

## Introduction

Ageing of an individual is conceived as a perpetual process associated with the passage of time. Various studies on ageing suggest that advances in technology and modernization have resulted in the increase of life expectancy and decline in the birth rates of people. Because of this, the twenty first century may be called as the "Era of Population Ageing". This situation has dramatically also given rise to the various issues confronting the elderly, making process of ageing as a challenge before the human society considering its impact on the individuals, community, family and society at large.

In general, family is the most vital non-formal social security for the elderly and most emotionally satisfying place to live in their later life. But owing to the modification and change of the family structure from joint family system to nuclear family, at both rural and urban levels, the responsibility and care for the elderly has reduced. Elders were better adjusted to the joint structure of the extended family in the past, with extended kins taking care and giving support. But, in present time, due to lack of such caring system, taking care of the elderly has become a serious problem (Bose & Shankardass 2004).

Currently factors like urbanisation, education, changing values, better employment opportunities etc. have altered the traditional roles of elderly in the society and in the family. Moreover, one also witness that, many younger person are immigrating to other cities and to countries for better employment, leaving their aged parents behind, resulting in isolation, loneliness and neglect of the elderly. Hence lack of personal care leads to constant search for new forms of care. A new trend is visible, where elders are increasingly moving into their own age cohorts in old age homes in search of care and needed support.

## Old Age Homes as an Alternative Form of Care

Currently protection and care of elderly is becoming a serious concern. As a result, of the undermined patterns of family care and changing value system, provision for the care of elderly is increasingly being passed to the domain of institutionalised caring. Though the concept of old age home is still new to the Indian society but the roles of such institutions towards elderly is becoming significant (Shankardass 2000).

Among all the services available to elderly, it is the old age homes that are mushrooming more than services like day care centers, foster adult care center, counseling, help line centers, night shelters etc. One finds a boom in emergence of old age homes especially in cities, as an alternative system of caregiver to the old. Majority of elderly who do not have any security or are widowed or destitute view these old age homes as their hope of getting security of social and familial environment. There is a large proportion of economically and physically fit elderly find old age home is as a last resort for emotional, psychological and physical care and support.

Citing upon the importance of old age homes, Rani (2001) also argues that in face of lack of primary family care, there are numerous institutions that take care of the old, managed by government, voluntary organisations and Christian missionaries. She opines that though home for the elderly are not in consonance with our culture and background, nevertheless there are good number of elderly who need them, to provide a wide range of services such as residential care, day care, geriatric care, medical care, recreation etc. Many of such homes are urban based, catering only to small segments of total elderly population. Increasing number of old age homes, in both government and private sector have drawn attention to the fact of adequate and appropriate facilities in these homes.

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# Old Age Homes: New Face of Old Age Care in India

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As a part of understanding situation of elderly in changing scenario, the present paper attempts to look at two major issues related to the elders. Firstly, it highlights some difficulties that elders face in their later years and prompt them to move to old age homes. Secondly, since old age homes are taking up the role of family in providing care and help to the elders and are becoming significant to many people, this paper also discusses the forms and functioning of such old age homes especially in terms of the services they provide.

### Methodology

An exploratory study was conducted with elders living in old age homes in and around the twin cities of Secunderabad-Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh. The study also extended its understanding on few selected old age homes in order to have an insight on their form and functioning. The homes surveyed were selected from the list provided by Hyderabad office of Help Age India, an organization working for the well being of senior citizens all over the country. Among the forty two listed old age homes fourteen old age homes (two government aided and twelve private) were selected and seventy five elderly residents among them belonging to the age group of sixty and above were interviewed.

There were two sets of questionnaires, one for the organisation (old age home) and one for the elderly respondents. The questionnaires consisted, both open ended and close ended questions. They were structured into several sections such as questionnaire for the residents aimed at their personal profile, their economic status, health status, family relationship, their living arrangement and so on.

The questionnaire for the organisation looked at their forms and functioning and kind of help, support and services they were providing to the elderly. The questionnaires for the residents were administered and filled in both ways, some respondents who knew English (20) filled and completed the questionnaire themselves and for others (55) it was filled and completed by the

researcher in the form of interview schedule in the field area.

### Objectives

- a) The objective underlying the study was to map out the old age home scenario in the twin cities.
- b) To identify the reasons or factors that determines them to stay in old age home. With this an attempt were also made to analyze the organisational functioning of the home.

### Characteristics of the Sample

All the interviewed elderly respondents, except five, belonged to Andhra Pradesh. Though, they lived in rural areas; but, before joining their respective homes they stayed in the twin city with their children for some time, ranging from few months to few weeks. All the elders were Telugu speaking with some exceptions of those who were able to speak English and Hindi too.

Compared to others, people without their spouses were more in number. There were also few cases (nine), where couples were staying together in the old age home. Further, one or two children of forty one interviewed elders were staying in the city itself and children of respondents were staying abroad.

