

Problems of senior citizens in India

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Abstract

Aging is a process where over time an individual experiences a decline in performance, productivity and health. Traditionally, the care of the aged has been the responsibility of the family. But new trends have emerged to transform family structures which has reduced the capacity of this institution to serve as the safety net for the less privileged. The emergence of nuclear family has changed the pattern of life enormously. The institution of family as the shelter for aging is gradually being eroded. 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 India faces many challenges in welfare for its elderly population. This article highlights the problems of aged population living in India.

Keywords: aging, senior citizens, India

Introduction

Senior citizen population is a universal phenomenon. One of the undeniable fact of human life is that the aging process is basically normal. Life is progression from youth to old. Aging is complex process that greatly influences the biological, psychological and sociological functioning of the organism it is normative process and not a fixed dimension of the life cycle. Like all previous life stages, aging consists of series of status passages. A central concept in any discussion ageing is the meaning of age itself. The senior citizens as per the United Nations are referred to as the people of 60 year of age and above. In India also they are described as persons of sixty years and above.

The main problem with the senior citizen in India is poverty. For the majority who works in the subsistence economy, the livelihood of the elderly depends on the vagaries of the weather, and receives no pensions when they retire. This has significance for their quality of life in that they have difficulties in meeting their basic needs (food, shelter, health and transportation). Because of the elderly persons have little or no money; they suffer from malnutrition, leading to depression and mantle confusion. In addition to problems of illiteracy, unemployment, widowhood and disabilities, older women in India also face life-long gender based discrimination, resulting in differential patterns of ageing of men and women.

Demographic transition and its impact on Senior Citizens

The aging of the world population is progressive and rapid. It is unprecedented that is affecting nearly all countries of the world. As long as fertility continuous to fall or remain low and old age mortality keeps on declining, the proportion of senior citizens will continue to increase.

The number of people who turn 60 each year worldwide is nearly 58 million, equivalent to almost two persons every second. In 2012, aged people 60 or over represent to almost 11.5 per cent of our total global population. By 2050 the proportion is projected to nearly double to 22 per cent. By

2050, for the first time there will be more senior citizens than children below age 15.

The Indian senior citizen population is currently the second largest in the world after China. According to Census 2011, senior citizen population is 8.6 per cent of the total population. Between 2001 and 2026, because of decline of fertility, the proportion of population aged less than 15 year is projected to decline from 35.4 per cent, the proportion of middle (15-59 year) and older ages (60 year and above) are set to increases considerably. With the declining fertility, along with increase in the life expectancy, the number of senior citizen in population is expected to increase by more than double from 71 million in 2001 to 173 million in 2026- an increase of their share to total population from 6.9 to 12.4per cent.

Senior citizen population faces a number of problems and adjusts to them varying degrees. These problems range from an absence of secure and sufficient income to support themselves and their ill- health, absence of social security, loss of social role and recognition and the non-availability of opportunities for creative use of free time. The needs and the problems of the senior citizens vary significantly according to their age, socio economic-status, health, living status and other such background characteristics

Social Transition and its impact on Senior Citizens

Indian society is undergoing rapid transformation under the impact of industrialization, urbanization and globalization. Consequently Indian traditional values and institutions are in the process of erosion. With the rapidly increasing number of senior citizens, compound disintegration of joint families and ever increase influence of modernization and new life styles, the care of elderly has emerged as an important issue in India. Providing care for the senior citizen has never been problem in India where a value based joint family system was dominant. However, with growing trends towards nuclear family set-up, increasing education, urbanization and industrialization, the vulnerability of senior citizen is rapidly

increasing. The coping of the younger and senior citizen family members are now being challenged under various circumstances resulting in neglect and abuse of senior citizen in many ways, both within the family and outside.

Problems of Senior Citizens in India

Old age is a natural process. In many countries this phenomena has been considered a serious attention of policy makers of the government. There are a number of older people grows, we need to realize that there are many subsequent serious issues related to the situation. India is facing several challenges in the form of weak economic growth, weak pension system, and null infrastructure for ageing people, and above all lack of political will makes life miserable for the senior citizens in India. Problems of aging usually appear after the age of 65 years. In this Age senior citizens face Medical, Economic, Social and Psychological problems.

Medical Problem

Health problems are supposed to be the major concern of a society as senior citizens are more prone to suffer from ill health than younger age groups. It is often claimed that senior citizens are accompanied by multiply illness and physical ailments. Besides physical illness, the senior citizens are more likely to be the victims of poor mental health. Mental disorders are very much associated with old age. Decline in mental ability makes them dependent. They no longer have trust in their own ability or judgements but still they want to tighten their grip over the younger ones. They want to get involved in all family matters and business issues. Due to generation gap the youngsters do not pay attention to their suggestion and advice. Instead of developing a sympathetic attitude towards the old, they start asserting their rights and power. This may create a feeling of deprivation of their dignity and importance. Thus, health status of senior citizens should occupy a central place in any study of senior citizen population. In most of the primary surveys, the Indian, senior citizen in general and in rural particular are assumed to have some problems like cough, poor eye sight, anaemia and dental problems. There is lack of provision of medical aid, and proper familial care, besides insufficient public health services to meet the health needs of senior citizens.

