The Perception of Senior Citizens of Mumbai on Old Age Homes

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ABSTRACT

Globalisation has resulted in increased mobility of people for pursuing their profession, which in turn, has caused the society getting used to living in small unit nuclear families. Focus group discussion with the residents of Old Age Home. An increasing number of senior citizens are now staying in residential old age homes that are designed to cater to the needs of the aged. Most of these old age homes provide help with personal care and hygiene, meals, social interaction and bedside care. This paper is based on a series of Focus group discussions (FGDs) that were held with the senior citizens of Mumbai to know their views on various aspects of elderly life especially regarding the alternative arrangement for aged, that is, old age homes. On the basis of the study, it was generally seen that elderly people who are very sick or dying prefer to stay in their own homes. Moreover, if the aged person stays in the home, it is cost-effective for the family members too. In this situation, it is easier for them to carry out their day-to-day activities in comparison to paying required visits to the hospital or old age homes.

Key words: Senior citizens, Old age homes, Focus group discussion.

1.0 Introduction

From the Vedic age, Indian society has particularly aimed to have long life that is a hundred years of life for everyone: it goes by the saying “*Jeevet Sharadah Shatam*”, i.e., let (one) live for 100 years. With increase in life expectancy, these words seem to be coming true in the case of whole world including India. Today, the population of persons aged 60 and above is continuously increasing. India has around 104 million elderly persons which, in other words, means that 8.6% of the population is comprised of 60+ population (Census, 2011). This number is expected to increase to 296.6 million constituting 20 per cent of the total population by 2050 (United Nations, 2013).

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Increasing mobility of people for pursuing their profession and the effect of globalisation has led to the society getting used to living in small unit nuclear families. As a result, a large percentage of senior citizens are staying on their own. These aged people invariably at some stage require medical and rehabilitation assistance, and there is a need to provide them professional care.

2.0 Review of Literature

There have been sociological studies and surveys on the aged group of population. Most of the studies conducted on the aged population in India are found to be for Kerala state. Various studies show that Kerala has the highest number of old age homes in India. However, only a few studies are carried out to know the effect of government policies, the expectations of the aged from the government schemes and what more they need regarding their daily living from government.

The review of related literature suggested the need to conduct research on 'Aged residing in the old age homes and other aged of Mumbai'. Hence, the sample of the study included aged residing in old age homes and the slum areas of Mumbai. The present study was conducted in 2013-14. Descriptive research method was used to study the subject. All the aged were contacted in person. Qualitative method i.e. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) was used for data collection. FGDs were held with the consent of the aged and as per their convenient time. The present paper is based on the views of those who were residing in the old age homes of Mumbai and also views of slum dwellers regarding the old age homes.

An increasing number of the aged are now staying in residential old age homes that are designed to cater to the needs of the aged. Most of the old age homes provide help with personal care and hygiene, meals, social interaction and bedside care. Old ages homes are supported either by Government or by private sources for various categories of elderly people (like poor, needy, disables, suffering from various health problems like TB, cancer, etc.).

The data shows that in Kerala demand for institutional care is on rise due to the increase in nuclear type of families and migration of children abroad. Rajan (2000) in the survey of old age homes in Kerala pointed out that ageing population is the ultimate consequence of demographic transition. It assesses the ageing scenario in Kerala by district and the profile of existing old-age homes in Kerala. It assumes that the elderly of today do a lot of mental exercises on various patterns of living arrangements and choose the best according to their socio-economic conditions.

Prakash (1991) found that lack of family support, dissatisfaction with children, absence of children, death of spouse and ill health were found to be the reasons for institutionalisation. The study also found that the homebound elderly were more active, more satisfied and had more social contacts and hence were in a more privileged (better adjusted) position than the elderly in old age homes.

Raju (2004), in his book titled 'Networking of Organizations Working for the Care of Older Persons in Mumbai', studies the agencies working for the care and welfare of the elderly in India especially in the city of Mumbai. He has mentioned that these agencies are categorised broadly into: old age homes, day care centres, senior citizens associations and associations for retired persons. His study approach was to identify various organizations working for the care of the elderly in Mumbai and to collect their information by contacting them. Besides this source, snowball technique was used to get the information of 70 organisations working for the care of the elderly people. The findings revealed the urgency on the part of the organisations to channelise their efforts and strengthen the activities of the organisations working for the care of the elderly people. Raju (2004) expressed the need to have far-reaching policy and programmes with the networking of organisations working for the care of the elderly.