In most of the old age homes, there were more females than males. Many of the interviewed elders were not financially secure and the expenses for staying in the old age homes were provided either by their children or by other relatives. Forty-eight elderly (61%) from the sample were widowed, nineteen were married (thirteen males and six females), eight had never married (three males and five females) and in two cases elderly were separated from their spouses. In the present study married men outnumbered women. There was predominance of widows over the widowers (eighteen widowers and twenty eight widows).

The educational status of the elderly respondents show that it was only eleven percent (eight) of them were illiterate. A maximum number (twenty) i.e. around

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twenty seven percent of elderly people had studied till graduation. Around thirteen percent (ten in numbers) of them reported to have done post-graduation or diploma like nursing, accounting, photography etc.

It was only about five percent (four in numbers) who knew only the local language i.e. Telugu. Hence in the criteria of education, literacy level of the elderly were observed to be average for both men and women; as most of the respondents were educated and could read and write the spoken language, even if they did not have any formal education.

### Major Findings and Suggestions

The major problem confronted by elderly was economic insecurity. The economic situation declines in old are due to inability to work or retirement. In the present study, less than 50% (thirty five) respondents were economically secure as they were receiving pensions and economically independent. The other forty respondents were not receiving any kind of pension (as they were agricultural worker or were in private jobs). Also in comparison to males, more females were economically deprived. There were only fourteen females who were pensioners and out of them six females were getting family pension and others receiving it in honor of their earlier work.

Thirty-five respondents who were getting pensions also included five who are getting social pension of Rs.200 per month. The pension amount ranged from Rs.1,000 to more than Rs10,000. But, there were few people who were doing volunteer work for their old age home. For instance one of the respondents was working as a teacher in a school run by the old age home. Another female respondent was voluntarily working as administrative assistant. There were some other respondents too who were working for the home in one way or other. However, majority of them, both male and female, in the current study stated that because they did not have any economic security, they were financially dependent on their children and kin.

Economic dependence was a main reason

for some of the people to join an old age home. Many elderly were unaware of government scheme for social pension. The amount of old age pension was considered minimal when compared with increasing cost of living. Many of them demanded that the pension amount should be increased.

Health status is also an important issue, affecting situation and quality life of elderly. In the study, forty-six elderly reported to be suffering from some kind of health problem, of which twenty-seven were females. Only twenty-nine elderly stated that they are not suffering from any kind of major health problem. The common health problems reported by them included blood pressure, rheumatism and joint pains, diabetes, asthma, heart disease, hearing problem, paralysis etc. It is observed from the study, that there were some elderly who had shifted to old age homes for the sake of medical care. Though it is not sufficient; but, still better, as they had a constant medical checkup and medication facility. Thus, to tackle this problem, more health planning and more appropriate policies considering older patients as partners in care are required.

The study found some major reasons to chose the old age home. In brief, reasons (Table I) reported by the respondent included: lack of personal care, in some cases financial constraints and incapacity of the family members also made them choose old age home. constant need for medical attention also made some elderly join the home. Four elderly came to the old age home in search of shelter and food. Peaceful and spiritual environment of some old age home, and independent living even in their old days also encouraged some elderly to join these homes. This showed that for older people, the importance of old age home increased due to diminishing care available to them in the family and other related factors. The responsibility and care of elders in the family has also undergone change, due it increasing number of working couples. This also leads to less interaction with children there by making elders isolated and neglected. There were cases in the

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**Major Health Sufferings of the Elderly**

Health Problems	Males	Females	Total
No problem	15	14	29
Diabetes	1	3	4
Paralysis	1	-	1
Asthma	3	1	4
Heart problem	1	3	4
Blood Pressure	2	5	7
Joint pains	2	2	4
Hearing problem	-	1	1
Blindness	-	2	2
Speech defect	-	1	1
More than two health problems mentioned above	7	6	13
Other	3	2	5

The study also revealed that many elderly living in old age homes, had children on home they were dependent, but missed contact with them.

**Reasons Reported by Elders for Moving to Old Age Homes.**

Reasons	Males	Females	Total
No caregivers	21	24	45
Due to health problems	2	3	5
Adjustment problem	2	1	3
Tension in family	1	3	4
No home and shelter	2	2	4
Do not want to be dependent	3	4	7
For peace and spiritual environment	4	3	7

study, where the elderly were living in old age home, despite having at least one child living in Hyderabad city.

The study also revealed that many elderly living in old age homes, had children on whom they were dependent, but minimal contact with them. It was seen that frequency of phone calls which they received or made were limited to once or twice a month. Even meeting with each other was monthly or sometimes once in two or three months. Their interaction depended more on the needs, payments etc. Many elders reported that they did not visit the children regularly and met them only during some festivals/occasion or for major medical treatment.

In such circumstances, elders chose old age homes, where they would meet like-minded people and where they could have much better social interaction. Most of the respondents were happy to be in the old age home as they were able to interact with people from their own generation.

