CHALLENGES REVOLVING AROUND ELDERLY STAYING IN OLD AGE HOMES

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Abstract

Ageing is a natural course of life. Every born baby is bound to get old and It's a wonderful process of life. When a person completes almost all stages and responsibilities of life, he finally takes a step back from active life and becomes a senior citizen. It's up to society, community and by and large world how to deal with such elderly generation. Whether to treat them with respect, make additional use of their knowledge or look at them with hatred, take them as a thing of disgrace and insult them. This applies to all elders around us. Unfortunately, there are wide reasons that still now generation gap exists. Difference of opinion between two generations create misunderstandings, conflicts and lead to separations. Elder people are not a problem but when their social, economic, responsibility become issue they find themselves in trouble.

The article highlights the journey of elderly from Indian traditional "vanaprasthashram" to modern day "old age home" complete the circle. This article though purposive research using both primary and secondary sources of data tries to analyse challenges related to loneliness, insecurity, mental health etc and highlights the questions revolving forcefully or coincidently dropped elder people into an old age home. Seeing and indulging with the member's living there, need arises to trace the issues and criticalities faced by these people track back their history and situations they are in now.

Keywords: *Ageing, Stages, Senior, Conflicts, Vanaprasthashram, Criticalities.*

Introduction:

According to ancient Hindu tradition life was divided into four stages of existence. A person would plan his life into 4 ashrama's (stages). Each stage or ashram was in line to the circumstances and age for that period of life. The purpose of life planning was to experience of self-realisation. No matter in how diverse cultures, religions and philosophies we live in, this simple framework of life had great values bringing comfort and clarity and lending meaning to our existence. Out of the four Ashrama's *Bramhacharya* (student), *Grahastashram* (family-house holder), *Vanaprashthashram* (hermitage) where a person used to shift his focus from family and worldly needs towards spiritual containment, meditation and slowly entered role of a mentor rather than actual player, and the last ashram was '*Sanyasa*', where the person more profoundly sacrificed and moved away from materialistic needs, professional achievements and led a peaceful life away from the family and society. This fourth phase of life was a deliberate attempt to detach from world, hand over all responsibilities to the next generation including decision making, financial settlements and day-to-day involvement. Late. slowly the existence of an elderly person became secondary and dependent on family members.

Later in the mid to last quarter of last century due to increase of modernization, industrialization, globalizations, urbanisation the priority of every family member differed. Also, especially in Indian sub-continent the popular and affectionate culture of a "Joint family" structure started deteriorating. Society

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preferred small families around 5-6 people involving 3 generations. But later even this concept crumpled and thus the journey of "Nuclear family" took grip. In modern days many newly married couples preferred staying separate. The third generation was clipped off as widely coupled stayed away from their parents. The parents had to lead forced or pushed willingly or unwillingly lonely life.

The reasons were many for this transformation or phase-shift. Changing scenario of society and world contributed a lot. Difference of opinion between two generations, contradictions in likings, everyday conflicts, financial dependency were some of the core causes for crumbling family structure. This all lead to separation of families and in worst cases the living home became the critical issue. Differences erupted and old people had to lead a lonely life. If the spouse wasn't alive the single person found it difficult to live all alone. And then came the inevitable option of leading rest of the life in an old age home or "*Vrudhhashram*". Many single survivors have to swallow this bitter pill.

There are many reasons staying in old age home like helplessness, compulsion, conflicts, difference of opinions, ego, self-respect, self-space etc. This paper intends and tries to understand existing challenges of old age home and elderly staying in that place. 'Old age home', 'a retirement home' 'old folk home' are witnessed globally whether in developed, developing or under developed countries. This is a universal issue and not a social problem pertaining to specific caste, creed, religion or part of world. Hence it indicates that the elderly issues need to take seriously for welfare of our society. There are various problems studied by various scholars on old age and elderly from various aspects like demographic, psychological, social and economic. This article is another minuscule attempt to study problems and issue's related to people staying in old age homes. Also, this write-up tries to analyse some of the hardships and challenges faced by NGO's and charitable trust who run such homes.

