

# Old age homes – its relevance in present society

Dr. Punyarupa Bhadury

*Assistant Professor, Dept. of Sociology, Barasat College*

**Abstract—Introduction** Old age is the natural culmination of human ageing process and happens to be an inevitable, ubiquitous, and universal phenomenon of human life. As people grow older, they face physical, psychological, financial and health related problems. As a result, they try to get hold of others for support and depend on them. Many old people staying in the city or town take recourse to old age homes and sometimes old age day care centres, depending on their financial capacity.

**Method** For this study several real cases of Kolkata have been taken up to highlight the importance of old age homes on the lives of the elderly population.

**Results** Several cases are often reported of old people being left alone by the caregivers (such as spouse, sons, daughters, relatives, friends, neighbors, voluntary workers, paid workers). The elderly are thus vulnerable to illness, loneliness, and crime. Loneliness is causing great danger to the health of the elderly people and creating a menace. Thus, the existence of old age homes is very relevant today as they are the only alternatives left for the elderly who live alone in the society.

**Conclusion** Old age homes have become an integral part of the social system due to its importance and dependency for the elderly population. Here caregiving professionals volunteer to assist the elderly by providing care and the emotional needs that the elderly desire and deserve.

**Index Terms**—old age, old age homes, elderly, caregivers

## I. INTRODUCTION

Ageing is a biological process that every human being must go through. It begins at birth and ends with death. Thus, old age is the natural culmination of human ageing process and happens to be an inevitable, ubiquitous, and universal phenomenon of human life. Globally, the elderly population is increasing rapidly, which also means more care and support for old people.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines elderly as people above the age of 60 years. In India, the elderly population stood at 56 million in 1991, which rose to more than 76 million in 2001 and further to 103 million in 2011. Thus, in India the Census shows a steady increase in the percentage of elderly population from 6.8% in 1991 to 8.6% in 2011. Due to the advances in medical sciences, improved health standards, and better living conditions, life expectancy of human beings has increased.

As people grow older, they face physical, psychological, financial and health related problems. As a result, they try to get hold of others for support and depend on them. The psychological aspect of ageing needs to be given due consideration as it plays a vital role. Thus, social isolation for the elderly means having limited contact with the family, community members, and neighbours. This social solitude happens due to lack of attachment with the group that an elderly person shares with his/her common interest and activities. The loneliness can happen due to various reasons – when the family members neglect, death of a spouse, being childless, or when there is nobody to look after them. Many old people staying in the city or town take recourse to old age homes and sometimes old age day care centres, depending on their financial capacity. Old age homes, which were once thought to be the shelter for the deprived section of the society, are now considered an alternative home for the age-sensitive generation of the society.

Old age home is a residence where old people live and are cared for when old age prevents them from looking after themselves in their own homes. It is also termed as ‘retirement home.’ Here old people are provided with food and a shelter to live. These are institutions run by a trust or people who want to do social service for the old population. Old people who are alone or do not have anyone to take care of them can live in these

places. There are two types of Old Age Homes in India – free/unpaid and paid. In free/unpaid old age homes, destitute old people who have no one else to care for them are looked after. They are given shelter, food, clothing, and medical care. In paid old age homes, care is provided against a fee. But the aim of establishing an old age home is to provide a healthy, happy, and well-integrated platform for the elderly population. Old age home also encourages productive and healthy ageing and promotes the concept ‘live with dignity’ for the elderly.

Old age homes give protection and security to the elderly and promote a safe and secured life free from all the worldly worries and anxieties. They protect the elderly from intruders and help them to live peacefully. It is the place where one receives companionship from caregivers, home authorities and from the inmates belonging to their age. Old age homes are considered an alternative to family household because within the family, the family members neglect the elderly, and they are left with no other choice but to stay at an old age home. It is believed that an old age home can give similar care and comfort to the elderly like their family members, which are unfortunately missing in present times. Hence, old age homes have become the secured institutions for the lonely elderly who have nobody to look after (due to loss of partner, being childless or child/children staying abroad/outside the city/state) and for those who are abandoned by their families due to various reasons like adjustment problems, neglect and suffering from various forms of abuse. Staying in an old age home can help the elderly to avoid the risk of staying alone or being subjected to crime by intruders, which is a common occurrence in present-day society.

#### 1.1. Genesis of old age home

The first old age home was set up in Thrissur, Kerala, in the year 1911, with the aim of giving shelter to the elderly population. Kerala witnessed faster ageing than the rest of the country. It was the need of the hour to set up such an institution that could help the elderly to live a peaceful and secured life. The Raja of Cochin took the initiative and thus it was called the Raja Varma old age home.

