



A Study on Psycho-Social Problems of Institutionalized Elders

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Abstract

*Ageing is considered as natural and universal phenomenon. Ageing is an inevitable developmental phenomenon. Old age is considered as **second childhood** of human beings (uma, 2012). Usually, age 60 is the dividing line between the middle age and old age. WHO defines health as “a complete state of physical, psychological and social aspects. Psychological Health is considered to be state of well-being in which a person realizes his or her own abilities, can cope up with normal stresses of life and social well-being as holding healthy relationships with family, friends, and others. In modern societies, elders suffer from lot of problems which affects the psycho-social health.*

A Study was conducted to understand the psycho-social problems of the institutionalized elders. The present study was carried out the selected institutions (old age homes) of the Mysuru district. An exploratory research design was adopted to carry out the study and interview method was used to obtain data. The present study considers people with more than 60 years of age.

Study reveals that institutionalized elders are suffering from various psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, death anxiety, low self – esteem, stress and social problems such as social isolation, lack of social support system, loneliness, boredom etc., mainly due to the separation of family, urbanization, industrialization, status of women and spread of institutionalized services.

Application of social work methods such as Case work, Group work and Social work researches can be conducted in focusing on the unravelled areas in the issues of older persons is

helpful in redressing the poor mental health conditions of elders population and in turn resulting in psychological and social well – being.

Key Words: Institutionalized elders, psycho-social problems, old age, social work.

Introduction:

Old age is a universal biological fact and a natural process, “old age is an incurable disease” said by Seneca. Age ‘60’ is considered a dividing line between middle age and old age. The ‘elderly’ or ‘old’ or ‘aged’ or ‘senior citizen’ are the terms referring the person at the stage of old age starts from the age of ‘60’ onwards. Old age is a period where the person’s productive contributions declines and he becomes physical, psychological, socially, economically, emotional, religious, cultural dependents on the others. Sir James Sterling Ross commented, “**you do not heal old age you protect it: you promote it; you extend it**” Thus, ageing is a universal process, nobody can escape from the process of the ageing, and it is a natural and irreversible process of the human life span. It is considered as either a disease or a disintegrating force.

Meaning of Old age?

Old age is considered as age nearing to death or surpassing the life expectancy of human beings, and leads to end of the human life cycle. Ageing is a continuous, irreversible, universal process, which starts from conception end at the death of an individual. However, the age at which one’s productive contribution declines and one tends to be economically dependent on other. In the human lifespan, Old age is the last phase of life cycle. Ageing is a universal biological fact and a natural process. (Dr. Sanjoy Roy, 2011)

Ageing is an inevitable developmental phenomenon bringing along a number of changes in the physical, psychological, hormonal and the social conditions. Old age comprises the later part of the life, the period of life after youth and middle age. Age ‘60’ is usually dividing line between middle age and old age. (P.Uma & G. Mettilda Buvaneswari,2012). Old Age is called as Second Childhood Period. (Uma, 2010).

Demography of Elders in India

India is getting old as many other developing countries of the world; India is also witnessing rapid ageing of the population. According to World Population Prospects, UN Revision, 2006, the population of elderly in India is currently the second largest in the world.

The population of the elderly is growing from 19.9 million in 1951, 76 million in 2001, 103.8 million in 2011, 116.10 million in 2016, 143.20 million in 2021 and 173.2 million in 2026 (Integrated Programme for older persons(Revised effect from 01.04.2015). The phenomenon of growing population of elders has been the result of recent successes in the achievement of better health standards and a longer span of life for our citizens.

Demographic Transition of ageing of population in India.

Sl. No	Year	In Millions	%
1	2001	70.6	6.9%
2	2006	83.5	7.5%
3	2011	94.8	8.3%
4	2016	118	9.3%
5	2021	143.7	10.7%
6	2026	173.1	12.4%

Source: Census of India, 2001

Psychological / Mental Health and Social Well-being:

WHO defines Mental Health as ‘a state of well-being in which the individuals realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make contribution to his or her community’.

According to Birren and Renner, 1971 defines, **psychological well-being** refers to as person’s adaptive capacities, i.e., how well he/she adapts to changing environmental conditions and cope up with society.

Social well-being is when somebody has a good social life, which means getting around the right people and healthy relationships with family, friends, and others.

Institutionalized Elders:

An **institution** refers to the special home that provides care to elderly such as old age homes, day care centers, and shelter homes. Elders above the age of 60 years those who are destitute, loss of family, thrown out from family, migration of the children, lack of care and support by family, elders who are economically insecure, those who need of food and shelter etc., are depend upon for the institutional services mainly run by government and non-government organization.

Old age homes are increasing day by day because roles and responsibilities of the elderly are shifted from family system to government. Spread of old age homes in the modern period results in the elderly to suffer from various types of psycho-social problems such as social isolation, loneliness, depression, anxiety, stress and low self-esteem, lack of traditional roles and responsibilities to perform in old age homes, loss of spouse, missing of family members, lack of traditional respect, economic insecurity, loss of status, lack of traditional legal and ethical responsibilities, disintegration of traditional family norms and values etc., resulting in elders at institutional services suffer at greater extent from non –institutionalized elders.

