

## INTERGENERATIONAL WELL-BEING: POLICY, PRACTICE AND PSYCHOSOCIAL PERSPECTIVES IN INDIA

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### **Abstract**

*India's ageing population has made intergenerational well-being an important part of social and psychological development. This paper studies how the interaction between young people and older adults supports emotional health, dignity, and community harmony. It uses the ideas of Intergenerational Solidarity Theory, Cultural Gerontology, and psychosocial models of ageing. Evidence from the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (2023–24), the National Sample Survey, and UNFPA shows that programmes such as Atal Vayo Abhyuday Yojana (AVYAY), Integrated Programme for Senior Citizens (IPSc), and Rastriya Vayoshri Yojana (RVY) are helping to move elderly care from welfare support to empowerment. International examples like Japan's Fureai Kippu, America's Grand Friends, and the EU's Digital Grandparents show that intergenerational connections reduce loneliness, increase confidence, and build empathy. The paper ends with an Intergenerational Ecosystem Model that links emotional, functional, and cultural solidarity to India's vision of Ageing with Dignity and Viksit Bharat 2047.*

### **Keywords:**

*Intergenerational solidarity, elderly well-being, psychosocial ageing, AVYAY, IPSc, RVY, cultural gerontology, India*

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## **Introduction**

Ageing in India is becoming increasingly visible in both demographic trends and daily family life. As life expectancy rises and households shrink, many older adults experience fewer everyday interactions (National Commission on Population, 2021). Migration, urban work demands, and digital lifestyles have widened generational distance: emotional bonds may remain, but the loss of shared routines often leads to isolation for elders and limited exposure to older perspectives for youth. This growing gap raises an important question: what happens to well-being when generations no longer participate in each other's lives?

Intergenerational well-being highlights that ageing is shaped by relationships, purpose, and belonging—not only health or finances. Older adults offer cultural knowledge and lived experience, while younger people contribute new ideas and energy. When these strengths connect, both generations benefit. Studies show that meaningful intergenerational contact reduces loneliness and improves elders' psychological well-being, while helping youth develop empathy and social maturity (Brown & Wilson, 2021; Singh & Misra, 2009). In India, where respect for elders is valued but everyday contact is declining, this perspective is especially significant.

Three theoretical ideas help explain this relationship. **Intergenerational Solidarity Theory** (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991) describes how emotional closeness, shared values, and mutual support bind generations and improve confidence and well-being. **Cultural Gerontology** reframes older adults as cultural contributors who sustain identity and social meaning (Gulati, 2020). **Psychosocial Models of Ageing** (Erikson; Baltes & Baltes) show how identity, self-esteem, and social roles shape the ageing experience, and how supportive ties with youth can strengthen elders' resilience.

This paper approaches intergenerational well-being as a lived, everyday experience. It explores how simple interactions can rebuild trust, deepen emotional bonds, and foster belonging across age groups. By connecting policy trends, social change, and psychological insights, the study argues that a more compassionate and connected society is possible when generations learn from one another and move forward together.

## **Review of Literature**

Research on ageing and intergenerational relationships has grown rapidly due to demographic change, shifting family structures, and rising concern about elder isolation. Intergenerational Solidarity Theory (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991) shows that emotional closeness, contact, shared norms, and support all contribute to family cohesion and elder well-being. Indian studies consistently confirm that

strong intergenerational ties reduce loneliness and improve life satisfaction (Chadha & Malhotra, 2007; Malhotra & Rajan, 2021). LASI (2020) data further reports that regular interaction and family engagement significantly lower depressive symptoms among older adults.

Recent Indian research highlights how solidarity is challenged by urbanization, migration, and the decline of joint families (Paltasingh, 2025). Yet elders continue to provide vital caregiving and cultural guidance. Sil (2021) shows that digital technologies can help maintain these ties when distance is a barrier, though inclusive design is essential so that elders are not excluded. LASI (2020) also notes that about one-fifth of older adults face reduced family interaction, emphasizing the need for intentional support systems.

