

# **SOCIAL LIFE OF THE ELDERLY LIVING IN OLD AGE HOMES: A STUDY ON OLD AGE HOMES IN HYDERABAD**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The traditional joint family setup replaced by the modern nuclear families has affected the lives of the old age people who have once enjoyed a lot of respect, authority and valuable role in the family has lost all those with the changes in the structure of the family. Due to the demand from the modern employment structure and changes in family structure, elderly care has been seen as a burden and challenge in nuclear families and hence, preferring to join them in old age homes. This type of system is becoming more common in metropolitan cities, and Hyderabad in the Telangana state of India is no exception to it. The article focuses on the social support network of elders and their health condition before and after joining the old age homes. Social support networks play a vital role in the life of the elderly, especially when they are away from their loved ones; it gives them a sense of belongingness that keeps them healthy.*

**Key words:** Elderly, Joint Family, Social Support Net works, Health

## **AGEING AND ITS DEFINITIONS**

The process of becoming ageing is a biological reality, and one cannot avoid it. Ageing naturally happens to all living organisms, and humans are no exception to it. With ageing physical strength deteriorates, mental stability diminishes and the ability to work reduces. Though ageing is a biological process, it is very much conditional and associated with various social factors, cultural values, norms and regulations to a great extent. Ageing can't be avoided, but how fast we age varies from one person to another and how we age depends on our genes, environmental influence, and lifestyle. In this context, ageing is defined as a progressive

functional decline of physiological functions with age, including a decrease in fecundity (Mangel and Patridge, 1999; Lopez - Otin et al., 2013).

Gorman (2000) defines the ageing process as a biological reality, and its dynamics are beyond human control. He points out that definitions of ageing are different from one society to another. In developed nations, chronological time indicates old age; 60-65 years is considered retirement age and the beginning of old age. But, in many other parts of the world, the chronological time has very little importance in defining old age; he reveals that factors like the ability to work that is assigned to them determine old age, meaning that old age has begun at the point where the active contribution is no longer possible.

A.S Reber (1985) defines ageing as the process of progressive change which occurs with time, independent of vagaries of life, infliction of disease or abuse of social living. Depending upon the age, cultural heritage, and societal norms, human beings take up many responsibilities to perform in a lifetime. In this context, according to Neugarten, “In every society, age is one of the bases for attribution of position and one of the fundamental dimensions by which social interaction is regulated”.

Hence, the above definitions summarise that ageing is the process of becoming older. Along with it, ageing also represents the accumulation of changes in persons physical and mental stabilities over time. It pushes human beings towards a wide range of physiological changes that make them more susceptible to death, limit their everyday activities, and make us more prone to various diseases.

## **AGEING INDIA**

As much as we have been liberated economically, our system is not supporting older people. Neither the state willing to provide enough support nor the individuals are coming forward to support them. Unlike developed nations, which have structured old age recuperation mechanisms, India doesn't have anything of that sort. There are no significant policies that deal for the benefit of the elderly people exclusively. Two-thirds of today's 60 plus people live in low and middle-income countries, and this proportion is expected to increase three quarters by

2050. Despite rapid and unprecedented demographic changes across the globe, ageing as a matter of concern is mainly absent from debates and discussions, etc.

The Millennium Development Goals have ignored the ageing population, and it doesn't feature any particular reference to old age people. On various International platforms, India was trying to project itself as a youth nation. But in reality, with the changes in the demographic transition, the Indian population is also getting aged. It is a serious matter to consider as the nation is not well prepared for these changes. As per the 2019 demographic report, approximately over 140 million people live in India aged over 60 years, and these statistics show that 10 percent of Indias are aged. The proportion of older adults is expected to double fold to 19.5 percent in 2050, with almost 319 million people aged over 60 years. This reveals that one in every five Indian individuals will fall under the category of senior citizens.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

A human being's life is generally divided into five stages: infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. Like all other stages, old age is not without problems. In old age, physical strength deteriorates, mental stability diminishes, money power becomes bleak, and all these are coupled with the negligence from the younger generations. Moreover, when a person becomes aged, it is a period where the person experiences decreasing their role in social roles and responsibilities. They have increased dependency on others for care and support.

Family is considered as the primary support for the elderly. However, with the changes in the social lives of the people and increased preference for the nuclear families, migration of younger generation to urban areas in search of employment and poor consideration of the younger generation towards the cultural values and responsibilities which once had great respect towards the older people making the elderly isolated and giving them the insecure life at their place of living and increasing the risk of being abused.

In the life of the elderly, the social support networks and social support system plays a vital role in easing their tensions and promoting their health and well being. In India, though the government of different states provides various pensions for the elderly, its support system

is insufficient to meet their basic requirements. In addition to this, there is a mismatch between life expectancy, various diseases and the age at which the older adults receive their pension.