A quick look on figures in history on the elderly people in India remark that there was an increasing trend in percentage share of elderly persons to the total population of India as observed in 1961. In the beginning of 6th decade in past century, 5.6% of the population was in the age bracket of 60 years or more, the proposition has increased to 10.1% in 2021 further more threatening news is that, this figure might likely get increased to 13.1% in 2031. (Government of India Ministry of Statistics and Programme, Pp16). It is healthy news that the death rate of the older population has deceased but with this alarming growth rate of elderly in the society, question arises in mind that are their adequate facilities available for these senior citizens? Along with government there are various NGO's, charitable trusts and other private organisations, who are not only working for the welfare of elderly community but have generously taken the responsibility on humanitarian grounds to lend a peaceful and somewhat respected life for the neglected, ignored and left alone older people.

Objectives of the study.

➢ To study problems faced among the elderly staying in old age home.

➢ To understand the relationship of elderly with institution running old age home.

Limitations:

Sample size, analysis at not much of bigger quantum level.

Methodology:

Quantitative data was collected using questionnaire, interview schedule as well as observation. One of the old age homes (name undisclosed for the anonymity purpose) at Thane city was selected for the data collection. Data was collected from elderly staying at old age home, some of their family members and organisation head running the old age home.

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There were 25 inmates living in this particular place. This is a private one floored bungalow turned into an old age home, shortly it will shape up with an additional floor (2nd to be precise) allowing more space for existing member's and also offering opportunity and possibilities to new entrants. The two floors are housed with one common kitchen, two Common bathrooms and two toilets, two big dormitories type halls having beds for their sleeping arrangements along with a reasonable sized storage cupboard. A Common community hall having One TV with cable connection, radio, some indoor games for some relaxation.

Findings:

The data which was collected

Table No: 1 Distribution of the Respondence: Age

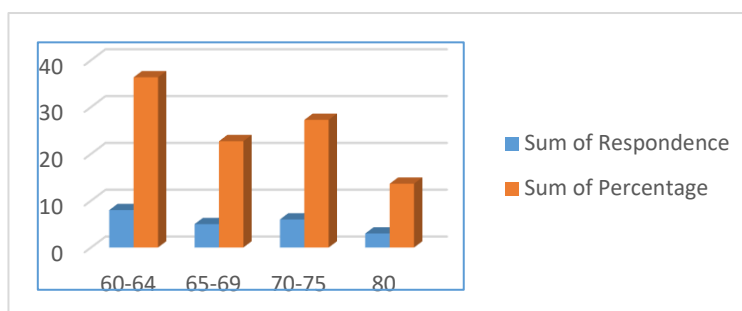| Age	Sum of Respondents	Sum of Percentage
60-64	8	36.36
65-69	5	22.72
70-75	6	27.27
80 and above	3	13.63

Table 1 shows that almost 60% of the members are just senior citizens. People who had entered above 60 mark and suddenly found themselves alone, or neglected and needed to get into old age homes away from their own families and relatives. Only 13.63 per cent of them are in the age group of 80 and above, who are in very bad physical and mental state.

Table No: 2 Population by Gender

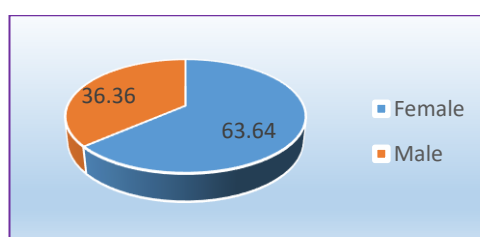| Sex	Sum of Respondents	Sum of Percentage
Female	14	63.64
Male	8	36.36
Grand Total	**22**	**100**

Table 2 further illustrates that more than 63.64 per cent of the residents are females and 36.36 of the respondents are male. May be the social scenario is such that single females or widows are more vulnerable and helpless so require a secured community shelter home for their living and safety. Male though can survive alone if they have a home of their own.

