

Elderly and Old Age Homes in Kerala

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Introduction

Kerala state India is, perhaps, passing through the last stage of demographic transition. As per the latest estimates (IIPS and ORC Macro, 2001), life expectancy at birth is around 74. The below replacement level fertility and high life expectancy have resulted, inevitably, in having the highest proportion of aged population in the country. As per estimates, Kerala has 11 per cent of population above 60 years. This has resulted in the fast growth of small sized nuclear families during the last two decades. Added to this, the state has been and continues to be a male dominated net out-migrating area. These demographic factors underscore the need for old age care including institutional care. Kerala has the largest number of old age homes (OAH) among the states of India, although the state's population share is only 3.4 per cent. However, studies on various aspects of old age homes in Kerala are indeed scanty.

With this backdrop, the objectives of the work were to study the socio-demographic characteristics of the inmates of old age homes in Trivandrum district, Kerala, the reasons why the inmates opted/forced to live there and the inmates' level of satisfaction about the OAHs and its determinants. The study also identified the major factors that determine the willingness of the inmates for going back to their relatives.

Methodology

One hundred and fifty seven inmates from eight randomly selected old age homes (OAH) from Thiruvananthapuram district constituted the subjects for the study. The main tool used for data collection was a semi-structured interview schedule, which was designed to collect information on various aspects of inmates, their children and their relatives. Information regarding the infrastructure facilities, availability of funds, availability of doctors etc. was also collected from the authorities of old age homes using an interview guide. The collected data was analyzed using various bi-variate and multivariate statistical techniques including logistic regression modelling for delineating various factors influencing the satisfaction of the older inmates' life in the Old Age Homes.

Results & Discussion

The results of the analysis are presented under four headings; (1) the socio-demographic characteristics of the inmates, (2) the reason(s) for joining the Old Age Homes (3) the factors determining the satisfaction of the inmates' life in the Old Age Homes and (4) the factors determining the inmates' willingness to go back to their relatives.

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Socio-demographic characteristics of the inmates

Table-I shows the characteristics of the inmates interviewed. Majority (58 per cent) of the inmates were females. More than half of the sample (59 per cent) comprised young old (60 - 75 years). However, 13 percent were below age 60 and only one person was found above 90. Sixty six percent of inmates had joined the Old Age Homes voluntarily. Majority of this group had come to know about Old Age Homes through personal contact. Among those who did not join voluntarily, about 30 percent were brought in by their children.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of the Aged

	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Age (in years)			
<60	7 (10.3)	14(15.7)	21(13.4)
60-69	23 (38.8)	32(36.0)	55(35.0)
70-79	24 (35.3)	34(38.0)	58(37.0)
80+	14 (20.6)	9(10.1)	23(14.6)
Educational (Years of schooling)			
Illiterate	24 (35.3)	40(44.9)	64(40.8)
5-9	24(35.3)	31(34.7)	55(35.0)
10+	20(29.4)	18(20.2)	38(24.2)
Marital Status			
Single	29(42.6)	18(20.2)	47(29.4)
Currently married*	6(8.8)	6(6.7)	12(7.6)
Widowed	14(20.6)	45(50.7)	59(37.6)
Divorced	0(0.0)	2(2.2)	2(1.3)
Separated	18(26.5)	4(4.5)	22(14.0)
Occupation before Joining OAH			
Nil	6(8.8)	45(50.6)	51(32.5)
Coolie	28(41.2)	21(23.6)	49(31.2)
Lower middle level	12(17.6)	9(10.1)	21(13.4)
Upper Middle level	12(17.6)	11(12.3)	23(14.6)
Executive	10(14.8)	3(3.4)	13(8.3)
With whom they lived before joining OAH			
Partner	6(8.8)	9(10.1)	15(9.6)
Son/ Daughter	22(32.4)	34(38.2)	56(35.7)
Brother/ Sister	12(17.5)	23(25.8)	35(22.3)
S/D-in-law	1(1.5)	2(2.2)	3(1.9)
Other Relatives	7(10.3)	7(7.9)	14(8.9)
Others	5(7.4)	7(7.9)	12(7.6)
Alone	15(22.1)	7(7.9)	22(14)
Total	68(100)	89(100)	157(100)

*Currently married couples are those who live together in Old Age Homes

About 41 per cent of the inmates were illiterate or those having less than 5 years of schooling. Only 20 percent of the females had more than 10 years of schooling. This shows an over representation of illiterate and less educated persons among the inmates. As per 2001 census results, illiteracy rate in Kerala is only 9.08 percent. Among males, 43 percent were never married while 8.8 percent had their partners with them in the Old Age Homes. Majority of the respondents were not willing to do any job even if they got one. Only a small portion (3 per cent) was still working.

