level community organisations to improve their income and make them heftier and more robust. This SHG model was adopted by Ministry of Rural Development in its projects to improve the financial standing of the rural women. Having understood the influence and inspired by the result the ESHG have brought into the lives of elderly, The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE) has launched 'Action Groups Aimed at Social Reconstruction' (AGRASR) program in 15 states. This program involves formation, fostering and guiding these community-based organizations of senior citizens.

In order to include the senior citizens in the main stream of the technological world, NGOs have initiated 'Digital Literacy' program. The aim is to introduce the senior citizens into the online world so that they can help themselves by placing online orders for goods. This obviates the necessity to go outside and will be a boon to people with locomotor problems. Now, making digital payments, making online reservation of railway tickets, and having better awareness of government beneficial schemes are at the fingertips of the elderly. They can make video calls to their children and relatives at far off place and the feeling of loneliness is mitigated to a large extent. Best usage of smart phones is made easy by simple method of teaching and handbooks for smooth learning of basic skills in computer are made available by the NGOs. To be fair to them, the elderly are eager to learn new things so as to be included in the contemporary way of life. They feel proud and empowered for having become digital literates. A great example of what technology could achieve for the aged people is CoWin app which facilitated hassle free vaccination to the elderly during the pandemic and made the programme the most successful of such kind in the entire world. This illustrates the consummate usage of technology which was harmonized with social milieu. NGOs, in this regard, are taking steps to make affordable and, accessible to the elderly by conducting digital literacy programs.

The organizations work in their own unique way to address the various issues of the elders. An NGO operates a community kitchen and thereby providing meals twice a day to the needy, lonely and elderly villagers. Some focus on women empowerment with an emphasis on lonely, elderly, widows and single women. Some operate multi-dimensional services such as community-based rehabilitation centres, wherein the resident elderly are encouraged to do physical exercises to beef up their physical strength, participate in recreational activities, socialization with other inmates and thus preventing loneliness. Some have established Counselling centres enable them to get a hold of the realities. They also conduct awareness programs to make it possible for the elders to gain knowledge of programs of the government and also, the elderly are informed of the way to gain access to them. Some

organizations provide on line assistance to the disabled, derelict and distraught elderly²³. Organizing cultural activities marking social events, elucidating and educating about health insurance policies, improving their job worthiness by training are the other activities. Some organizations take pains to provide all the facilities for a normal living like food, shelter, healthcare and clothing at their old age homes and try hard to make the elderly to realize that it is not merely a place where the abandoned find just a roof over their head.

Apart from providing for basic needs, some NGOs focus on the financial and emotional stability of the elderly. They employ different outlook and thought process to enable them to lead an independent life by improving physical and cognitive abilities. For those senior citizens who suffer from low esteem, low confidence and depression due to various events that have unfolded during their past years, providing companionship and emotional support is another area wherein these NGOs chip in to make their life better. Volunteers also help the elders who live alone in their household chores like cleaning, washing, bringing provisions and medicines. They also organize people for nursing care such as dressing and bathing. They involve the elders in community work which will enable them to socialize which will boost their morale. Some NGOs offer community living facilities with necessary support structures like safety, medical aid, and attendants for help, to those elders who cannot afford retirement homes. Old age homes managed by professionals offer a rich, green and lively environment with an ideal infrastructure to live a leisurely and meaningful life to the elders. Celebrations, social and festival functions and recreational events enable a family environment which boosts relationship and thus the issues of social isolation, consternation, depressions and feeling of loneliness are largely mitigated. They bring happiness and contentment to the forsaken elderly.

NGOs operate Day care centres, dementia/ Alzheimer centres and assisted residential facilities. In these centres, they also extend structured activities that foster spiritual wellbeing by means of prayers and dhyana, physical wellbeing through basic and simple exercises and yoga, social interaction which improves rapport and promotes amity with likeminded peers, skill building which enables the elderly to learn new skills or improve the already existing like fine arts, literary skills, dancing, singing, acting and many more, and arranging friendly competition in various fields of arts which improves their self-confidence and ability to be a part of a team. Some NGOs go further and conduct recreational programs online and they equally draw good cheers from the elderly and draw same amount of ardour and excitement similar to the regular offline programs. Social interaction and cohesiveness with peers are enhanced by taking part games like antakshari, chess, carrom, events like GK, quiz, birthday and festival celebrations, singing, dance and acting performances. Some NGOs have enabled the elders to market their products like imitation and art jewellery, paintings, eatables like snacks and pickles etc. and thereby improve their economic conditions.