In India, There are 728 Old Age Homes in 1998. Detailed information of 547 homes is available. Out of these, 325 homes are free of cost while 95 old age homes are on pay & stay basis, 116 homes have both free as well as pay & stay facilities 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 than any state. (Directory of Old Age Homes in India, Help Age India, 1998).

In India, according to 2009, 1,276 old age homes are in India (Directory of Old age Homes in India, 2009). In Karnataka, 91 old age homes in 2009 and 203 old age homes in 2013 (Handbook of Senior Citizen, Government of Karnataka Report, 2013) were exist to provide care and support for the elders in need.

Psychological Problems of Institutionalized Elders:

As age advances and human being becomes old, psychological system becomes increasingly less efficient and less resistance to disease. Psychological well-being is an important aspect of health. Disturbances in the psychological health from various factors such as health

problems, family disorganisation, migration of the children, loneliness and the feeling of empty nest, lack of traditional roles and responsibilities, loss of spouse, technological advancements in the society, attitudes and lifestyles of the present generation are changing and diminishing acceptance of family responsibilities towards one's elders results in the psychological illness in elderly. Some Psychological problems from which institutionalized elderly suffer from are memory impairments, depression, sleeplessness, fear, anxiety, social adjustment, insecurity etc., the important psychological illness from which elders suffers are as follows:

Depression:

Depression is a state of low mood and aversion to activity that affects ones thoughts, behaviour and feelings. According to Beck (1967), depression consists of negative feelings about one's self, one's world and one's future. A triad of feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness and helplessness is often observed. It interferes with an individual's ability to function and causes great distress to him/her (Geist and Jefferson, 1997).The changes that often come in later life – retirement, the death of loved ones, increased isolation, and medical problems – can lead to depression.

Depression prevents from enjoying life. It affects sleep, appetite, and physical health. The important causes for the depression are health problems, loneliness and isolation, fear of death, bereavement, changes in traditional roles and responsibilities, family disorganisation etc., Choudhary, 2014 says that 10 percent of people over 65 years have depression and an estimated 2 percent have suffering from severe depression in India. Elders living alone in residential or nursing care and those with physical stresses or disabilities are more at risk, with some 30 percent affected by depression.

Anxiety and Stress:

Anxiety is a feeling of fear, worry and uneasiness and Stress in general term applied to various psychological (mental) and physiologic (bodily) pressures experienced or felt by elders at the end of the lifespan. Stress is also defined as the 'a state of psychological and physiological imbalance'. The leading causes for the anxiety and stress among institutionalized elders due to the sense of insecurity, loneliness, increasing health problems, disintegrating family bond and relationship, financial insecurity, weakening of personal relationship and poor social

environment results in elders to suffers from the major psychological problems in the modern period.

Low Self Esteem:

‘Self esteem is considered as positive and negative evaluations of the self. According to Sociological and Psychology, Self esteem reflects person’s overall subjective emotional evaluation of his or her own worth. Lowered self-esteem among older persons has complex etiology that includes isolation, neglect, reduced responsibilities and decreased in value or worth by one-self, family and/or the society. Low self esteem results in the elders suffers from the various types of the psycho-social problems at the end of life span by the elders living at institutions.

Social Problems of Institutionalized Elders.

The problems of the elderly have been considered as one of the main social problem in Indian society during 21st century. The changes in the demographic structure during last few decades in developing countries due to decline in fertility, mortality and migration of the population have made the elders a socially more noticeable section of the society.

Nuclearization of Indian Joint Family System:

Joint Family system holds a unique place in Indian society. It is considered as the bedrock on which Hindu social organisation is built. As Iravati Karve defines Joint family as “a group of people who generally live under one roof, who eat food cooked at one hearth, who hold property in common and who participate in common family worship and are related to each other as some particular type of kindred”. In joint family system, an elder holds a special place and acts as a head of the family, holding property rights, control over younger generation, mutual rights and obligation and these undivided family acts as a place of recreation, satisfaction of basic needs, provides psychological, social support, helps in continuity of culture etc., for elders.

But, as the year passes and world is becoming modernized, urbanized, industrialized, spread of education and employment results in the disintegrating of traditional joint family system to modern nuclear family system which compose of parents and their children and giving less scope for the elders in the modern nuclear family system. In these, nuclearized family

system elders holds less space to performed their traditional roles and responsibilities, and feels as an empty nest due spread of employment among the women, loneliness, lack of time available to spend time with the their and grand children. Thus, joint family system holds elders a special place to care and support for physical, psychological, social, emotional problems. Thus, institutionalized elders miss their family and family members to a greater extent.

Social Isolation and Loneliness:

Indian society is undergoing rapid transformation under the impact of industrialization, urbanization, technical and technological change, education and globalization. Aries (1962) argues that youth was the privileged age of the seventeenth century, childhood of the nineteenth Century, and adolescence of the twentieth. Although old age is yet to be a time of privilege in modern societies, the elders and ageing were discovered as social problems in late nineteenth century and second quarter of the twentieth century.