Cultural Gerontology reframes older adults not as dependents but as cultural carriers who sustain memory, identity, and community meaning (Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008; Gulati, 2020). Indian research shows that storytelling, mentoring, and ritual knowledge strengthen elders' sense of belonging (Bhatia, 2018). Digital archives and shared cultural activities can support intergenerational cultural transmission (Sil, 2021). Evidence from recent studies (Journal of Gerontological Social Work, 2023) suggests that such exchanges enhance elders' emotional well-being and social identity.

Psychosocial models of ageing (Erikson, 1982; Baltes & Baltes, 1990) underscore that identity and meaningful roles are key to mental health. Loneliness often rises when elders lose social roles or regular engagement (Singh & Misra, 2009; Ahmed et al., 2022). LASI (2020) reports that nearly 30% of older adults experience reduced psychological well-being. Verma and Tripathi (2023) show that subjective experiences with younger people vary by gender, class, and ecology, and that coping strategies and engagement can buffer negative experiences.

International and Indian evaluations of intergenerational programmes show positive outcomes such as reduced loneliness and greater community participation (Brown & Wilson, 2021; Chen et al., 2022; Kumar & Anand, 2022). Scholars argue that intergenerational activities should be integrated into everyday community settings rather than delivered as occasional events (Paltasingh, 2025; Sil, 2021).

Key gaps remain: most studies are cross-sectional, socio-economic variation is underexplored, and digital literacy barriers persist (HelpAge India, 2022). Overall, the literature shows that intergenerational well-being in India is both achievable and beneficial, but it requires culturally sensitive, inclusive, and sustained policies and programmes.

## **Methodology**

This paper adopts a **conceptual and narrative review approach**, drawing exclusively on secondary sources to examine intergenerational well-being in the Indian context. The purpose of this methodology is not to generate primary data, but to synthesise existing theoretical perspectives, policy documents, and empirical findings to build a coherent understanding of ageing through the lenses of Intergenerational Solidarity Theory, Cultural Gerontology, and Psychosocial Models of Ageing.

The literature reviewed for this paper includes peer-reviewed journal articles, books, national reports, and policy documents published primarily between 2000 and 2025, with selective inclusion of foundational theoretical works predating this period. Sources were identified through academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, PubMed, ResearchGate, and Taylor & Francis, using keywords including *intergenerational solidarity*, *ageing in India*, *cultural gerontology*, *psychosocial ageing*, *elder well-being*, and *intergenerational programs*. National-level datasets such as the Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI, 2020) and government reports, including the Annual Report of the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (2024), were incorporated to contextualise India-specific trends.

The analysis followed a **thematic synthesis approach**, grouping literature into three core themes—structural and familial change, cultural identity and meaning-making, and psychosocial well-being—to align with the theoretical framework. Studies were included if they offered relevance to intergenerational relationships, ageing, or emotional well-being in India or comparable cultural contexts. Sources focusing solely on biomedical or clinical aspects of ageing without social or psychological relevance were excluded.

As a conceptual study, this methodology is limited by its reliance on secondary material and does not claim causal inference. However, it enables a comprehensive and theory-driven exploration of ageing, offering insights into how intergenerational relationships shape well-being within contemporary Indian society.

## **Discussion**

The themes emerging from this review suggest that intergenerational well-being in India cannot be understood through a single lens. Instead, it sits at the intersection of family change, cultural meaning, and psychological needs in later life. While ageing is often framed as a matter of health or care provision, the literature points to a much broader picture in which emotional connection, social identity, and opportunities for contribution are equally important.

A key insight is that structural shifts—migration, smaller households, and changing work patterns—have made everyday interaction between generations less frequent, even when families remain emotionally committed. Intergenerational Solidarity Theory helps explain why this matters: well-being is influenced not simply by being part of a family, but by the quality and regularity of contact, shared expectations, and emotional understanding (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991). When these patterns weaken, loneliness and social detachment are more likely, a trend reflected in recent Indian findings on elder well-being (Malhotra & Rajan, 2021). The decline in proximity does not automatically imply weakened bonds, but it does highlight the need for more intentional forms of engagement. This trend is consistent with national projections showing a rapid rise in the older adult population and shrinking co-residential family structures (see Figure 1).