Table No: 3 Reason staying in old age home

Reason for staying in old age home	Sum of Respondents	Count of Percentage
Burden on family	5	22.72
Conflicts	6	27.28
Disabilities	4	18.19
Loneliness	2	9.09
No children	1	4.54
No companion	2	9.09
No family members	2	9.09
Grand Total	**22**	**100**

The above table no. 3 shows that 22.72 percent respondents were considered burden on their families, while highest i.e. 27.28 percent of the respondents admitted that there were continuous difference of opinions leading to family conflicts in their homes and they were finding it very difficult to cope with situations and tensions in the house. The house where they had spent their whole life now seemed strange and unfamiliar. 18.19% of the respondents agreed that old age was like disease and their disabilities was curse for the family as well as society. They sadly admitted that their physical disabilities enabled them to move away from their families and have to take shelter at old age home and be dependent on caretaker's. 9.09 % of member's had no options but to seek admission here, as they had lost their spouse early and felt lonely and needed someone to stay with them as their relatives were ready to take up commercial implications by keeping them in care taking home but aren't interested and keen on keeping them in their home. However, the elderly's admitted that this was painful and were not happy with that decision but had no option or could not dictate terms, and are forced to stay in old age home. Last slot of 4.54 percent (01) respondent had no children and are widows too. While 9.09 percent each of the respondent had no companion's and had no family members.

Reason for Staying at Old Age Home
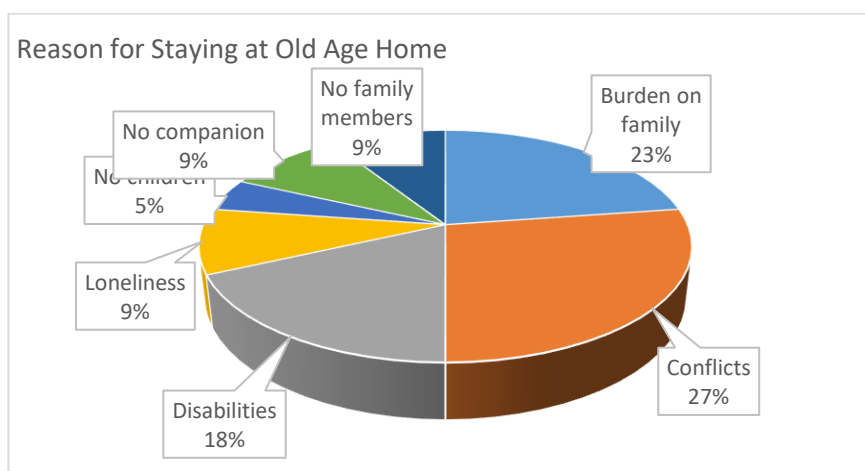
Table No: 4 Living Arrangement

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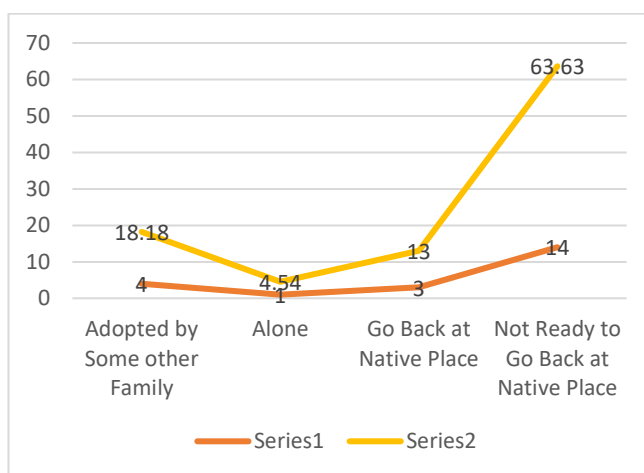| Living Arrangement	Sum of Respondents	Sum of Percentage
Adopted by Some other Family	4	18.18
Alone	1	4.54
Go Back at Native Place	3	13
Not Ready to Go Back at Native Place	14	63.63

Table no. 4 indicates that majority i.e. 63.63 of the respondents said that they don't want to go back to their home and are happy staying here as they have found new friends and companions, someone to talk to share to speak out to unleash their emotions, and are aware of the fact that that their blood relations and family members are not ready to keep them, While 18.18 percent of the respondents unusually are still hoping and wanting that some noble family will adopt them and they can stay for rest of their lives with some other family. Only 4.45 percent i.e. single respondent wanted to stay alone by choice. As he had some bitter experiences in life from some people whom he loved & trusted a lot. Those cursed days have made him believe staying aloof on own is far better than getting involved in someone. While 13 percent were in weak hope of some of their relative might still come to take them, as they still possessed desire to stay with grandchildren's.