Social support networks play a vital role in the life of the elderly. These networks give them a sense of belongingness, and the absence of such networks provides an individual with leads to depression, which is the root cause for various health problems. The main objective of this paper is to look into the social support networks of the elderly after their institutionalisation. A social network is the collection of interpersonal and communal bonds throughout their lives to establish social relations that satisfy specific needs and maintain their well being. There are two types of social support in our day-to-day lives, i.e., formal and informal support. The formal comes in the form of medical services, advice from physicians and other forms of health care services. Informal support comes from family, friends and other close associates. The social support and social networks come under informal support and need not be paid, i.e. informal generally refers to unpaid help given by family, friends, and neighbours (Novak, 1997). This type of support comes in various forms like helping, advising, affection and companionship etc.

The informal support for the elderly is significant. These networks give the elderly a sense of belongingness, which allows them to spend time and share activities with others. The absence of these networks leads to loneliness and depression. Poor social support leads to a decline in psychological and mental health which brings about problems of loneliness and depressive symptoms. Hence, the study has been conducted on elderly social networks and their health condition after joining the old age homes.

## **METHODOLOGY**

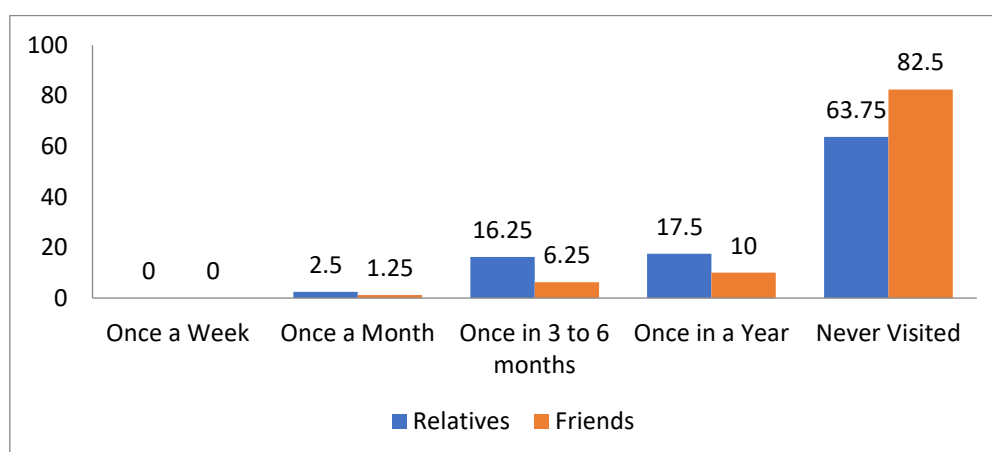
The study is an explorative one, and it is a qualitative study conducted among various old age homes in Hyderabad city of Telangana state. The areas for the survey were selected based on the pilot study conducted before proceeding with the fieldwork. The particular regions for the study were selected based on various reasons like immigration of the people and concentration of the software employees etc. The homes were chosen based on size, facilities offered inside and outside old age homes, types of food, medical care etc. A survey method

with the help of semi-structured schedules was used in the study to gather information. Besides, the interview method used in the study to know about the facilities and elderly social networks inside and outside the old age home. Further, the case studies of the elderly were taken to understand the health condition of the elderly before and after joining the old age homes.

## **SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS OF THE ELDERLY AFTER JOINING OLD AGE HOME**

The following are the findings of the study. The table below gives the details about the social networks of the elderly after joining the old age homes. The study has been conducted on 100 inmates of various old age homes across the Hyderabad city of Telangana state. The chart's Y-axis represents the percentage of the people who visited the elderly after joining the old age homes. The chart's X-axis represents the time duration of the people who saw the elderly after joining the old-age homes.