Further, 21 percent of the males and 51 percent of the females were widowed. Before joining the Old Age Homes, 51 percent of the females and 8.8 percent of the males had no occupation. More than one third (36 percent) of the inmates had lived with their son or daughter before reaching the Old Age Homes.

Reasons for Joining the Old Age Homes

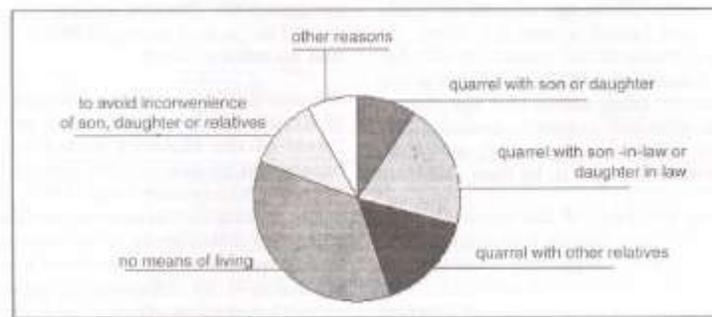
Old age homes are, generally, the last resort for the aged. In the absence of joint family system, nuclearisation of families with one or two children, the old parents are left no other alternative than joining the old age homes. According to a study conducted in the Old Age Homes of Maharashtra (Dandekar, 1996), almost 64 per cent of the inmates had nobody to take care of them, and among them 45 per cent had no money either.

Another study among the Old Age Homes of Kerala (Rajan, 2000) also mentions "Most of the inmates ended up there because of no one to take care at home". Further, Soneja and Tyagi (1999) in their study among five economic categories in rural and urban areas of the metropolis of Delhi concluded, "Old Age Homes were not encouraged by different social classes except lower class where more than half of the elderly sought Old Age Homes as an alternative." This also supports our view that economic consideration is one of the main reasons for choosing Old Age Homes. Furthermore, even if there is family to support, the domestic environment and poor inter-personal relationships also push the aged to old age homes.

The majority of the inmates who participated in this survey joined the Old Age Homes because of no means of living or they had no body to look after. The summarized results are shown in Figure-I.

About 10 percent of the inmates were brought to the Old Age Homes due to their quarrel with sons, daughters or other relatives. Quarrel with son-in-law or daughter-in-law was the main reason for 20 percent of the inmates. 10% of inmates voluntarily moved to Old Age Homes to avoid inconveniences to their children or relatives. If these are categorized as the main reasons under the heading 'Family Problems', the total figure comes to 41 percent. Thus, it is clear that the proportion of inmates who arrived due to family problems was higher than that of those who arrived due to economic reasons.

Figure I Main Reason For Joining the Old Age Homes



The majority of those who had quarrels with son-in-law and daughter-in-law were illiterate. Thus, education plays an important role in this. There is also a gender differential in this as females appear to have felt this more than their counterparts.

Majority (72 percent) of those who had no body to look after were either unemployed or coolies before joining the Old Age Homes. At the same time, inmates who had some white-collar jobs constituted only 8 percent of the sample. About three fourth in this group had joined Old Age Homes due to spiritual reasons and contentment in Old Age Homes' atmosphere. It is interesting to see that none of the currently married couple had joined the Old Age Homes due to family problems other than strained interpersonal relationships with in-laws. Another important fact is that the majority of those who stated their reason for coming as no means of living were not at all willing to do possible jobs even if they got one.

Marital Status was yet another important factor leading the aged to the Old Age Homes. The proportion of never married and widowed constituted 92 percent of the sample. Having children was yet another factor. About half of the inmates had no children at all.