At loneliness mitigation centres, the inherent fear of being and having been left alone without anyone to tend to is allayed through counselling and encouraging such elderly to take active part in social and cultural events that are organized in such centres. This loneliness syndrome affects irrespective of economic status, but seen more pronounced in the senior citizens belonging to bottom rung of economic ladder. Also, those who are engulfed by the emotions of melancholy, fear, angst and mental perturbation are consumed by this loneliness attitude. The people who have no social network, the people who wrongly infer that strangers are now contemplating their fate, the people who think that they are no more than a passenger

²³. 10 NGOs Supporting and Caring for The Elderly in India, NGOBOX, Nov 17, 2022, available at <https://ngobox.org/full-news_10-NGOs-Supporting-and-Caring-for-The-Elderly-in-India--NGOBOX_24697> (last accessed on June 21, 2026).

on a train without any control over where they go and the people who assume that they are mere onlookers while their fate unfolds before their eyes are also overwhelmed by this syndrome. Some problems have no answer or does not need a key to solve them. Those problems simply stand in need of maturity to outgrow them. One does not climb a tree to look for fish. The solution lies within those people. They are motivated to interact with their peers which helps to improve their mental weal and get involved in coaction which improves their networking capacity. These activities help them to get assured that they are a part of a society and no longer a deserted human being. Trained volunteers help and provide companionship to the lonely, bed ridden and distressed people to spring up from the suicidal tendencies and melancholia. HelpAge has initiated the 'HelpAge SOS' App to ensure help is immediate and is just a click away, in case of emergencies and distress. Most of the large NGOs provide a tollfree helpline to attend to the distress calls of the abused elders. Also, it helps to gather feedback, suggestions and information. In a way, a telephonic conversation with a deserted elderly helps to take the edge of their loneliness feeling. NGOs also provide, in addition to timely rescue from physical and mental abuse, police protection and the help of trained counsellors and lawyers, if a need arises. Apart from these, they provide strategies to come over thorny situations.

During the pandemic, the services of NGOs was unparalleled in the history of mankind. Their commendable and meritorious job, their selfless attitude and care on the elderly stood as a classic example of humanity. They first identified the residences of these beneficiaries viz. the bedridden and desolate elderly, within the communities. Braving their personal safety and health, volunteers then reached out to them with family survival kits consisting of necessary medicines, sanitisers, masks, soap, basic ration items like food grains, cooking oil among others. They also took care of transportation to hospitals, if there was a need. While governments also did a magnificent work during the calamity by dispensing relief packages to the deprived, migrant labours were hard hit due to lack of identifying documents like ration card, Aadhar card etc. and were left out of the pack. NGOs stood in the forefront to extend their charity to these sections of the people, particularly the elderly, disabled and sick among them, with no income of their own due to non-availability of work. Ration items and medical supplies were delivered at their door steps for their sustenance. They also worked closely with the government for the issuance of senior citizen cards to the elderly. It will be fitting if one repeatedly lauds the role of NGOs in the vaccination against the covid-19 virus. Their role in convincing the hesitant people, due to the unsubstantiated rumours spread by vested interests, to go in for the precautionary dose is worthy of admiration. They, along with the healthcare professionals, went to the last mile and reached people living in faraway areas also. During the second wave of the pandemic, Covid-19 Care centres in rural was set up at the initiatives of NGOs, complete with beds with number of facilities like oxygen cylinders, concentrators, medical supplies and food for the patients. Doctors, paramedics, nurses and ambulance services were made available round the clock.

We have seen disruption of functioning of strong economies, crumbling of systems and witnessed many certainties caving in. India takes great pride in the resilience of its fundamentals and culture which were responsible for the triumph of empathy over apathy during the pandemic. Above all, the emotional support provided by the healthcare persons and the NGOs are praiseworthy. A crisis reveals not only character, but also credibility. Same level of care is taken to alleviate the sufferings of elderly during natural disasters since they are the most vulnerable section of the society during any calamitous situation, either it is manmade or natural. They also make it point to rehabilitate the people who were devastated and displaced by these catastrophise. A perfect example would be the stupendous service by

NGOs with their relief work in the aftermath of 'Yaas' cyclone that devastated the coastal districts in the State of Odisha. The State was reeling under the pandemic wave at that time and combined effect of both the disastrous episodes made the relief work a very formidable task. Having lost their livelihood, shelter and savings, the rural people had become all but helpless. The government machinery was stretched to its limit to provide succour to the ravaged people. Having quickly assessed the situation with the help of their local Elder self-help groups and community organizations at the affected areas, the NGOs identified the immediate survival requirements. Immediate actions were taken through their volunteers and social workers, in tandem with the government machinery, to distribute food materials, medical supplies, temporary tents materials, beds, solar lamps, batteries and sanitation items to the affected people. And care was taken to follow the Covid-19 protocols.