**Paid & Free Old Age Homes**

There are two kinds of old age homes in the city; paid & free. The choice depended on their economic status. In comparison to free homes in Hyderabad, there are more paid homes. By observing the fourteen homes for the study and data collected from them, it could be concluded that, the homes differ in many aspects. There was difference between free and paid homes, even within paid homes. It was found that all the surveyed homes were open to both males and females, except one which admitted only female elderly. Most of the homes were of secular orientation and also did not have caste bias.

As far as funds for running old age home were concerned, it are observed that only one home, was supported by the central government, and was a free facility. There was another free home, which also got financial support from state and central government ; charged one time initial admission fee of Rs.300. Other homes

were operating mainly through the fees and charity or donation. Five homes were running on charity and monthly fees of resident, two homes on charity, residents' fees and NGO's help.

The sample old age homes, no doubt had motive to help and support elderly by providing different facilities such as food, shelter and care; but, it was found that, these homes differed from each other in many ways. The kind of environment and services provided to elders in free homes i.e. government aided homes were quite different from the paid homes. The location and building of old age home, furnishings food, entertainment facility, etc. differed in free and paid homes. In the study, two free homes in the sample were quite different from each other in terms of provisions available to them. In one home, all residents were staying in a single big hall and were provided with minimum furnishings. Along with that, they had to help in whatever way they could for managing the home. However the free home was much better, and had better services for the elderly.

Similarly, various paid homes, which were surveyed for the elderly, differ from each other in various aspects in terms of the facilities they were providing. It was found that, monthly payment in some homes was more than the other homes; based on the provision of better facilities to elderly. In one paid home, where residents were staying in a private two storey flat, they paid Rs2,500 monthly. This home was providing them only food and shelter. In comparison to this home, other paid homes were much better and charging less for their services. Another home charged Rs.1,500 to 3,000 per month depending on kind of lodging arrangement. In this home the admission was permitted only if elderly had given some amount (Rs.30,000 to 50,000) as a deposit. Thus, various old age homes of different class and nature were found. Some of them providing elderly better care with better facilities; whereas others were giving them just the basic minimum.

Since elderly spend most of their time within the premises of old age homes, so there were some homes which provided facility of indoor games to elderly, like

carrom board, ludo, chess etc. Further there were only five homes which sometimes took elderly for picnics or outings to some parks or to some religious place or *ashrams*. Television in some homes was also another source of entertainment for the residents along with a couple of newspapers both English and Telugu. Some of the homes also had provision of old magazines and books. However, in one home, television was the only source of entertainment for the elderly and newspapers or books had to be purchased by the residents.

It was observed that among various reasons medical aid was one reason for staying in home. In the sample homes, medical doctor/s paid visit periodically to treat and advise the elderly. In five homes, doctor came weekly for checkup; in three homes fortnightly and in other three, doctor came everyday. In two homes, one doctor visited everyday and one fortnightly and one weekly.

Though in the old age homes medical care was provided, but it was seen that in all the homes whether free or paid, elderly were expected to make their own arrangements for their other major medical requirements like operations, surgery and similar medical treatment. Most of the homes kept stock of medicines that were usually required for common problems. For other medicines prescribed to the elderly by their doctors, residents had to make their own arrangements. Thus, it could be stated that medical help available to them in homes was limited.

The functioning of old age homes and the facilities available highlighted the distinction between different classes of old age homes and different categories/class status of elderly. They differed in kinds of services they provided to the elderly. Among the paid homes, it was observed that, more the facilities, more costly was the old age homes. As for the low income group of elderly there were free or less expensive homes. There were homes which charged Rs.2,000 to 2,500 per month allowing middle class elderly to get admission, whereas the better ones, which catered to the need of more well off elderly charged much more.

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The elders are seeing old age homes as an alternative to care in the context of lack of family care. Among such elders, on the one hand we have elders from the upper class staying in paid homes enjoying all kinds of facilities and active life. On the other hand, is a vast majority of people who are not able to live a decent life due to lack of resources hence staying in homes which are less expensive and comfortable (low paid or free homes). Looking at the trend, one could safely conclude that the demand for institutions like old age home could increase in the future.

### Conclusion

Lack of care, emotional attachment in the family made many elderly look at other source of care. Next to family care, elders are considering old age homes as better alternative. So, with their services and facilities, many elderly find these homes as next best solution for spending their later

years. However, till now they are more common in urban areas; but, one can not ignore the fact that these homes will also become the part and parcel of the elderly life in rural areas in coming years. Also though these homes have become a necessity, yet many elderly can not make use of such homes, they cannot afford such costly homes.

Considering the growth and nature of old age homes, we should change our perspective. Now Old Age Home does not mean the homes meant for destitute and for those who are abused by the family; but, now old age homes for many have become more as a place where one can go and spend last stages of their life in peace. They have taken the root in a more prosperous way identifying themselves more as senior citizens residence, resorts, enclaves, societies etc. Most importantly, these homes are providing care and elderly resident are happy in these homes.

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