The scenario of family was different earlier from what it is today. Earlier, there was the prevalence of joint family or extended family where the elders used to live not only with their children but also with their brothers, sisters, uncles, and aunts, and helping each other in all the matters of life. Moreover, everybody was available not only during happy days but also during times of sorrow. There was always somebody to look after each other. Whenever there was any emergency within the family, there was somebody to take care of the situation. There was always understanding between each other, leading to caring and sharing of the duties. All these are missing in today's nuclear families.

The decline of joint family and rise of nuclear family happened due to various factors like migration (education, career, marriage), better livelihood, medical facilities, and infrastructural facilities. A change in the lifestyle is well accepted by the young generation than the elder generation. Elderly population find it very difficult to adjust to new environments and new ways of life after leaving behind all the comforts, sentiments, and property holdings. But the young generation easily move out of their house leaving the old generation behind, with nobody to look after them. The elderly population allow their children to move forward for their betterment and live a lonely life themselves. Therefore, the only option left for the lonely elderly population is to take shelter in old age homes, where caregivers are available to look after them. In this context, it is seen that the non-resident Indians (NRIs) are relieved from their worries when their parents are looked after by somebody outside the family. For the NRIs, these old age homes emerged as an alternative home for their parents and they are ready to pay well for their stay. It is also often found that the parents are not given shelter in their own homes, and are forced to stay in old age homes. Now-a-days, when the elderly population see that their life is at a risk, they want a secured life, which they can have if they opt to shift to an old age home.

## II. METHODOLOGY

Research in a common parlance refers to a search for knowledge. One can also define research as a scientific and systematic search for pertinent information on a

specific topic. On the other hand, research methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problem. It may be understood as a science of studying how research is done scientifically. In it the researcher adopts various steps in studying his research problem along with the logic behind them. It is necessary for the researcher to know not only the research methods/techniques but also the methodology.

For this study several real cases of Kolkata have been taken up to highlight the importance of old age homes on the lives of the elderly population.

### III. INTERPRETATION OF SOME CASE STUDIES

80-year-old Soma Ghosh (name changed for the purpose of anonymity) used to stay in an old age home on NSC Bose Road. She was living there for six to seven years. She used to consider herself to be 'admitted' here as if it were a hospital or prison. Earlier, she used to stay with her son, daughter-in-law, and two granddaughters in a flat at Belur that was bought by her husband. Her husband passed away in 1984. As the flat was very small and the kids were growing up, she had to come to the old age home to make room for her family. Although it was her husband who purchased the flat, she did not mind living in an old age home now. As she was an Indian mother, she knew the concept of 'sacrifice' for the wellbeing of the children. She adjusted herself with the old age home to give the best for her son and she had no complains about this.

The case of 92-year-old Putul Banerjee (name changed for the purpose of anonymity) is no exception. She moved to an old age home after years of insult and agony. Her husband and son died years ago, and she was told by her nephews that she would not get anything of the family property. Hence, she landed up in an old age home in Behala. There were times when her relatives prayed that she would die and would possibly be relieved from her distress, but faith kept her alive for years.

Bina Parui, aged 75 years, (name changed for the purpose of anonymity), was allegedly tortured by her sons and in-laws. Her husband passed away in the year

2011 and immediately after the completion of the rituals, she was driven out of her home by them. Then she went to her daughter's place and with her she took shelter in an old age home at Thakurpukur. For a widow like Bina, old age home became the refuge of solace and dignity.

Likewise, Mala Biswas and Mani Chatterjee (name changed for the purpose of anonymity), being tortured took shelter in old age homes for their dignity and wellbeing. They were subjected to torture by their children, leaving them with no option but to shift to old age homes. Mala's husband had left a big fortune for her, so she depended on the old age home for her safety.

In another case, 62-year-old Sameer Khan (name changed for the purpose of anonymity), was found dead in his house in Behala's Satyen Roy Road. He was a hypertension patient but had an otherwise active life. His son, who used to live in Bagnan, called the police to check on him after failing to contact him for a day or two. The police broke into the house and it was found that Sameer Khan was lying dead in the house for three days. This is not a one-off incident and is true for elderly people who stay alone at their own residence. In such cases, only when the body starts rotting or when a relative not getting response for three to four days files a police complaint that the plight of the elderly person becomes known. This is where old age homes provide an advantage, as an elderly person residing there would not be left unattended in times of medical emergencies.