The medical field has made great strides and reached dizzying heights in maternity and child care while it cannot be said of the same thing about geriatrics. NGOs have been pressuring the government and medical council to make geriatrics a separate course in medical colleges and establish a greater number of geriatrics wards and hospitals in all towns. The absence of sufficient data on eldercare is also stumbling block to evolve an effective geriatric program throughout the country and not much research is undertaken in the field of geriatrics. Treatment of cancer is not supported by insurance policies and is very costly throughout the world. NGOs provide palliative care to poor terminally ill cancer patients in association with cancer institutions. It has been estimated that a section of senior citizens suffers from neurological and mental disorders such as dementia and mood disorders, psychosis, liquor and drug abuse and delirium etc...The pandemic also played havoc and added salt to the injury by exacerbating the mental disorders of the elderly for want of care. To overcome and alleviate the issues, NGOs conducted large scale mental awareness programs both at old age homes, day care centres and even at the residential areas of elders through their mobile healthcare units. Doctors, volunteers, community workers and social protection officers were specially trained for the purpose. Interactive sessions and preventive measures such as changes in their daily activities, diet and sleep patterns brought marked improvements in the mental wellbeing of the affected senior citizens. There is a social stigma on people affected with mental imbalance and is particularly pronounced on affected senior citizens. There is another misconception is that it is inevitable part of ageing. The family members and the society have to be made aware of this misconception and there is a need to take a sympathetic view of affected persons. NGOs are in the forefront and taking active role in non-stigmatisation of mental issues of elderly.

Senior citizens of lower income class continue to work in spite of their age to support the family. However, many of them are beset with medical imbalances like gait problem, balance issue, feet swelling and hypertension. They are unable to afford to treatment at private medical facilities and the crowds at the public hospitals dissuade them from treatment since they have to stand in queue for many hours and they have to forego their wages for the day too. The mobile physiotherapy units of NGOs enable such deprived people to get treatment near their community dwelling place itself at affordable cost or free of cost. Elderly migrant labours who live in slums are major beneficiaries of this facility provided by NGOs. Elderly people with age related mobility issues, musculoskeletal disorders like back pain, arthritis, paralysis are treated under geriatric physiotherapy. These treatments are offered both in stationary clinics and mobile units. Sufficient and strong data backed by systematic research, both qualitative and quantitative, is lacking to undertake major programs on healthcare of elderly in the country and we are still depending on anecdotal and experiential learnings for the purpose. In this regard, NGOs are lending a helping hand by taking up

spearheading research on the issues of health care of the elderly. For example, the report 'The Silent Tormentor - COVID-19 & the Elderly' (2021), by HelpAge India, has clearly spelt out the repercussions of Covid-19 and its aftermaths, not only on elderly but also on care takers in households, hospitals and old age homes. The reverberations of the pandemic on the mental health of the elderly were also dealt in the paper. It is regrettable that we find a paucity of heed on the healthcare of elderly.

In order to regain and recultivate the lost values of Indian culture due to colonisation and modernisation, NGOs are working with schools to infuse, in the school children, the much-cherished values of revering, and caring for the elders. This will nurture them to be conscientious and dutiful individuals of the nation when they grow up. The mobile care units have become a place where elderly are able to vent their feelings since it is a gathering of entirely senior citizens and they were able to express their issues. And so, a social space has been created, albeit unintentionally, to articulate their anxiety. It has come to the attention of NGOs that the elderly are deserted not for financial issues alone. Family issues and other compulsions force them to take this drastic step. Family has largely been the principal care taker of the elderly till date. Among the one of the issues that scream for immediate redressal is the abuse and ill treatment of the senior citizens by the care taker, usually the family member. Most of the elderly are not aware of the existence of institutional grievances redressal mechanisms that are in place by the government. The care givers of the NGOs effectively sort it by bridging the intergenerational crack.