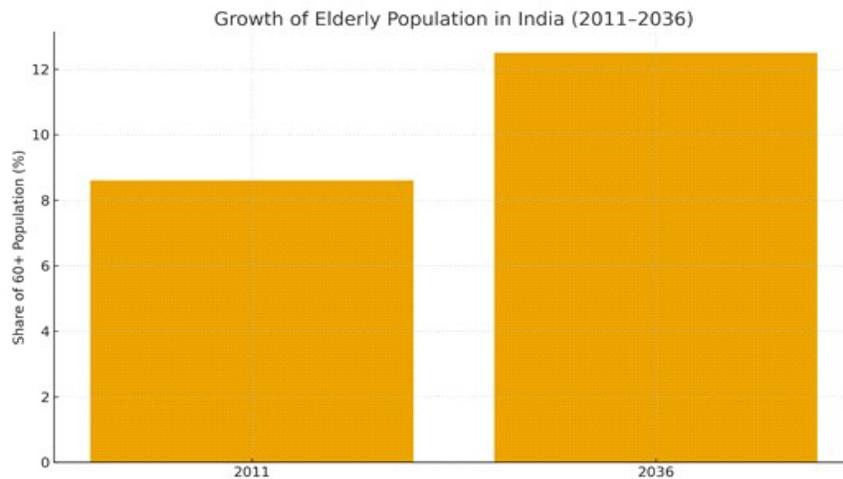


Figure 1. Projected growth of India's elderly population, 2011–2036. Source: National Commission on Population (2021).

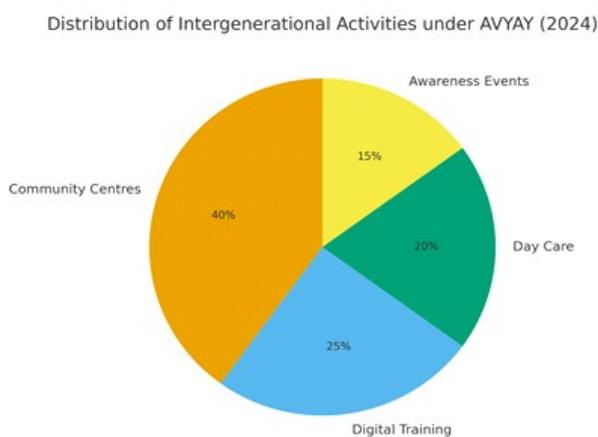
At the same time, Cultural Gerontology reminds us that intergenerational relationships are not only functional but symbolic and meaning-rich. Older adults carry cultural memory and moral knowledge, and the opportunity to share these roles helps reinforce dignity and purpose (Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008; Gulati, 2020). This perspective provides an important corrective to narrow views of ageing as dependency. In India, where identity is deeply tied to tradition and community, reduced cultural participation—reported in large-scale surveys such as LASI (2020)—may contribute to a quieter, less visible form of exclusion. The discussion

suggests that initiatives supporting elders should not only focus on care but also on restoring their space as cultural contributors.

Psychosocial models of ageing further deepen this understanding. Emotional well-being in later life depends on a sense of usefulness, continuity, and recognition (Erikson, 1982). When older adults experience role loss—whether through retirement or changing family dynamics—the absence of meaningful interaction can erode confidence and self-worth. Engagement with younger generations can counter this by offering affirmation and renewed purpose, a pattern noted in recent Indian research linking intergenerational contact to higher resilience and social participation (Verma & Tripathi, 2023). This highlights that emotional reciprocity, rather than mere availability of support, is crucial.

Technology complicates the picture. While digital tools can maintain contact across distance, they also risk creating new inequalities. Access barriers and low digital literacy mean that many elders cannot take full advantage of virtual communication (Sil, 2021). Psychosocial perspectives suggest that technology cannot replace the emotional depth of sustained, reciprocal relationships. Thus, digital engagement is best seen as a supplement—not a substitute—for genuine intergenerational presence.