### IV. REASONS FOR STAYING IN OLD AGE HOMES

There are five scenarios behind the stay of the elderly population in an old age home –

- Elders who are staying with children in the same house but they are neglected within the family and are forced to stay in an old age home
- Elders who are staying alone as their children stay in a separate house but within the city, so there is nobody to look after the elderly. Though once a week the children visit their parents but that does not help them to come out of their loneliness. Therefore, the elders choose to stay in an old age

home for overcoming their loneliness and for security reasons

- Elders who are staying alone when their children stay outside the city for employment. They visit once in a few months or in times of emergencies regarding health issues. Thus, the elderly find it suitable to stay in an old age home where there are caregivers to look after them.
- Elders who are staying alone when their children stay abroad for higher education or job and visit their parents once in 3 or 4 years. In this case, the children are earning well enough to keep their parents in costly old age homes as they send money transfers from foreign accounts.
- Elders who are staying alone because they are single, unmarried, or childless often take shelter in old age homes for financial, health, emotional, and security reasons.

#### 4.1 Merits and demerits of old age home

Some old age homes provide good facilities, while others fall short of it depending on their financial capacity. It is not that all old age homes take good care of the elderly inmates or are well managed by the home authority. Many homes serve low quality food and do not have well-maintained sanitation system. This scenario is justified in free old age homes but when there is a question of monetary transaction at paid homes, this is not justified at all. However, the elderly inmates are still happy with other inmates as they feel comfortable within the home, enjoy their time watching television, chatting with other inmates, and feel safe with their company than their own children.

Though old age home is considered to be an alternative home but in reality, it cannot be a fully substitute of a family where there are comfort, warmth, and oneness within the household. The environment is very impersonal though the elders try to adjust with it. The elders often feel the vacuum that is created when they remember their family members, be it their children, grandchildren, or relatives. The personal touch of the family members, emotional attachment with the family members, privacy of a household, decision making/taking in family matters, oneness within the family - all these are missing, irrespective of how good or bad the environment of the old age home is.

## V. CONCLUSION

The existence of old age homes is very relevant today as they are the only alternatives left for the elderly who live alone in the society. Old age homes have become an integral part of the social system due to its importance and dependency for the elderly population. These places also have caregiving professionals who volunteer to assist the elderly by providing care and the emotional needs that the elderly desire and deserve.

Apart from paid and unpaid old age homes, day care centres for the elderly population have come up where the older population can spend time throughout the day and can return in the evening to their home. They consider their time of staying in the day care to be precious as they spend with others doing concrete tasks and enjoying their life in their own way. So, whether it is the peace of mind or unhappiness within the old age homes, the elderly population consider it to be a place of relief and dependable for their existence and for their future life.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Bhadury, Punyarupa (2019). Elderly Abuse: A 'Grey'ing Concern. In Dibyendu Ganguly (ed), *Understanding Social Issues: Some Reflections* (Vol. I, pp. 248-257). Kolkata: PAIOLCK.
- [2] Census of India (2001 & 2011). Available: <http://www.censusindia.gov.in>
- [3] Help Age India. Available: <http://www.helpageindia.org/>
- [4] World Health Organization. Available: <http://www.who.int>
- [5] Chakravarty, Indrani (2018). Elder abuse – Role of a voluntary agency. *Ageing & Society*, 28(I & II), 3-11. Available: [http://www.cmig.in/JOURNAL\\_2018\\_Vol\\_I\\_II.pdf](http://www.cmig.in/JOURNAL_2018_Vol_I_II.pdf)
- [6] Macionis, John J. (2006). *Sociology (10<sup>th</sup> Edition, pp 397-398)*. New Delhi: Pearson Education, Inc. & Dorling Kindersley Publishing Inc.
- [7] Menezes S & Thomas T.M. (2018). Status of the Elderly and Emergence of Old Age Homes in India. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Management*, 5(1), 1-4. Available: <https://doi.org/10.3126/ijssm.v5i1.18972>

- [8] Paltasingh, Tattwamasi, & Tyagi, Renu (2015). *Caring for the Elderly – Social Gerontology in the Indian Context*. India: Sage Publications.
- [9] Pillemer, Karl, Burnes, David, Riffin, Catherine, & Lachs, Mark, S. (2016). Elder Abuse: Global Situation, Risk Factors, and Prevention Strategies. *The Gerontologist*, 56(2), S194–S205. Available: <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnw004>
- [10] Shankardass, Mala, Kapur, Rajan, S., Irudaya (2018). *Abuse and Neglect of the Elderly in India*. Singapore: Springer Nature Pte Ltd.
- [11] Thomas, Gary. (2015). *How to do your Case Study*. India: Sage Publications.