



## AGEING: LIFE BEYOND HOME AND FAMILY

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**ABSTRACT**

Old age is characterised by physical debility which leads to gradual loss of eyesight, hearing power, appetite and digestion accompanied with chronic illness and pain all of which requires specific attention and care. The analysis shows that the demographic transition in India which is also in the threshold of an economic makeover has given rise to a change in the social and cultural milieu of the society. Today economy plays a principal role and is a motivating factor for life, thus leading to individualism, materialism, intergenerational conflicts, and disintegration of the joint family system, economic independence of women and migration of children to other countries for better prospects. Thus it has drastically changed the attitude of society and the family towards the aged. The study shows that most of the people in an old age home are unable to accept and adjust to the realities of abandonment, powerlessness and loneliness.

**KEYWORDS** : Ageing, old-age home, dependency, disengagement

**Introduction**

Ageing which is a universal phenomenon has now slowly started to engulf the culturally rich India in to its fold. The recent census shows that the ageing population has increased to 77 million from a mere 24 million in 1961 (Irudaya, 2010). Indian society is transforming drastically in all spheres whether it is economic, political or social, undermining the cultural values and ethos that have been part of the societies for centuries. Ancestry and traditionalism which had been at the core of Indian culture since time immemorial has provided the elderly a position of respect and reverence throughout. The recent mushrooming of old-age homes throughout the country is indicating that this traditionalism is slowly waning away in the present scenario.

In pre-industrial India, a family consisted of three or four generations. In such societies the elder members were not only respected, cared for and considered as the repository of knowledge and experience but they also contributed substantially to the everyday subsistence and care of the family. Ageing is very relative as well as subjective, as there is no single point at which people cross a magic line and become aged or elderly. The ageing in a particular society depends on several factors like social setting, economic sustainability, proximity to health care facilities etc.

Gujarat, where the study was conducted has an economy that has expanded by almost 17 times from 1960-61 to 2011-12. But the fact that there were no policies for the elderly population in the state as noted in the Socio-Economic Review 2012-13 is surprising. As the 2011 census shows that Gujarat state has 8% of elderly in its fold.

**Aim**

The aim of the study was primarily to assess and understand the quality of life of the elderly population in various old-age homes in Gujarat. The study also attempted to understand their acceptance of an institutional home or environment away from their family or place of stay for years.

**Justification of the study**

There has been an increased diaspora by the younger generation within and outside the country in search of better economic opportunities and life styles. There has also been an increase in inter-generational conflicts and mushrooming of nuclear families due to individualism. These factorial changes have led to an increase in old-age homes throughout the state. The study attempted to assess the socio-psychological satisfaction/dissatisfaction experienced by the elderly in an old-age home, as care and dignity are among the eighteen principles adopted by the General Assembly of United Nations.

**Research Methodology**

In order to have a holistic approach of the problem and have a

representative data across the State, a total of 135 elderly were sampled from different old-age homes in five districts of Gujarat. The sample consists of 66 males and 69 females. Design of the study was empirical research field work. To collect the required information for the study a structured interview schedule with both open ended and close ended questions were used. The interview was carried out by the researcher on a one-to-one basis.

**Theoretical Perspectives**

This paper tries to analyze how the elderly copes with the significant fading of family support, income, individuality, self-esteem and authority using the Psycho-Social Perspective. Durkheim, the proponent of this perspective posited that stressful social events caused one to modify his/her behavior patterns which were usually accompanied by physiological and emotional reactions. Stress has been conceptualized as working its way out in three major areas: life events, chronic strain and daily existence. If these stressors accumulate, then the ability to cope with life, diseases and illness decreases, thus giving rise to depression and anxiety (Jewson, 2009).

The prime objectives of the analysis were:

- To capture the social background of the elderly.
- To assess their economic status through source of income and level of independence or dependence.
- To understand the environment and setting as well as the facilities provided by different old age homes and its effect on the psychological status, that is, the level of satisfaction and happiness.

**Study Analysis**

The analyses of the data has been presented under four broad categories; (1) Socio-Demographic Trend (2) Economic Dependence and Independence (3) Old Age Homes and Facilities (4) Psychological Status

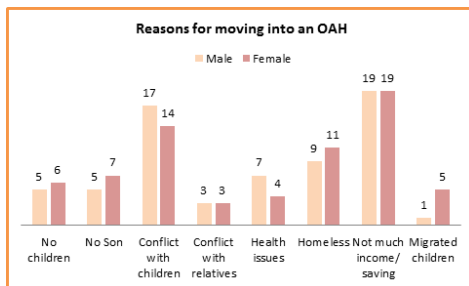
**Socio-Demographic Trend**

Ageing has of late brought about drastic demographic changes in India, which, though known as a young country, is now moving towards becoming a country of the old.