Satisfaction of the inmates

Overall contentment or satisfaction on the style of life in old age homes is a direct indicator of healthful living. Otherwise, it can definitely lead to psychosomatic illness that restricts the quality of life of the inmates. Based on a study conducted in the Old Age Homes of Maharashtra, (Dandekar, 1996) majority (81 per cent) of the inmates were fully satisfied with the living conditions of the Old Age Homes. Again, Rajan (2000) also found that only 1% reported that the environment in the Old Age Homes of Kerala was bad. It may be recalled, in that study that majority of the inmates had either no offspring or they were separated from their offspring. In this study, only 63 percent of the inmates were found to be satisfied with their life in the Old Age Homes. Since the satisfaction is determined by a host of interrelated factors, a multivariate analysis using logistic regression was attempted to find out the effect of various factors.

In the logistic regression model, the coefficient for a variable (say i) measures the increase or decrease in the log of the odds of the event of interest occurring for every one unit increase in the i^{th} variable. Then if p is the probability of satisfaction, the event

of interest in this case, then β_i give the change in the value of $\log(p/(1-p))$ when the explanatory variable increases by one unit. The Odds ratio is interpreted as the proportionate change in the value of the i^{th} predictor variable. The Odds ratio of any category of the variable is estimated by dividing the Odds of the category of the variable by the Odds of satisfaction for the category chosen as the reference category. The Odds ratio for the reference category is 1 by definition.

In order to extract the deterministic factors in life satisfaction in a logic fashion, several logistic regression equations were estimated by considering the different combinations of various factors. The factors showed a tendency to cluster around two groups. The first was the set of general factors, which included both the individual's personal background factors and the present situation.

The second group consists of variables that concentrated on the facilities provided by the Old Age Homes. Therefore to explain the two sets of factors separately, two models were fitted.

The factors considered for the first model were:

- Who spends for their health expenses?
- The quality of food in the Old Age Homes
- The marital status of the inmates
- The educational level of the inmates
- The number of children of the inmates
- The type of Old Age Home (Governmental or Non-Governmental)

Here the variables; education, marital status and number of child were entered as three category variables.

The aim of the second model was to examine the deterministic factors of satisfaction, especially in the light of the facilities provided by the Old Age Homes.

The variables used in this model were:

- The quality of the food
- Whether the Homes took care of the health expenses or not
- Whether the inmates had to take part in the activities in the Homes
- Doctor's visit to the Homes
- Whether the inmates could get visitors and have interactions with family and friends.

Here all the variables were entered as dichotomous variables.

Multivariate Analysis (Model-I)

The summary of the Results for the first model is presented in Table-2.

The inmates were asked about the source from where; they spent money for their health expenses. In some Old Age Homes, this expenditure was met by the Homes themselves while in some others; the inmate had to take care of their health expenditure on their own. Therefore, this variable is classified into two Old Age Home itself and Others. In certain Old Age Homes the authorities said that the medical help was sufficient and all the required medicines were supplied to them. However, all the inmates did not admit this. According to them, they had to buy the medicines from their own savings or with the help of their friends and relatives.

Table-2
Odds ratios of satisfaction for different variables (Model-I)

Variable	β /	Exp(β i)
Disease expenses		
Old Age Homes(r. c) Self & Others	-0.7928	0.4526
Education		
Illiterate & < 5(r . c)		
5-9 years	-0.2459	0.7820
10 or more	0.4042	1.4981
Food		
Good (r . c)		
Bad	1.6553***	0.1910
Marital Status		
Others (r . c)		
Widowed	-1.5991	0.5537
Never married	0.0466	1.0477
No. of Children		
No child (r . c)		
1 or 2 children	-0.0385	0.9622
3 or more children	0.6522**	1.9198
Old Age Homes		
Non- Govt.(r . c)		
Governmental	-1.3917**	0.5224
Religion		
Hindu (r. c)		
Non- Hindu	-0.6494	0.5224
Visitors		
Having Visitors (r. c)		
No visitors	0.1934	1.2134
Constant	6.0239	

** : P < 0.05 for two tailed test

*** : P < 0.001 for two tailed test

r . c : Reference Category

These inmates were also grouped along with those who took care of their health expenses by themselves. In the logistic regression analysis, this variable played a significant role in the satisfaction of the inmates. Those persons whose health expenses were borne out by the Home itself were considered as the reference category. The second category included those persons who carried out the same by their savings or with the help from their friends / relatives and those persons who said that no treatment was required. It was found that the first category derived more satisfaction than the second, i.e. those persons whose disease expenses were carried out by the Old Age Home itself were more satisfied than the others.