The data on aged women reveal that nearly three out of five single older women are very poor and about two-thirds of them are completely dependent in economic terms (http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/india/drive/BKPAI_Maharashtra_13thJan2014.pdf). There are very few studies dealing with comparison of the elderly persons residing in old age homes and those residing with their families in the different areas of adjustment. So, the review of literature points that there remains a dearth of studies of the elderly in India, particularly those comparing the different sections of the aged people in our society.

Kerala's Old Age Policy 2013 emphasises on providing old age homes, with special attention to ill and people with dementia. In Kerala, there is Vayomithram scheme implemented by KSSM. Under this scheme, there is a provision to take senior citizens outside the confines of their old age homes for vacations, tourism and entertainment. Such a provision enables senior citizens to interact with others. In Mumbai city there is a contrast between the houses of the rich, middle class and poor.

3.0 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The researcher held discussion with 75 senior citizens residing in one of the old age homes of Mumbai and the major findings of the discussion have been summarised below.

- Those who were staying in the old age home were of 60 to 75 age group.
- Before coming to the old age home, some (40%) of them were staying in the 'chawls' of Mumbai
- None of them were suffering from any major sickness and they could perform their daily chores on their own.
- Most of them were educated up to graduation.
- Most of them belonged to open caste.
- They were staying in the old age home from last 4 to 5 years.
- Most of (93%) were in touch with their family members.
- Half of the aged said that their relatives come to visit them in the old age home once a while.
- Almost all of them said that they liked staying in the old age home.
- All of them said that they do not do anything for their family members as they stay away from their families and relatives.
- Around 66.6% of the aged never visited their homes after their admission in the old age home.
- More than half (60%) had no source of income.
- Most of them mingle with those who live with them in the old age home. They do not have any visiting friends.
- Most (63.3%) of them were widows.
- The decision about staying in the old home was taken by most (73.7%) of the elderly people on their own.
- Almost all the aged felt that government should provide financial support to all those senior citizens who stay in the old age home.

A series of *Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)* were held with the senior citizens of Mumbai to know their views on various aspects of elderly life especially regarding the alternative arrangement for aged that is old age homes. Following are some of the major findings of the FGDs.

- a) ***Focus group discussion with the aged residing in the Bhimchaya Slum Area Vikroli slum, Mumbai:*** The Focus Group Discussion was attended by 35 participants: 15 males and 20 females. The age group of the elderly participants ranged between 60- 70 years. Out of 35 participants, 25 were illiterate and 10 had education up to primary education. Most of them were rag pickers and waste pickers.
- The focus group discussion with Bhimchaya Slum Area Vikroli slum revealed that they are not aware of any laws or government schemes of the services like helpline, old age home, etc., for them.

- When the participants of FGD were asked if they would like to be in old age home, most of them said those who do not have anyone can go to old age home. In reality, however, out of 35, only 2 were ready to go and stay in the old age home. They said that even though we have lot of worries and our own children harass us, we live our life seeking solace with our grandchildren.

Views of the elderly person regarding old age home

- Most of them were against the idea of going and staying in the old age home. Out of 35, only 9 felt that old age home should be in existence. However, two said, “Those who have money can go and stay in old age home”.
 - All felt that Day Care facility should be made available to them so that they all can be financially independent to earn their livelihood.
 - 30% of the participants felt that government should provide free old age home facility.
- b) *Focus group discussion at Kurla, Budha Colony BudhaVihar, Ward L of Mumbai:*** It was attended by 28 participants: 15 male and 13 female. The age group of the elderly participants of the focus group discussion ranged between 60-78 years. Out of 28 participants, 25 had completed Primary education and three had studied up to SSC. Most of them were daily wage earners, construction workers or retired persons working in private firm. Some of the participants were not aware about the government schemes meant for them. All of them knew that they could get concession in travelling by train for long route. They were aware of ‘Rajiv Gandhi JeevandaiYojna’. Half of them had received the card for Rajiv Gandhi Jeevandai Yojna’.
- None of the elderly persons had ever seen the old age home. But four of them showed their willingness to stay in the old age home.
 - All said Government should establish old age homes but they should maintain them properly.
 - None of them had ever seen Day Care centre, but they wished to visit it.
 - They expect that the bed ridden elderly people be cared by the government. At present, there is no solid support for them and they need to be sent to the old age homes.
 - All of them said that they do need day care centres for their daily care, but not old age homes.
- c) *Focus group discussion at Bhimnagar, Ghatkopar Pipeline:*** The discussion was attended by 14 female participants aged in the age group of 60 to 70 years. Out of

14 participants, 10 of them were domestic housemaids and 4 were housewives. All of them had studied up to 4th standard.

