

Rising South Indian elderly-issues & challenges

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Abstract

Many developing nations like India are witnessing growth of elderly population. In India mainly in South India there is a phenomenal increase in the aged population when compared to the Indian average. It will be a big challenge to support the increasing aged population unless the government, NGO's, Medical professionals and Social workers take appropriate action at the right time. The government needs to carry out certain work to make the life of the senior citizens a better one. Medical professionals need to identify the emerging needs of the elderly and get prepared to address the medical needs of them. NGO's and Social workers need to work and lobby to bring policy changes regarding the elderly. Well coordinated efforts will help in making the lives of senior citizens a better one.

Keywords: NGO's, Elderly population

Introduction

Elderly population has risen considerably in this decade all across the globe. India too has witnessed a surge in the elderly population since Independence. The decline in infant mortality rate and improved medical services has led to the considerable increase in the elderly population mainly due to lower birth rate (decline) and lower death rate (decline) i.e. Lower fertility and lower mortality rates. On the whole the elderly population has grown from

Rise in Elderly Population

In India that too particularly in the four southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamilnadu the percentage of the aged people is on the rise when compared to the Indian average of 8.0% (2011) The averages of the four southern states are Andhra Pradesh 8.8% Karnataka 8.4% Kerala 12.6% and Tamilnadu 10.5% which is clearly well above the Indian average. There are so many implications that lie behind the rise of elderly population which needs to be studied.

Because of the steep rise in the elderly population the need for improving the facilities for them arises. Government and other voluntary agencies working for them should try to address their needs in a more scientific way rather than with a common man approach. There is a huge gap in the services offered to the senior citizens and services utilized by them. This is the area of concern which needs to be addressed.

Total Indian Population and the Elderly population (in millions) 1950-2025

| Group | 1951 | 1991 | 2001 | 2021 |
|---------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| Total | 356.0 | 827.2 | 964.1 | 1228.8 |
| 60+ | 20.1 | 60.5 | 81.4 | 177.5 |
| percent | 5.62 | 7.31 | 8.44 | 14.45 |

Source: Sharma, S.P.& Xenos, P. Ageing in India: Demographic Background and Analysis (Based on Census Materials. Occasional papers, Census of India, 19997)

Government's role

It is the States responsibility to ensure that elderly get fair treatment in all public places such as transportation, Ration shops, government offices, banks, hospitals and in other places. Health attention to elderly shall be made easily accessible and available. Community based treatment and rehabilitation should be at their reach. Accessing these facilities should not be a problem for the elderly. Elderly friendly ramps and rails shall be constructed and installed in all the places. Indian Railways has already introduced battery cars at the railway stations to help the disabled and the senior citizens and the same may be introduced in places where the elderly have to walk long distances. One area where great attention needed is public transportation where in many elders find it difficult to climb up the stairs in buses for which lift facilities shall be provided as that of foreign countries.

Government can also think of utilizing the services of NSS & NCC volunteers in helping the elderly. There are lakhs of NSS and NCC volunteers present all across the country. Volunteering service to the elderly shall be included in their regular activities so that the youth of our nation get an opportunity to help and serve the senior citizens of our country thus becoming still more responsible towards elders and society at large.

Need for Geriatric Hospitals and Geriatric Medicine Course

Health care needs of elderly persons are different from normal persons. There are lot of health disorders and ailments related to old age such as dementia, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, diabetes, hypertension, cancer, heart and cardiovascular problems, respiratory diseases, liver problems, stroke, Musculoskeletal problems, anemia and bed sores, falling & orthopedic problems and Mental health problems etc. In such a scenario the gravity of the situation should be understood and steps shall be taken to introduce exclusive hospitals for the elderly. Doctors in the under graduation level should be oriented about the illness and requirements for the care of elderly and shall be motivated to focus on geriatric medicine. Government should all give thrust for the geriatric

medicine. Apart from this there are many disabled elderly who need medical attention and care. This is another area where medical attention is very much needed.

NGO's role

Old age care giving services offered to the elderly shall not be general but should be need based. It should be understood that requirements and needs of elderly cannot be generalized and their needs are case specific. Individual care is needed for every case with regard to the elderly. NGO's taking care of elderly or offering services to the older persons should understand that their role is very crucial and in addition should understand that the needs of older persons are individual specific. Special services such as elderly health care, counseling shall be provided by NGO's involving professionals who are very much needed today.

Common care giving or common old age home is always not an answer to the needs and problems of the elderly. NGO's running old age homes need to understand that right from food habits, dietary requirement, physical health issues, mental health issues differ from one person to another. NGO's focus should shift from general care to individual based care for the elderly. NGO's also should try to tap and utilize their expertise of well experienced and knowledgeable senior citizens in a fruitful and meaningful way so that they are also kept occupied and their knowledge is utilized purposefully.

Role of elderly

Senior citizens should always look for places which take care of their individual needs. They should not hesitate to Fight and claim for their rights. It is their responsibility to make judicious judgment regarding old age homes. They should always look for care givers who give options to pull out if the services offered are not satisfactory. They should always opt for legal options which help them to pull out from old age home if not satisfied at any point of time. It is vital to maintain good mental and physical health. Individual attention and care is very vital. Senior citizens can opt to stay along with their friends and relatives so that loneliness will not haunt them.

Role of Social Workers

Social workers should advocate for the rights and privileges of the senior citizens. Social workers should ensure that the old age homes are providing proper facilities to the older citizens staying in old age homes. It should also be monitored that the care givers of the elderly are trained properly and ensure that they are fit enough to take care.

Lobbying with the government is another important task of Social workers. With the policy makers and the planning body of the government Social workers need to provide relevant details so that decision for the betterment of the elderly will be taken. Social workers should use the Social work methods such as case work, group work for the betterment of the senior citizens. This would help the elders to cope up with the day today challenges faced by them. Psychiatric counselling and Psycho social well being also needs to be taken care by professional social workers working with senior citizens.

Conclusion

In the coming years India is going to witness increase in the elderly population. Already the four southern states have more elderly when compared to the national average. With the

available resources and infrastructure it will become difficult to support the senior citizens. Long term planning regarding the facilities and services to be offered to the older persons is very much needed. Inclusiveness of the elderly in the mainstream of our society is every ones responsibility and our actions shall be in that direction.

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