

SOCIAL CONDITIONS, ISSUES AND PROBLEMS OF ELDERS

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INTRODUCTION

In India, elderly population consists of 7% of the total population, in which two third resides in villages and almost half of them live in poor conditions. There is rapid growth in number of older population in India that present issues that need to be taken care of if economic and social development is to proceed effectively. It is affected by the change in socio-economic condition of the elderly that adversely affects the individual's way of life after retirement. Economic loss comes from a change that is due to transformation from salaried to pensioner or unemployment leading to economic dependency on children or closed ones i.e., from independency to dependency. A feeling of low self-worth creeps in that is due to the loss of social recognition and earning power. Traditionally, elderly had occupied the position of power and prestige but now they are becoming inactive, dependent, sick and weak. All these phenomena lead to many physical, psychological and sociological problems. This mental status of a person is harmful. In coming times this stress needed to be taken care of effectively because if not than many health related problems will rise. Though at present due to technical advancement in field's general health, education, medicine and medical facilities, national food related schemes and food availability, there is decline in death rate of all age groups resulting in continuous incline in population with the age of sixty years and more.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO PROBLEMS OF ELDERS

There are several factors that are contributing to the problems of elderly. These factors are as follows:

- Decrease in purchasing power.
- Increased life expectancy has led to longevity.
- Disintegration of social support system.
- Migration of kin pin due to economic opportunities.

CONDITIONS & PROBLEMS OF ELDERS

Ageing is the natural stage of human life, it brings with it innumerable problems for the people who have grown old. These problems can be distinguished under subheads health, economic, physiological, housing and elder abuse related. A more comprehensive approach to explain the problems is as under-

Economic Insecurity: This problem arises when elderly are unable to sustain themselves economically. They either lack the capacity to be productive or lack the opportunity as they were before. They lose their independency due to increase in competition from young generation, sluggishness in physical and mental faculties, mindset of society, malnutrition, decrease in access to resource, lack of awareness about the rights and entitlements with changing times. These all things play significant roles in lowering the ability of old aged to remain finically productive. Financial security is not only relevant to elders only but to those of other age groups. It should be taken care of that elderly who are capable should be motivated and if necessary should be given a helping hand for engaging them in

economically productive manner. Those who are not able to support themselves should be given full or partial social welfare basic relief. The first motivation comes from the family and community so they should be encouraged to support the elders via counseling and self-governance.

Incomplete Preparedness for Old Age: Majority of people enter the age of elderly with very little or no awareness of what it is about to offer to them. While age of 60 years demographically acknowledges a person that he/she belongs to old age, there is no such clear indicator available to the individual. Each individual has different trigger point after which he or she feels that he is physiologically and functionally old enough. This trigger point can be before or after 60 years of age. India lacks behind in it as there is absence of formal awareness programs that should prepare them for old age. This problem of preparedness can only be prevented. An initiative to spread awareness can be started with in the work place where Human Resource department can take an active role in preparing employees to face retirement and facing old age issues. For those who work in unorganized sector or self-employed this work or awareness generation can be done by government departments or NGOs.

Housing Related Problems: Housing for elderly should be suitable not only to the living pattern which they have established in optimum health, but also to conditions of failing health and illness. Majority of housing that is there for elderly may be found not adequate and not suitable to their needs. The sizeable populations of elderly widows and elderly males have been facing problem of shortage of peaceful place to live in. With age a common complaint of many elderly is the feeling of loneliness and sense of being isolated. In most case isolation is imposed purposefully by the families or communities where the old age people live in. Changing lifestyles and values, job culture, various means of distractions like internet, television, societal shift such as nuclear family structures and redefined priorities have led to increased neglect of the elderly by families or communities, and with this isolation comes in. With it the problem of housing rises again. It is not only terrible thing but also it leads to detrimental quality of life. It is important to address this issue by making the elderly feel included in the things going around them.

Health Problems: During the course of old age metabolism processes slows down. People became weak both physically and mentally. They are more prone to sickness, diseases, syndromes, etc. The immunity of a person is lowered. Older people are mostly vulnerable to non-communicable diseases. Reducing health due to increasing age is complicated by non-availability to good quality, age-sensitive, health care for a large proportion of older persons in the country. In addition to this poor accessibility and reach, lack of information and knowledge in combination with high costs of disease management makes old age care beyond the reach of older persons, especially those who are poor and disadvantaged. Few diseases which are common with advancing age obesity, diabetes, greying of hair color, lessened hearing, wrinkling of skin, liver spots on the skin, agility and slower reaction times, reduced ability to clear thinking, diminished eyesight, difficulty recalling memories, weakness to bone diseases such as osteoarthritis.

Psychological Problems: With onset of old age mindset also changes. First of them is fear which is faced by both rational and irrational elderly. Idleness is other in which old age person is made to believe in that he or she is not physically productive or useful and with it he or she can't do much meaningful in his or her life. It occurs due to infused inactivity, lack of personal goals, and withdrawal from responsibilities. This has a huge negative emotional

impact on person. Last one being the lowered self-esteem. It includes neglect; reduction in responsibility, decrease in value, deteriorating worth, and isolation.

Problem of Elder Abuse: Elder abuse is defined as any ill treatment to an older person. Around 81 percent of the elders face the verbal abuse problem, 53 percent of them face neglect, 37 percent face material abuse and 23 percent face physical abuse. In abuse person is usually harmed by a person who is the part of family or closed to the person. As elderly are relatively weak, they are prone to physical abuse. They are abused financially, emotionally, and mentally as well for various reasons and in various ways.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The best form of protection from problems of elders is to prevent them. This should be carried out through awareness generation in families and in the communities. Elders can be motivated and trained to work on productive activities that would be useful to them or benefit their communities or families. This will enable elders to keep boredom away from them and will strengthen them mentally. Recreational activities are to be promoted at little or no additional cost. Motivating them to do certain work utilizing their skills is far more challenging task so it requires dedicated person that are determined to work with them in their environment. Restoring self-confidence is also a difficult task as one has to identify and address the cause and remove it. The cost of health treatment has to be addressed so that no person is denied necessary health care for financial reasons. Rehabilitation, community or home based disability support and end-of-life care should also be provided where needed, in a holistic manner, to effectively address the issue to failing health among the elderly. For all this to happen government intervention is very much important along with high-level social organizations. Holistic approach to address the issue of social problems of elders is need of the hour.

CONCLUSION

The elderly were out of the work force, partially or totally dependent on others, and suffering from health problems with a sense of neglect by their family members. There is a growing need for interventions to ensure the health of this vulnerable group and to create a policy to meet the care and needs of the disabled elderly. The benefits of government's various social welfare schemes are there but the numbers who are benefitted by it are insignificant when compared to the very high size of their population and the growth rate among them. With rapid industrialization and urbanization in addition to rapid decline of social order it is becoming a critical area that needed a more concrete intervention. As far as India is concerned, social security schemes should be coupled with anti-poverty programmes. With continuous increase in aged population there will always be a social change and economic transformation. With this view an all-round approach to address elderly population taking social, economic and cultural changes into consideration is needed to effectively solve the emerging problems of the elderly.

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