Table No: 5 Staying at old age home

Staying at Old Age Home	Sum of Percentage
Not Satisfied	36.36
Satisfied	63.63

Unusually table no 5, reveal alarming fact. Inspite of lot of adversities and emotional setbacks almost 63.63 % were satisfied at old age home as they have cut their roots for the lifetime. They no more want to return to the society or world who have not accepted them or whole heartedly considered them as part of them. They have coldly swallowed the bitter pill of the fact that their blood relatives are not ready to call them back. It's not that they are enjoying life in an old age but the reality remains that they are thrown away and this shelter have offered them food, existence and some sort of respect. While 36.36 % were not satisfied at old age due to basic problems like common toilets, no privacy, no mouthwatering food's, same boring routine.

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Some of the Problems Face by NGO's while running old age home:

No matter the NGOs are doing a noble job, but they too face their own share of challenges, issues and problems. Primarily they face economic issues. funding for such old age home is not easy. Though some of the admitted are self-sufficient and pay for the stay, there is huge chunk of oldie's who are financially dependent on such trusts, organisations. Gathering funds for running old age homes is tough and tedious. Also, people coming here are not always healthy and with positive frame of mind. They are ignored and left out. All these reflects in there personality. They are mentally and physically disturbed. Some of the common problems occurring in them are Sleeplessness, psychology issues, hypertension, their small issues need high attention, Bed ridden and mental issues also are to be taken care with utmost effort, patience and calmness. Continuous counselling of these oldie's is a regular part of their job. Further their safety and security is responsibility of old age runner and authorities.

Relatives and Family members rarely come to meet their own old age people who have taken admission here. No matter how much elderly's try to forget their past but they still feel the pain. From the view of society, old age homes are considered stigma. And the people who have to take shelter here are not respectfully taken. This disgrace or humiliation still reflects in behaviour of world outside old age home, and this hurts the people staying here. There needs certain creation of atmosphere or awareness to be developed so that old age homes shall be taken as a part of society. The unfortunate and unlucky elderly's admitted also owe some respect from the world outside.

Challenges by family of elderly:

As a part of the exercise, attempt was made to seek view's and intentions of children or relatives of the people staying here. Many were not ready to face the interview. But some admitted that they had their own limitations & compulsions for keeping the elder's in shelter homes. However, they occasional visited the old age home, checked up regarding health and any other issue's, celebrated their parents' birthday and fulfilled their duties. but they admitted that it is not possible or feasible for them, to take them back home. They regretted for the same but were firm on their decision. The reasons being day-today interactions would again result in difference of opinions, conflicts, argument etc. Surprisingly one of the family members of elderly revealed that he wanted him to stay with the family, but his father had made his own decision to stay in age old home as he didn't wanted to be burden on the family. Unlike other's this person was quiet satisfied staying in old age home.

Concluding Observation:

Major observation which emerges from the above findings are that there is more need of family support. People consider earlier generation (elderly) as burden, some do not want to indulge in regular conflicts (from both end's), space and generation gap are another major point leading to separation of families. One needs to find own ways to tackle on such sensitive issues.

People should be more generous and understanding and avoid elderly's sending in old age home. More old age homes will definitely be not a good sign for the healthy society and community.

Old age home already existing should be funded and kept hygienic, clean and fresh. Extracurricular activities shall be increased to keep mental health of people upbeat and happy. Outside people shall donate and spend atleast 1 day of their life with any of such old age homes to understand and show empathy towards those who are staying here, mostly forcefully or without choice. Government and other NGOs should regularly plan out studies or psychological surveys to improve state of old age homes.

Regular health check-ups, compulsory psychology counselling shall be monitored.

Mental health of elder's admitted here is of utmost importance, care should be taken for the same. Recreation facilities, extra curriculum activities, outing, picnic's (if possible) should be arranged so that stay of people here becomes smoother and they lead a normal happy life like other elder's staying with their own family member's, children, grandchildren.

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