Fertility control and improvement in the life expectancy results in the 'Ageing of the Population' but in the modern times, the primary care giver – family has undergone a significant changes due to impact of industrialisation, urbanisation, modernisation, employment among women etc., Even in traditional societies of Asia or Africa, there is a visible change taking place so far as the role and function of family is concerned. The traditional joint family system is giving way to modern nuclear family system. Family, nevertheless, occupies a unique place in the traditional as well as modern society even today.

The social problems faced by the elders are considered as the massive due to the fast eroding of the traditional joint family system, impact of education, employment of the women, migration of children, impact of technological advancement, loss of spouse, health problems, empty nest, reduced income, loss of friends, spread of institutions, social isolation, lack of recreation, lack of social security measures, Push factors such as population pressure and pull factors such as wider economic opportunities and modern communication cause young people to migrate especially from rural to urban areas etc., posing economic, social, psychological problems among the elders in the present century. Hence, elders are suffering from the problem of social isolation and loneliness in modern phenomena.

Changes in Social Support System:

In old age, social supports play a key role. Social support is the perception and actuality that one is cared for, has assistance available from other people, and that one is part of a supportive social network. Lacks of social support really hinder a person's overall quality of life. Lack of social support is related to negative impact on health and well being especially for older people. Having a positive social supports can contribute to psychological and physical wellness of elderly. Lack of support from family, spouse, friends, relatives, neighbours, care takers play a important role in reducing stress, increasing physical health and defeating psychological problems such as depression and anxiety.

Elders often rely on family to either meet the demands of everyday life, or for help with a chronic illness or during crises. Scholar estimate that 70% of the total support received by the elderly derives from informal sources, the majority from spouse and children.

But, institutionalized elders are suffers from lack of family support, care and support are given by only staffs, nurses, management personnel, his friends those who residing in the institutions. Thus, Family as an important source of support and primary care giver is under drastic change by changing its structure and functions. Changes in the social support system results in the various types of social problems such as loneliness, social isolation, feeling of empty nest, worries, feeling of neglect, boredom etc., during the end of the life span.

Factors affecting for psycho-social problems among Institutionalized Elders:

Psychological Problems		Sociological Problems	
Causes	Effects	Causes	Effects
Physical illness	Depression	Physical illness	Low-self esteem
Family disorganization	Anxiety	Family disorganization	loneliness
Economic insecurity	Stress	Economic insecurity	Social isolation
Changes in social roles and responsibilities	Poor psychological distress	Changes in Social roles and responsibilities	Adjust mental problems

Suggestion to improve the Psycho-social problems of Institutionalized elders.

Here, some suggestion to institutionalized elders to improve the psycho-social well-being is as follows:

- Planned retirement benefits solve various socio-economic problems of the elders.
- Health benefits schemes helps in prevention and prevention of various health problems occurs at old age.
- Following the religious ceremony, rituals, practices etc., by the family members and create an environment of Joint family system timely.
- Giving some time to the elders by the family members to improve their psychological well-being.
- Craft work, Art Therapy and Play Therapy.
- Development of Geriatric Counseling centers.
- Welfare measures to improve mental health of the elders.
- Institutions arrange activities such as group work activities and carrying recreational activities to heal psycho-social problems.
- Involving them in religious activities helps to a greater extent.
- Holding sessions about programmes, policies, services, acts and health benefits programmes relating to gerontology by resource persons to make them to know about the present phenomena.
- Involving in simple vocational activities helps them to improve the psycho-social well-being.

Conclusion:

Thus, the ageing population is increasing day by day due to three major factors such as decline in fertility rate, mortality rate and migration of the population. As persons above the age of 60 years is fast growing although it constitutes 8.2% of the total population at the beginning of new millennium in India. On the other hand, the increasing ageing population is also posing pressure in the family, society and for the individual itself. Rapid spread of old age homes and increasing elders who depend on institutionalized services. Among such institutions elders also suffers from various psycho-social problems as they were away from family bondage and social support network. Though, government and non-government organization offering various programmes and services to improve the physical, psychological, social, economic, emotional etc., but, mental health is the most neglected dimension of the positive health which needs to be strengthen by offering Geriatric counseling centers at old age homes and day care centers to handle the issues such as psychological, social, economic, emotional, cultural, physical aspects

of the institutionalized elders as they suffers from lack of family, close primary, secondary and tertiary family relationship, neighborhood, lack of social support system to a greater extent.

Social Work Intervention:

Social work profession is considered useful in solving the psycho – social problems of elders to great extent. Medical Social workers may appoint to provide institutional services for the welfare of elders. The scope for intervention of Social Workers in such institutions are wide to act as case workers, group workers, community organizers, geriatric counselors, experts, and mediators etc. Primary methods of Social Work such as case work, group work and community organization can be very effective in solving the psycho-social problems of the elders to a greater extent.

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