In old-age homes, the maximum number of male sample population, that is 47%, were in the 71-80 age groups implying that most of the elderly males were brought to or opted for these homes as their age and dependency increased. Whereas among women, majority, that is 41%, fell in the 60-70 age groups which could be termed as the onset of aging. The age pattern among women showed that these women opted for the organization when they were still healthy and active. Their reason for this choice could be attributed more due to economic dependency, poverty, and inter-generational conflicts.

It was found that 68% of the elderly women were widows, while only 41% of men were widowers. This clearly shows that women are considered as a burden by their family once her support system ceases to exist. More than sixty percent of the elderly women said that there was considerable change in their status and role after their husband's death, while 30% reported to have faced avoidance from their relatives and children. Another 20% said that there were restrictions on their daily chores and lifestyle, which they were expected to follow. Ten percent of the elderly who were widowed at a very young age felt that they were faced with more responsibilities like educating their children and marrying them off. While men mentioned no specific changes in their life after their wife's death except that they felt lonely and had to depend on others for their daily chores like washing and cooking.

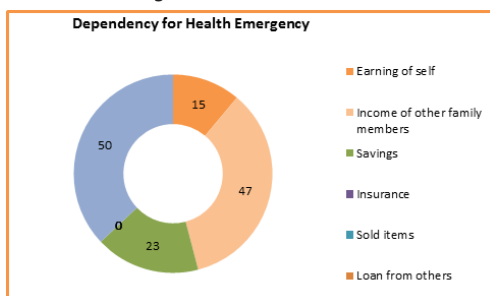
Thirty percent of the men were married and had their spouse staying along with them in the old-age home. Among the males, 11% were separated from their spouses. Several reasons have been stated for their separation, like health issues and incompatibility. The cultural belief that the parents should not depend or stay with their daughters could also be cited as one of the reasons for taking shelter in these old-age homes. However, majority of those who are in such organisations are either homeless, economically disadvantaged or have some kind of conflict with their relatives or children.



The data revealed that 26% of males and 22% of females had at least one son and 8% of males and 14% of females had more than 2 sons. The data also showed that 50% of males and 42% of females had no children; this also includes those who are unmarried and separated. Apropos the above graph, of the issueless residents, only 8% of males and 9% of females have specified it as the reason for moving into an old-age home. Most of the samples usually counted on only their sons, as daughters were considered as outsiders after their marriage. It was however found that the samples became more close to their daughters after coming to the old age home as they regularly visited and enquired about their parents' wellbeing. Of the total sample population, 10% of the inmates had children who had migrated to countries like USA and UK for better economic opportunities. Most of these children have been supporting their parents stay in the old-age homes.

**Economic Dependence and Independence**

Majority of the respondents depended on others for their sustenance as 62% of the residents were below matriculate and 28% were educated up to matriculate. As a result, these residents were employed in unorganized sector which left them with no savings and property. The 8% of graduates and 2% of professionals in these institutes were in a better position of meeting their needs as they had some savings or pension to fall back on. Sixty seven percent of the residents do not own any property. Out of the 33% residents who owned property, there are many who had to move out of their own home due to inter-generational conflicts and abuse.



More than 70% of elderly did not have any source of regular income, and were depended on others for their sustenance. Only 16% of the residents had a saving for health emergencies. The old-age homes provided the residents with two square meals a day and the residents also received dress/toiletries etc. through charity. But health issues and sickness which is an accompaniment of old-age is usually ignored or unattended due to financial constraints. Thirty seven percent of the residents were depended on government hospitals or charity clinics nearby their organisation. None of the residents have any type of insurance. They were dependent on their children or relatives in case of any health emergency.

The poor implementation of old-age pension scheme was very evident as only 2% received it. There has also been variation in the amount of pension received by the residents; some of the pensioners received only 200 rupees, a few got 400 rupees. The State government sets the pension amount as well as the eligibility criteria. Many residents were found to be fulfilling the eligibility criteria for old-age pension but have not availed the benefit as they found that the procedures and paper work involved were complicated, time consuming and cumbersome. It was also found that the amount was not remitted to the account on a regular basis. The people who received retirement benefit pension or family pension were able to fulfill their requirements and occasionally helped their children as well. The residents who received such pensions were merely a seven percentage.