A typical NGO meets the expenditures in running the organisation, which it cannot accomplish by selling goods, or products or service, by means of donations, charity and gifts either from individuals, institutions, corporates etc. NGOs raise funds to support their senior citizens' welfare activities and it can be a stupendous job since the elderly face a very wide range of issues. Small NGOs have to harness all their energies to raise funds from individual and corporate donors while it is relatively easy for medium and large NGOs. Online fundraising platforms provide a convenient, straightforward and more efficient way of generating funds for their activities. These professional platforms offer expertise and provide greater results through their marketing adroitness. These platforms offer cutting edge digital tools and the NGOs can bolster their digital outreach to influence the donors. While the large NGOs can afford these digital tools and websites for their funding purpose, small and medium NGOs use crowdfunding platforms, like Ketto, for the purpose. These crowdfunding platforms provide a user friendly and intuitive system for the individual donors to contribute to the greater cause of supporting the aged persons without any hassle²⁴. An NGO can propose a crowdfunding fundraiser through an appropriate digital platform to seek donations. Also, NGO can exploit the sentiment of making donations by the public on festival days. Nowadays, crowdfunding platforms effectively use this method to collect funds. This method greatly cut the costs of fundraising. One gets access to advanced digital tools and concepts by employing Crowdfunding platforms and their stature and reputation gets firmly entrenched by their online presence. Alternatively, conducting competitive events, social events and sports events is another efficient way of raising funds. Additionally, such events create awareness about the cause among the public and participants.

One of the other methods of fundraising is done by team of fund raisers closely working with school children. Association of children results in larger collections of funds and also it creates consciousness among the children on the need and importance of taking care of elders which would result in a better world for the elders in future. Also, this awareness gets permeated to their families and the society which creates a better environment

²⁴. <https://www.ketto.org> (last accessed on June 21, 2026).

for the senior citizens. 'Amrit Varsha' is a payroll donation scheme by which donors automatically contribute from their payrolls. Corporate offices employ this method for their contribution. Corporates gain valuable and obligatory CSR points by supporting these NGOs and they usually associate with reputed and large NGOs. Donation boxes kept at shops, hotels and other commercial establishments are also another important sources of donation from the public. Sale of greeting cards also fetches donations. People throughout the world donate for the causes they believe in or support. It also gives them a sense of satisfaction, makes them feel good and happy, improves their self-esteem etc. Many think that it is personal moral duty to give back to the society and are driven by this personal value and social conscience to donate²⁵. Perhaps, one can find love in a helping hand or an expression or a smile or a sympathetic word. It is all around us. We have to merely seek for it. Additionally, they are entitled to tax deduction by donating to registered NGOs.

Nowadays, many of the large NGOs have become professionally managed institutions. However, the basic mottos of volunteering, philanthropy, compassion and altruism remain their building blocks. They function with the help of donations, charity and voluntary service. Their primary objective is championing for the interests of the elderly, poor, downtrodden, women, children among a host of other interests. As far as the welfare of elders is concerned, they operate in the fields of establishment and functioning of infrastructure facilities, research, observation and assessment, assisting new developments in equipment that improve the functioning of the elderly, conducting pilot projects etc. They mobilise thousands of volunteers for government, if need arises. They encourage and promote communication between the government and the people. While they inform the people about the policies and programs of the government, they also provide a feed back to the government about the efficacy of implementation and usefulness on of its schemes. Also, they can form networks with other organizations involved in similar nature of services to the people and can effectively share information horizontally. They function as spokespersons for the senior citizens and others who they represent. And can shape, formulate and sway government policies and schemes and play an advocacy role for the section of people they represent. Their actions are multifaceted as protestors and censors to parliaments as well as exponents, mediators, pilot project managers, scheme executors etc. The NGOs endeavour to provide an insight into the issues of the senior citizens and strive to alleviate their concerns. In this attempt, they also enable the society to join their battle to eradicate the hardships of the elderly.

Contributing to the development of the community they belong to, to the society they live in and lastly, but not the least, to one's own life self is termed as productive ageing. And as the name and definition implies, it is impossible to attain productive ageing in isolation. An eco system is one where each individual is placed. The NGOs strive to generate an eco-system which will enable productive selves, to grow and prosper along with the society and the community²⁶. These NGOs help the elderly to go through active and productive phase of life, in spite of their age, by providing dependable information and service. They aim to mould a civilized, tolerant and knowledgeable society which would generate a sense of security and confidence among the elderly which will enable them to live without any apprehension and misgivings about the future. This will also wipe off any misunderstandings with their kith and kin, distrust and misconception about the society. This will enable them to view the world in an optimistic way with full of positive thinking. With their targeted interventions, the NGOs help the elderly to access their rights. The ministry level dialogues

²⁵. <https://serudsindia.org> (last accessed on June 21, 2026).

²⁶. <https://www.dignityfoundation.com> (last accessed on June 21, 2026).

about financial, physiological and psychological wellbeing, behavioural and social problems would be greatly influenced by the feed backs from the NGOs. Also, their field work enables them to understand the issues more pointedly and this results in the best way to address these issues. They focus on not only nub of the existential issues that plagues the lives of senior citizens today, but also take stock of the problem in its entirety.