It was found that level of education played no significant role as far as the satisfaction of the inmates was concerned. The touching experiences of life and the present situation was more important for the satisfaction than the educational status they achieved long ago.

The quality of food served in the OAHs was found to be a consistently strong and significant predictor of the satisfaction of the inmates. Here, those who had a good opinion about the quality of food were taken as the reference category. It was found that those who had unfavourable opinion were less satisfied (81percent) compared to the reference category. Marital status was yet another significant predictor of satisfaction. In this study, the inmates were classified into three categories according to their marital status as: those who never married the widowed and the others. 'Others' consisting of divorced, separated and abandoned persons were taken as the reference category. Results revealed that the widowed inmates were comparatively less satisfied (45 percent) than the reference category. Also the 'never married persons' felt more satisfied than the others.

The inmates were also classified according to their number of children. The first category consisted of those with no children, taken as the reference category. The other categories were those with one or two living children and those with three or more children. The multivariate analysis shows that the inmates with three or children were more satisfied (91 %) than those who have no children. No significant relationship however, was observed between those with two children and the level of satisfaction.

A significant relationship was observed between the type of Old Age Homes and the satisfaction of the inmates. The Old Age Homes were categorized into two as governmental and non-governmental/ private old age homes. It was found that the inmates of the Government run Old Age Homes were much less satisfied (by 76 percent) as compared with Nongovernmental Old Age Homes. This may be due to the vast difference in the facilities provided by the two types of Old Age Homes.

The total sample was grouped according to the religion as Hindus and Non-Hindus wherein the Hindus were considered as the reference category. However, no significant relationship was observed between satisfaction and religion. This may be due to the fact that there was no discrimination observed in the Old Age Homes in terms of religion.

However; it may be noted that in some Old Age Homes run by the Christian Organizations, the admission was restricted to Christians only.

No significant relationship was found between the number of visitors for an inmate and satisfaction. Though half of the inmates had visitors, most of them came to meet them rarely and that may be the same reason why this factor did not affect the satisfaction of the inmates.

Multivariate analysis (Model II)

The results of the second model are summarized in Table 3. The expenditure for medical care played an important role in the satisfaction of the inmates.

Table -3
The Odds ratios of satisfaction by various factors (model II)

Variable	β_i	Exp (β_i)
Health Expenses Old Age Homes (r. c) Self/ No treatment	-0.6927**	0.5002
Quality of food Good (r. c) No	-1.5301***	0.2165
Assisting or not in the Activities of OAH Yes (r. c) No	-0.0515	0.9498
Whether the inmate had visitor or not Yes (r. c) No	-0.2742	0.7602
Doctor's visit Sufficient Insufficient	-1.0357**	0.3550
Constant	5.5618	

** : P< 0.05 for two tailed test

*** : P<0.001 for two tailed test

r. c : reference category

Similar to the first model, it was found that the persons whose medical care was taken care by Old Age Homes itself were more satisfied than those whose medical expenditure was borne by them or who needed no treatment in the Old Age Homes (49%).

The role played by the quality of food on satisfaction was clear from the first model itself. In the second model as well, it was observed that those inmates with negative opinion about food were found to be less satisfied (99%) than others. Thus, it is clear

that if the facilities provided by the Old Age Homes are taken into account, the quality of food was the most significant predictor of satisfaction of the elderly.

There was no significant relationship found between satisfaction and whether the inmates were assisting or not in the day to day activities of the Old Age Homes. Visitors to an inmate also had no effect on the satisfaction of the inmates.