- None of the participants had ever seen the old age home. In fact, none of them knew about old age homes and the kind of facilities provided there.
 - They informed that they would like to visit old age homes but not stay there
- d) **Focus group discussion at Khardanda:** This was attended by 20 women. The age group of the participants ranged between 60 to 70 years. They all were working in the family business of pottery making. They were unaware of day care centres, old age homes, helpline or any other scheme of government. None of them were interested in knowing more about old age home or discussing about old age home.
- e) **Focus group discussion at Path Centre, Cheetah Camp:** This FGD was attended by 15 persons; 10 females and 5 males. The elderly people were small entrepreneurs, daily workers and house maid servants.
- They knew about old age homes but had never visited the old age homes.
 - All of them were unanimously against the idea of leaving all the relatives and ties and going to stay in the old age homes.
 - All of them wished to live in their own house and not an old age home.
- f) **Focus group discussion at Tulsiwadi, Tardeo (Mahalakshmi Station) D-Ward:** The Focus group discussion was attended by 40 persons: 30 female and 10 male. The aged slum dwellers of Tulsiwadi, Tardeo (Mahalakshmi Station) were from mixed group, majority of them were from 'kathewadi' community. Their age group ranged from 60 to 70 years. This slum reported maximum cases of abuse of aged from their families. One of the participants of the FGD was abandoned by her family and she lived on street and begged for food. People requested employees of government to send her to an old age home. Another participant lived in a temple and survived on the offerings (*prasad*) offered by devotees of the temple. He was suffering from tuberculosis and expected help from government. The participants of the Focus Group Discussion mentioned that abandoned old people should be rehabilitated at Old Age Home

3.1 Views of social scientists

Majority of the social scientists said that due to privatization, it is not possible for the government to provide jobs to the needy. Therefore, the children of many aged people are without income and hence, they do not have proper staying arrangement for themselves. Therefore, they find it difficult to support their parent at their own homes in

Mumbai. Regarding old age homes, over two thirds felt it does not fit into our culture, as children are supposed to take care of their parents. There are multiple levels of vulnerabilities that women face at old age and only a rights based approach to policy and programs can bring about social integration of the elderly, especially women, commented Prof. Vibhuti Patel (Stree Shakti Report, 2015).

3.2 Major concerns regarding old age home and aged

The study has revealed the following major concerns regarding old age homes and the aged.

- Though willing to stay in old age home, the senior citizens cannot afford to pay the rent of the old age homes. They need financial support to enable them to stay in old age homes.
- There is a need for networking between the government, NGOs, 'Jeshta Nagrik Sanghs', Old Age Homes, Ward offices and others who will help to reach out to the aged who need help.
- There is a need for more participation from school/ college students who can visit day care centres and old age homes, and understand the needs of the people living there.
- During the tenure of 'Shivsena' government in Maharashtra, the government had helped in establishing old age homes in every district across Maharashtra State. However, many of the old age homes are not functioning properly. The government needs to revive them or offer other old age home as an alternative to them.

4.0 Conclusion

The breaking of the joint family system is an important factor contributing to the problems of the elderly people. In a nuclear family, the elderly people find it difficult to get the attention they require or deserve. In India, there are not sufficient number of old age homes, which can provide the required care to the aged. It is very difficult to get a substitute of a home for the aged. Generally, it is seen that elderly people who are very sick or dying prefer to stay in their own homes. Moreover, if the aged person stays in the home, it is cost-effective for the family members too. In this situation, it is easier for them to carry out their day- to- day activities in comparison to paying required visits to the hospital or old age homes.

Research shows that there is paucity of trained staff working in aged institutions like Old Age Homes, NGOs, Jestha Nagrik Sanghs. There should be a governing body

to monitor the training of staff or the government should make it mandatory for these registered organisations to ensure that they appoint trained staff who would work for the aged. Training of the functionaries of Jetha Nagrik Sangh, Day Care Centers, Old Age Homes and NGOs working for the senior citizens can be funded by government of Maharashtra.

Old age homes do not substitute for the care provided by the family members. Yet, old age homes have become an alternative to family care of aged. Hence, there is a need to look at this alternative with care and concern. The aged need to be encouraged to take interest in their own life. They need to be motivated to remain healthy and happy. The Stree Shakti Report (2015) has recommended intergenerational housing and intergenerational vocational housing where young destitute women could be trained along with the residents of the old age homes. It also recommended government to maintain the standard of the old age homes by allocating them grades on a regular basis. The government report can serve as a reliable guide for the aged and their children and their families to select suitable old age home. Schools and colleges need to encourage students to serve the aged group by regularly organising visits to Day Care Centres, Hospitals, Old age homes, NGOs working for the aged.

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