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Research Paper

Health Status of Institutionalized Elderly

Social Science

KEYWORDS : Elderly, Institutionalized aged, Physical Health and Mental Health, Geriatric

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ABSTRACT

The process of ageing concerns the total organism, body as well as the mind and its impact is laid on every aspect of human existence.The elderly people are now virtually thrown into a life of uncertainty and vulnerability. They suffer in the process of growing old and become overwhelmed by the unfavorable atmosphere when they are confronted with the problems. This study is undertaken to understand health status of elderly living in old age homes. This study is exploratory as well as descriptive in nature. Here an attempt is made to describe physical and mental health problems faced by institutionalized aged of the age of 60 and above. The participant group comprised 75 aged both males and females residing in Ashaktashram Old Age Home, Dakor, Gujarat.

INTRODUCTION:

"About the only thing that comes to us without effort is old age"

Ageing is a universal phenomenon, inevitable in the life cycle. It affects each human being in the world. It brings about certain anatomical, physiological, psychological changes in life. It is a byproduct of demographic transition, i.e. the change form high fertility and mortality rates. Ageing, also refers to a decline in the functional capacity of the organs of the human body, which occurs mostly due to physiological transformation. But senior citizens constitute a precious human resource reservoir gifted with knowledge of various sorts, varied experiences and deep insights. Obviously, the senior citizens must be willing to take active part in rendering services of their choice and capability to the various needy sections of our society. This will not only create an opportunity for the older people to constructively utilize their time and energies, but it will also enhance the level of their satisfaction.

Older persons have always been an integral and important part of the family in Indian society. By 2025, the world's population is expected to include more than 830 million people at an age of 65. The percentage of the population (>= 65) will be highest in developed countries, but the absolute number will be higher in developing countries. Developing countries such as China and India have the largest total population, and will continue to have the largest absolute number of elderly people. With a comparatively young population, India is still poised to become home to the second largest number of older persons in the world.

Earlier the older people were considered as a blessing rather than a curse. But now families change a lot due to many reasons. The degradation of joint families and establishment of nuclear families are important factors in this regard. Nowadays most people belonging to the nuclear families have no time to spend with aged people. There is no one with whom the aged can share their problems. Lack of income and dependency over family members become a problem to them. In a situation like this most of the members consider the aged as useless creatures and they are forced to lead vulnerable life. The problems faced by them are many and large and requires serious attention.

Development of old age home is a new tendency in our society. The younger ones in the family take this as a chance and send their parents or grandparents to these homes and escape from responsibility. The life of people living in old age homes also needs special attention. It is a mere fact that the elderly people in general are increasing in proportion day by day in our society and similarly problems faced by them.

METHODOLOGY:

The study was conducted from Ashaktashram Old Age Home, Dakor, Gujarat in 2010-2011 and was exploratory as well as descriptive in nature. A structured interview schedule and an old age disability scale were used to gather information from elderly of the age of 60 and above after obtaining their informed consent. Total 75 elderly of the age of 60 and above were selected by Simple Random Sampling method. The study protocol included questions on demographic aspect, institutionalization history, physiological and mental health problems. Data was processed and analyzed using MS Excel program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

This section has been further divided into four sections according to the objectives- demographic factors, institutionalization history, Physical problems/ disability and psychological or mental health problems. The main idea with which the research was initiated was to understand various geriatric problems like physical and mental health problems of geriatric population residing in Old Age Homes.

Demographic Factors:

Table 1 Demographic Profile

Sr. No.	Variables	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
1	Age	60-65 Years	03	4
		66 – 70 Years	13	17
		71 – 75 Years	15	20
		Above 76 Years	44	59
2	Gender	Male	27	36
		Female	48	64

Table 1 shows that a major fraction (59%) of the population is in the age group of above 76 Years. In gender wise distribution majority of the respondents are females, females are more prone to this problem of ageing.

Majority of the respondents' spouses are dead. The study also reveals that though majority of the elderly have sons, they are living in old age homes.

Institutionalization History:

Most of the respondents (47%) are staying in the present old age home for 0-2 years. The result also shows that the reason for staying in old age home for most of the respondents is that they are neglected by their family members (Table 2). This has compelled them for institutionalization.

Table 2
Reasons for Institutionalization (N=75)

Sr. No.	Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Economic crisis	08	10.66
2.	Negligence by family members	28	37.33
3.	Rejection by family members	09	12

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4.	Not having own children	18	24
5.	NRI children	03	4
6.	Death of spouse	12	16
7.	Willingly/self interest	08	10.66

Physical Problems/ Disability:

In case of hearing capacity good hearing capacity is claimed by majority (52%) of the respondents. While in case of eye sight their vision capacity is moderate.

The present study also reveals that majority (81%) of the elderly are suffering from one or more health problems. (Table 3)

Table 3
Physical Problems faced by Elderly

Sr. No	Physical Problems	Frequency	Percentage
1	Respiratory Disease	32	43
2	Diabetes	09	12
3	Constipation	26	35
4	High/Low Blood Pressure	43	57
5	Insomnia	30	40

Psychological/ Mental Health:

Table 4
Psychological Problems faced by Elderly

Sr. No	Psychological problems	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Loneliness	58	77.33
2.	Anxiety	12	16
3.	Mental illness	08	10.66
4.	Depression	05	6.66
5.	Forgetfulness	27	36

It is also reported from the study that the major fraction of the elderly population are suffering from psychological problems. Out of them majority of them are suffering from the problem of Loneliness (Table 4). Overall the elderly living alone face more psychological problems than their fellow-beings living with families. K. Oberoi & S. Dey (1991) observed in their study that the old people whose children and family members did not meet or visit them frequently, were psychologically more upset and felt lonely. This loneliness, naturally, makes them psychologically depressed and they persistently face such psychological problems as old age worries, emotional instability, etc. The psychological stress faced by older persons has serious implications.

CONCLUSION:

The analysis and findings of the study indicates that majority of the respondents are in the closing years of their old age i.e. above 76 years. It clearly shows the impact of medical and technical advancement and other services for the aged that increases our life expectancy.

In Indian traditional culture, the women are generally involved in household work. As a result they are economically dependent on their spouse. But after the death of the spouse, they don't have any economic source. As they are non productive and dependent, they are rejected and neglected by their children especially son and daughter-in-law.

Though having male children, the old parents have to live in old age homes. In our culture, it is the responsibility of male child to take care of their old parents in their later life. Due to the impact of modernization and westernization, our traditional values are changing day by day.

Different factors prompt the inmates to join the institution. Describing them was very painful to many of the respondents. They were neglected and rejected by their son and daughter-in-law.

The aged suffer from physical disability. The most common health problem is high or low blood pressure while the less prevalent disease among them is diabetes. Psychological problems in old age are common. The old people often feel lonely and isolated. But they don't feel lonely when they are in group which shows that elderly need companionship, with whom they can share their views and problems.

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