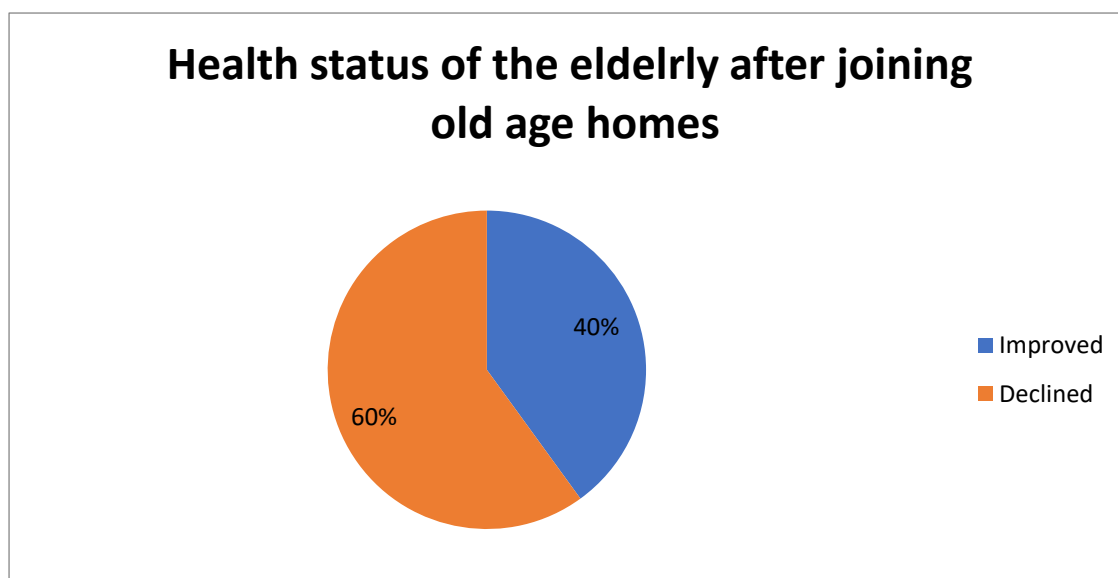
The data shows that 82.5 percent of the inmates revealed that their friends had not visited them after their institutionalisation. The communication between them their friends has been limited to the phones, and that too very minimal. 63.75 percent of the elderly revealed that their relatives didn't visit the homes to see them once they joined them. 7.5 percent of the inmates revealed that their friends visited them once in three to six months, and ten percent of the elderly revealed that their friends have come to see once in last year.



Source: Data collected from the field visits in Hyderabad.

The frequency of visiting relatives also diminished once the elderly were institutionalised. 36.35 percentage of the elderly revealed that their relatives visit them once a year and in months. The study revealed that the social networks of the elderly drastically diminished once they joined the old age homes.

Health is an essential factor to identify the quality of life of elderly people in old age homes. In most cases, it is apparent that they suffer from one or the other health problems in their later years of life. The study looked into the status of their health condition after their institutionalisation.



Source: Data collected from the field visit in Hyderabad.

Infantilizing, a term coined by Greshman (1976), involves dressing up female patients, combing their hair into a pigtail and attaching bows or calling patients by first names, which is a common practice or even using baby talk (Dolinsky, 1984; Heine, 1986; Keith, 1982). As Greshman rightly said about the duties of the care staff in nursing homes (or) old age homes, but in the study, it is found that the care staff that plays a crucial role in taking care of the elderly in old age homes are not performing any such duties. The study also finds that the relationship between care staff and inmates of the old age homes is just formal, i.e., they perform their tasks like cleaning the toilets, rooms, cooking etc. When it comes to the personal care of the elderly, there is not much personal special care from the care staff. In the study, it

was also noticed that in most old age homes, the care staff are young compared to the age of the house inmates, which was the main reason for the lack of misunderstanding among the care staff about the behaviour and needed elderly. “Age of the staff plays a key role because it represents the life experiences, to some extent knowledge”.

It was also surveyed on the elderly perception towards their current old age home. 64 percentage of the inmates in the study revealed that they are not happy with the houses where their children or relatives placed them. So, this could be one of the major factors that hamper the health of the elderly people after joining the old age home.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be stated though we have welcomed modern technology and enjoying its benefits. Developing in various fields like medical facilities gave rise to longevity, resulting in a growing number of elderly populations globally, especially in India. With the increasing modernisation, the situation of the elderly population is not the same as it used to be in the past. Traditionally, these people enjoyed a lot of respect, authority, and valuable role in the family. But with the changes in the family structure, i.e. in nuclear families, the role and importance of the elderly have changed. Their significance and position in the family have declined, and they have to spend most of their time sitting lonely at home. Various other reasons of the family have made them walk towards alternative care for them. In urban scenarios, old age homes are not a new phenomenon. Though old age homes were set up with good cause in the past, the present system has changed as more old age homes turn into profit-oriented rather than service-oriented. The data provided by Help-Age India shows that in Hyderabad, there is a maximum number of paid homes compared to that free service homes.

The old age homes are a second home to the elderly, and they should be treated with the utmost care, and proper facilities and environment need to be provided. The children who join their parents in old age homes should take responsibility for their parents and visit them regularly. The elderly want to spend their later years of life with their loved ones, which can be possible with the realisation of the younger generation. Because soon they are going to take the same path where their elder parents are going. Therefore, a civilised society must create



conditions such that the aged can live a life of self-worth and dignity, more source of joy than a burden. To remain lively and enjoy successful ageing, they must accept that being old should not mean the end of life, but it should be seen as “retirement from work, not from life”.

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