**Facilities Provided in Old-age Homes**

Breaking up of traditional cultural values and changes in economic activity have resulted in breaking of joint family system which had been an informal social security setting, wherein the aged enjoyed a position of authority and respect. Migration of youth to other cities seeking better horizons has resulted in nuclear family systems and individualism. This has resulted in children moving out of the lives of aged parents, leaving them to fend for themselves. The structural changes in the society and the absence of any formal social security for the rapidly increasing elderly population have given rise to organisations like the old-age homes.

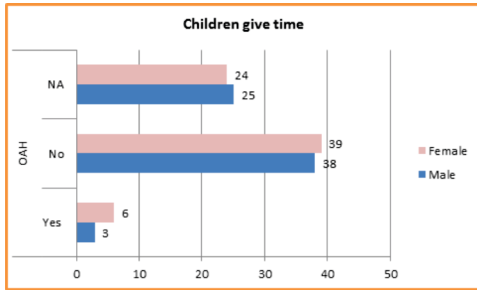
Throughout Gujarat the old-age homes fell into four major categories that were NGO run, spiritually based, trust run and caste based. Elderly seeking entry into these old age homes had to pay deposits as well as monthly rentals. The monthly rentals ranged from 500 to 1000 rupees. Most of the residents were found to belong to the neighbouring districts or the state. People chose to stay in old-age homes that are away from their local area or birth place, because of the stigma attached or taking into consideration the status of the family. Seventy percent of the residents kept no contact with their friends or neighbours to hide their whereabouts and kept in touch only with their immediate family members. Eighty five percent of the elderly staying in old-age homes was suffering from one or the other health issues but except for one old age home, none others had any care taking facilities. Of the 11 old age homes that were visited for sampling, only two had a doctor visiting once in a week.

Most of the old age homes run on the concept of lodging and food, thus providing only the bare minimum facilities to the residents. The residents in these organisations lead a monotonous and inactive life giving rise to boredom, loneliness and depression. All the old age homes accepted donations in the form of food items, cash, medicines, dress, and toiletries etc. Except for two old age homes, none of the others provided facilities of cleaning and laundry thus putting the residents in a difficult situation.

**Psychological Status**

The disengagement theory maintains that an individual disengages himself from certain social roles as his/her age advances. The study data too conforms to the said theory as we found that 91% of the elderly residents staying in several organisations were disengaged. But it would also be very wrong to say that all would like to be disengaged. It could also largely be attributed to the social environment in the institute as well as absence of a role in the family setting.

Fifty seven percent of the respondents in organisation do not receive any attention from their children. These children visit the organisation only to remit the fees of their parents.



Seven percent of the respondents have children who visit them regularly, these parents are staying in an organisation due to various reasons like no enough space in the house or, have only daughters who are married in to another family. Sixty eight percent of the old age home residents have strong religious beliefs and immerse themselves in related activities. Their respective religious beliefs help them to cope with their situations.

Discussions on elderly abuse are very rare in India, though it has been existent in the society. In a culture where family status and values are considered to be paramount, admitting to being a victim of abuse, whether physical, verbal or psychological was or is considered a taboo. When quizzed about incidence of abuse, many of the inmates denied it initially but slowly opened up when they became more acquainted with the interviewer. Forty three percent of samples have faced abuse at home. Abuse is mostly unreported or under-reported as there is still stigmatization of victim and the fear of worsening the situation.

**Major Findings and Conclusion**

- Majority of the elderly in the old age homes are either homeless or have some kind of conflict with their relatives.
- Most of the women are widows and are considered a burden by their family.
- Most of the elderly do not have any source of regular income and are dependent on others for their sustenance.
- The old age homes merely provide lodging and boarding with no extra facilities, making the life of the elderly stressful, unhappy and monotonous.
- The elderly feels unwanted and neglected by their children.
- Sixty percent of the elderly have faced abuse in one form or the other at the hands of their family members.

The 'Golden Years' concept of ageing posits that to be happy in old-age the individual needs to be active. If the existing roles and relationships are lost it is important to replace them because when there is a drop in activity and engagement, there is also a drop in the level of satisfaction (Dhillon, 1992). Old-age homes are set up for ageing members of our society who go through several life events like disconnect from economic activity and independence, lack of appropriate place of stay or support, inter-generational conflicts and abuse etc. which may be acting as stressors in their life. The elderly enters an organisation with the hope of leaving behind these stressors and to lead a carefree life with dignity but unfortunately the organisations which are existent do not fulfill it. The Government of India till date has not set up any strict standardization criteria for the setting up of such institutions and there are no steps to check and evaluate the facilities and infrastructure. therefore leaving the elderly stranded, unhappy and undignified in the organization

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