In summary it was observed that, among the facilities provided by the Old Age Homes, the health expenditure and quality of food were found to be the highly significant factors for the satisfaction of the aged people. The results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4
The odds ratios of the willingness to leave the Old Age Homes by different variables

Variable	β_i	Exp (β_i)
Reason		
Problems with son daughter, and partner (r. c)		
No body to look after	0.05099**	1.6652
Other reasons	-0.5623**	0.5699
Age		
< 75 (r. c)		
75+	-0.7905	0.4536
Satisfaction		
Not Satisfied (r. c)		
Satisfied	-0.3224	0.7244
Years spend		
Less Than 2 years (r. c)		
Greater than 2 years	-0.1319	0.8765
Assisting the work		
Yes (r. c)		
No	0.3798	1.4620
Constant	-0.1721	

** : $p < 0.05$ for two tailed test

r. c : Reference category

An attempt was also made to rank the Old Age Homes according to the level of inmates' satisfaction. The government run Old Age Home was found to be placed in the last position with only 51 percent satisfied inmates. However the non-governmental Old Age Homes attained an average of 84 percent satisfied inmates.

Willingness to go back to the relatives

Since the willingness to go back is determined by several factors, multivariate analysis was preferred and a logistic regression model was fitted for the data. Factors considered here were: the reason for coming to Old Age Homes, age of the inmate,

satisfaction of the inmate, years spends in the Homes, whether they assisted in the works of the Homes.

The reasons for moving into Old Age Homes were classified into three. The first category was the problem with their offspring and partner, taken as reference category. The second category was of those who had nobody to look after or no means of living. The third group was 'other reasons'-quarrel with relatives, neighbours, inclined towards loneliness without spiritualism. It was found that the reasons for moving to OAHs and the willingness to go back had a significant relationship. A remarkable observation was that those inmates who had nobody to look after or had no means of living showed higher interest to return to their own homes. The 'other' category was found to be less willing to go back.

Another significant predictor of the willingness to go back to their homes was age. The inmates less than 75 years of age were taken as reference category while those above age 75 were included in the second category. It was observed that the old and very old persons were seldom willing to go back, perhaps due to their psychological adjustment with the settings at the Old Age Homes.

The willingness to go back and the level of satisfaction at OAHs do not show a significant relationship, i.e., the willingness to go back to their homes was not influenced by the satisfaction of the inmates. Furthermore, the decision to go back did not have any significant relationship with either the years spent in Old Age Homes or the way they spent time in Old Age Homes.

Summary and Conclusion

An attempt was made to study the relevance and usefulness of old age homes in Kerala, with the objective to find out the socio-demographic characteristics of the inmates, the factors that led them to join OAH and their level of satisfaction about the conditions and life in the Homes

Eight old age homes were randomly selected from Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala and 157 inmates constituted the subjects for the study. Information regarding the infrastructure facilities, availability of funds, availability of doctors etc. were also collected from the authorities of old age homes using an interview guide. The collected data were analyzed using bivariate and multivariate statistical techniques including logistic regression modelling.

Major findings revealed that the majority of the inmates were females in the age group 60-75 years. Sixty six percent of inmates joined the Old Age Homes voluntarily. About 41 per cent of the inmates were illiterate and those having less than 5 years of schooling. Among males, 43 percent were never married while 9 percent had their partners with them in the Old Age Homes. Further, 21 percent of the males and 51 percent of the females were widowed.

The majority joined the Old Age Homes due to family problems. Absence of caregivers emerged only as the second most important reason for moving to Old Age Homes. The number of children and marital status were two main factors, leading to orphaned status in the old age. About half of the elderly in Old Age Homes had no children.

The multivariate analysis of the determinants of satisfaction of the inmates showed that, the health expenses, quality of food, and the type of Old Age Homes (Govt. or Non-Govt.) were significant predictors of satisfaction with the quality of food being the most significant factor. Logistic regression model showed that among the facilities provided by the Old Age Homes, the health expenses and quality of food were the prime factors of satisfaction of the inmates.

The Logistic Regression Model fitted for the inmates' willingness to go back to their homes showed that the reason for coming to Old Age Homes i.e. familial problems and the age were the only significant predictors of one's decision regarding going back to their homes.

Whatever steps the government may take, it would succeed only if the societal attitude towards the aged is changed. For this purpose, the educational system needs to be restructured and revamped as it determines the attitudes of younger generations. Introducing license system to run Old Age Homes may be in the right direction.

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