Failing health due to advancing 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, poor accessibility of health services, lack of information, high costs of disease management make reasonable elder care beyond the reach of senior citizen, especially those who are poor and disadvantage.

Economic Problems

Elderly people face several challenges and one of the most important among those is the problem of financial insecurity. Old age dependency ratio is increasing and it is projected to increase continuously, with higher share from rural areas than in urban areas. The National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) in its 2006 report revealed that a higher percentage of males in rural areas (32 per cent) are found to be financially fully dependent as compared to that in the urban areas (30.1 per cent). Widow, poor and disabled elderly constitute more disadvantaged among elderly population. Elderly women,

especially widows, face many disadvantages, like a substantial gender differential exists in the ownership of property and assets and in role and participation in the family as compared to aged men in both urban and rural India, which consequently affects their access to various basic necessities like food, housing and health. Pension and social security is restricted to those who have worked in the public sector or the organized sector of industry; however, many surveys have shown that even retired elderly people are confronted with the problems of financial insecurity and loneliness.

Retirement from service usually results in loss of income and the pensions that the elderly receive are usually inadequate to meet the cost of living which is always on the rise. With the reduced income they are reversed from the state of "Chief bread winner to a mere dependent" though they spend their provident fund on marriages of children, acquiring new property, education of children and family maintenance. The diagnosis and treatment of their disease created more financial problem for old age. Old age is a period of physical deterioration and social alienation in some cases, loss of spouse, friends, Job, property and physical appearance. In old age physical strength deteriorates, mental stability diminishes, financial power becomes bleak and eye sight suffers a setback. It is a period of disappointment, dejection, disease, repentance and loneliness.

Social Problems

Sociologically, aging marks a form of transition from one set of social roles to another and such roles are difficult. However, in modern society, improved education, rapid technical changes and new forms of organization have often rendered obsolete the knowledge experience and wisdom of senior citizens. Once they retire, elderly people find that their children are not taking advice from them. This realization often results in feeling loss of status, worthlessness and loneliness. If senior citizen is economically depended on children, the problem is likely to become even worse.

Older people suffer social losses greatly with age. Their social life is narrowed down by loss of work associated, death of relatives, friends and spouse and weak health which restricts their participation in social activities. The home becomes the centre of their social life which gets confined to the interpersonal relationship with the family members. Due to loss of most of the social roles they once performed, they are likely to be lonely and isolated severe chronic health problem enable them to become socially isolated which results in loneliness and depression.

Psychological Problems

The common psychological problems that most of the senior citizens experiences are: feeling of powerlessness, feeling of inferiority, depression, uselessness, isolation and reduced competence. With growing age, senior citizens experience various anatomical and psychological changes. These changes bring many psychological, behavioural and attitudinal changes in them. The number of people in old age homes is constantly increasing and also most of the parents are now deciding to live in old age homes rather than living with their children. Nowadays these people are facing the problems like lack of care, emotional support and economic support from the family etc. Our culture recognizes the status of the parents as that of God. A moral duty is put on the children to take

care of their parents. But nowadays what we are observing in our society is that the children are not willing to take care of their parents, they do not want to spend money on them, they are treating their parents as aliens, and they do not want to share an emotional bond with parents.

Housing Problems

Housing for the senior citizens 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, commonly associated with later years of life such as, failing eye sight, hearing, slowing and upsurges, diminishing energy and more acute disabilities, such as blindness, forgetfulness etc. On this pattern, the housing available to majority of the senior citizens may be found inappropriate and unsuitable to their requirement. The sizeable populations of older widows as well as the older males have been facing the problem of "where to live peacefully". 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.

Conclusion

Older persons are considered as most revered members of the society in our country but treated otherwise when it comes to practical behaviour with older people. Old age is a stage of life that every human being ultimately reaches and it is inevitable. In this time people dread old age but what the youth should be aiming is to create a world where people do not fear old age as a phase which they consider an inescapable prison but look forward to it as a phase of vacation where they can enjoy and have their loved ones to care of them after decades of having worked so hard and showered their loved ones with care and love. This aim cannot be achieved through administrative means only this requires the people of the society to understand the severity and urgency of the situation to be made known to the masses. The real solutions are not new laws and provisions, the real solution lies with the people themselves. If they start treating the old aged people as they deserve to be treated with respect and love then this problem will cease to exist.

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