We have to analyze within ourselves how do we discern and perceive the elderly, who constitute around 10% of the population today, whether as a burden or potential contributors of the society. The Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing of UN and subsequently our own National Policy on Older persons are of the view that the elderly a valuable resource for the betterment of society. It is essential to architecturally and attitudinally include the elderly in the community so as to give of sense of purpose to them. Dignity, participation and independence are what they seek which can prop up their self-respect and self-fulfilment. As the family sizes shrink due to the compulsions of the modern world, it is a stark and dismal reality that the elders are subjected to neglect which could be both deliberate and unintentional. NGOs contribution in alleviating the sufferings of aged population is exemplary and its yeoman service to the community is unparalleled. These social establishments leveraging their organisational prowess can reach out to every household to address the issues. Appropriate and genuine care for the senior citizens will add life to their balance years and bring a meaning for they being alive. There is a need for the programs for this elderly to be sensitive to their emotional wellbeing also. They should not only improve the wellbeing but also should be humanitarian in their approach. There is a need to make them feel that they are an indispensable part of the society, continuing to contribute to the wellbeing of the society as they have done in the past, equally important as any who does matter and also productive as anyone else. It is true that government is bending backwards in its strive to make the lives of the elders easier. Time and again, there is a large disjunction between what the senior citizens want from the government and what they get delivered. Sometimes, the disjunction may be just as huge. This is wherein, NGOs step in and fill up the vacuum.

Conclusion:

The Government of India has taken many measures for the safety and well being of old people.²⁷ Earlier, it was not a legal obligation but a moral one. But due to the various

²⁷. 1) The Government of India approved the National Policy for Older Persons in 1999 in order to accelerate welfare measures and empowering the elderly in ways beneficial for them. This policy included the following major steps :

- a. Setting up of a pension fund for ensuring security for those persons who have been serving in the unorganized sector,
- b. Construction of old age homes and day care centres for every 3-4 districts,
- c. Establishment of resource centres and re-employment bureaus for people above 60 years
- d. Concessional rail/air fares for travel within and between cities, i.e., 50% discount in train and Indian Airlines.
- e. Enacting legislation for ensuring compulsory geriatric care in all the public hospitals

2) The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has set up of a National Council for Older Persons in the process to make life easier for older persons.

3) Attempts to sensitize school children to live and work with the elderly. Setting up of a round the clock help line and discouraging social ostracism of the older persons are being taken up.

4) The government policy encourages a prompt settlement of pension, provident fund (PF), gratuity, etc. in order to save the superannuated persons from any hardships. It also encourages to make the taxation policies elder sensitive.

5) The policy also accords high priority to their health care needs.

6) According to Sec.88-B, 88-D and 88-DDB of Income Tax Act, 1961 there are discount in tax for the elderly persons.

7) Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) has also been providing several schemes for the benefit of aged persons, i.e., Jeevan Dhara Yojana, Jeevan Akshay Yojana, Senior Citizen Unit Yojana, Medical Insurance Yojana.

8) Annapurana Yojana for the benefit of aged persons was launched. Under this yojana unattended aged persons are being given 10 kg foods for every month.

9) It is proposed to allot 10 percent of the houses constructed under government schemes for the urban and rural lower income segments to the older persons on easy loan.

circumstance like increasing old age homes and all, the government made various laws to protect the elder section of the country. But the worst part is, the implementation of law for the elders under which their rights cannot be curtailed.²⁸ India is not culturally ready to take their children to court except in a few instances.²⁹ Finally, since the police force will have to actually enforce the decisions of the tribunals, their performance in this regard has to be evaluated from time-to-time. Notwithstanding these loop holes and lacunae, the 2007 Act and the new schemes for the elderly can be seen as significant steps in erasing some of the insecurity of the elderly and thereby improve the sense of well being. Also, it is not an exaggeration to say that NGOs, ably supported by the government and the society, have added spirit to the lives of the scores of elderly and made it worth living. Having the done meat and potatoes of securing the welfare of elderly, it is time for the government to move to the higher plane and enable them to lead the society.

10)The layout of the housing colonies will respond to the needs and life styles of the elderly so that there is no physical barriers to their mobility; they are allotted ground floor; and their social interaction with older society members exists.

²⁸. Runa Thakur "Philosophy of Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007", *1 International Journal of Advancements in Research & Technology*, 24- 38 (2012).

²⁹. Amelia Gentleman, "Law to take care of those not taking care of old parents" Live Mint, March 08, 2007.