Finally, policy and community initiatives show promise but remain uneven. Recent programmatic data illustrate how intergenerational activities have been distributed across different formats and settings (see Figure 2).



*Figure 2. Distribution of intergenerational activities under AVYAY. Source: Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (2023–24).*

Programmes under AVYAY and IPSrC report positive outcomes, yet they often function as short-term interventions rather than embedded community practices (Kumar & Anand, 2022; Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, 2024). The discussion indicates that lasting change requires structures that value elders not just as recipients of services but as active participants in cultural and social life. This aligns with both Cultural Gerontology and psychosocial perspectives, which emphasise contribution, recognition, and meaning.

Reported outcomes also suggest psychosocial gains for older adults, particularly in terms of reduced loneliness and increased participation (see Figure 3).

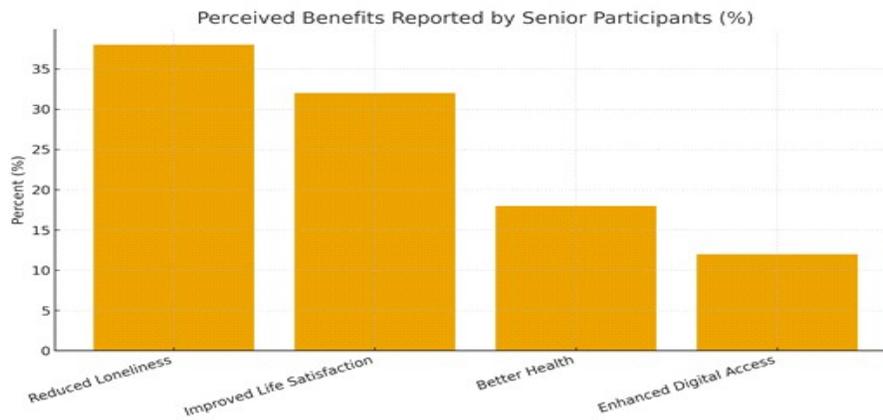


Figure 3. Reported psychosocial benefits among programme participants. Source: IPSrC & Vayah Vikas Records (2024–25).

Taken together, the evidence suggests a central argument: **intergenerational well-being in India depends on more than family care—it requires sustained, reciprocal relationships that affirm identity, cultural belonging, and emotional relevance in later life.** As families evolve and physical distance grows, intentional spaces—whether community-based, cultural, or digitally supported—will be essential to maintaining these bonds.

To bring these strands together, this paper proposes an Intergenerational Ecosystem Model that integrates emotional, functional, and cultural dimensions of solidarity.

### The Intergenerational Ecosystem Model

The Intergenerational Ecosystem Model proposed in this paper brings together emotional, functional, and cultural dimensions of solidarity to explain how intergenerational well-being can be strengthened in contemporary India. Rather than

viewing family support, cultural participation, and psychological needs as separate concerns, the model positions them as interconnected elements of a shared social environment. The core assumption is that ageing does not unfold in isolation; it is shaped by the quality of relationships, the structure of families, and the social meaning attached to older adulthood.

### **1. Emotional Solidarity**

Emotional solidarity refers to feelings of closeness, trust, empathy, and mutual regard between generations. It includes regular communication, shared decision-making, and a sense of being valued. Drawing on psychosocial perspectives, the model suggests that emotional reciprocity provides older adults with recognition and purpose, protecting against loneliness and withdrawal (Erikson, 1982; Verma & Tripathi, 2023). When emotional bonds weaken—due to distance, conflict, or role loss—psychological well-being declines, even if practical support remains available.

### **2. Functional Solidarity**

Functional solidarity encompasses the practical exchange of support—caregiving, financial help, household assistance, and everyday cooperation. This element is rooted in Intergenerational Solidarity Theory, which highlights how patterns of contact and support structure family cohesion (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991). In India, functional support has traditionally been embedded in joint households, but migration and nuclear family systems have altered these arrangements. Functional solidarity in the model acknowledges that support can take multiple forms, including community programmes and guided digital contact, particularly when co-residence is not possible (Sil, 2021; Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, 2024).

### **3. Cultural Solidarity**

Cultural solidarity refers to the transmission of values, stories, rituals, and collective memory across generations. Cultural Gerontology underscores that older adults play a vital role as carriers of cultural knowledge, and that participation in these roles fosters dignity and meaning (Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008; Gulati, 2020). The model views cultural exchange—whether through shared festivals, storytelling, mentorship, or traditional practices—as a stabilising force that strengthens identity for both elders and youth. When cultural participation declines, as reported in LASI (2020), older adults risk social **invisibility and loss of belonging**.

### **How the Model Works**

The model assumes that emotional, functional, and cultural forms of solidarity are mutually reinforcing. Emotional closeness makes functional support

more willing and meaningful; cultural participation deepens emotional ties; and practical cooperation creates opportunities for shared cultural and relational experiences. When all three dimensions are present, older adults are more likely to feel connected, valued, and resilient. When any one dimension weakens—such as reduced contact or lost cultural roles—the entire ecosystem becomes fragile.

These national visions including Viksit Bharat 2047 highlight the importance of creating social environments where older adults remain visible, included, and meaningfully connected. The Intergenerational Ecosystem Model suggests that progress toward these goals depends not only on services and policy, but on nurturing relationships that affirm elders' emotional worth, practical relevance, and cultural contribution. In this sense, intergenerational well-being becomes part of India's development agenda—one that recognizes older adults as partners in social and cultural continuity rather than dependents on the margins.

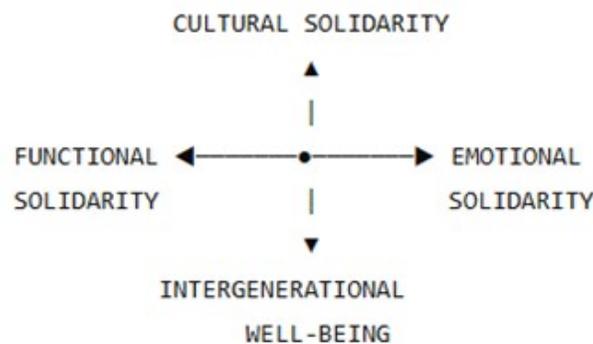


Figure 4. The Intergenerational Ecosystem Model linking emotional, functional, and cultural solidarity to intergenerational well-being.

#### **Practical Implications / Policy Suggestions**

- Strengthen Everyday Intergenerational Contact
- Create Cultural Spaces for Elder Contribution
- Support Psychosocial Engagement, Not Just Care
- Make Digital Connection Accessible
- Embed Intergenerational Programmes in Everyday Community Life

#### **Conclusion**

Ageing in India is unfolding at a moment of rapid social transition. Families are becoming smaller, migration is more common, and everyday intergenerational

interaction can no longer be assumed. The evidence discussed in this paper suggests that older adults' well-being depends not only on access to care or financial security, but also on sustained emotional connection, cultural participation, and a sense of continued relevance within the family and community. Intergenerational Solidarity Theory helps make clear that social closeness and regular contact matter just as much as practical support, while Cultural Gerontology reminds us that ageing is a meaning-making process shaped by roles, recognition, and shared cultural memory. Psychosocial models further demonstrate that identity, purpose, and emotional reciprocity are central to later-life well-being.

At the same time, the paper highlights a growing tension: as physical distance between generations increases, the traditional pathways through which elders remained connected—joint households, shared routines, cultural rituals—are becoming more fragile. Digital communication offers new possibilities, but it cannot fully replace the depth of face-to-face interaction, especially when access and literacy gaps persist. Policy programmes show promise, yet many remain short-term or unevenly implemented. Taken together, these insights point to a simple but powerful conclusion: intergenerational well-being is not automatic; it must be cultivated.

Ultimately, the discussion suggests that ageing in India should be understood not as an individual journey, but as a shared social process. Strong intergenerational relationships—whether within families, communities, or public programmes—can help preserve identity, strengthen belonging, and support resilience in later life. As India continues to change, the challenge is not merely to care for older adults, but to keep them meaningfully connected to the generations that follow.

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