

THE ELDERLY IN OLD AGE HOMES: A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF SELECTED OLD AGE HOMES IN KOLKATA, WEST BENGAL

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Abstract The number of elderlies across the world are on the rise. The situation is same in India. The demand for old age homes is also rising. The researchers have tried to explore the social and economic situation of the residents living in the old age homes of Kolkata and the reasons that compelled the elderlies to shift to old age homes. It was revealed that care of the elderly have become a challenge for nuclear families. Children with or without means often consider their elderly parents as a burden. Elderlies without financial means, finding it difficult to support themselves, fall back on old age homes. Elderlies with financial resources but lacking in family support move to old age homes for care and support. Some also move to old age homes for independent living. Old age homes provide the much-needed emotional support and care to the elderly. The researchers suggest that living in an institution should be the last resort for all. Families with elderly members should be helped/supported to take care of their elderlies.

Keywords: Elderly, Old age homes, Family

I.0 Introduction

The National Policy on Older Person (India, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, 1999), defines elderly as those above 60 years of age. According to Census 2011 (World Health Organisation, 2015), the elderly make up 8.6% of the population of India. The National Policy for Senior Citizens (India, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2011) depicts that in the years 2000-2050, the overall population in India will grow by 55% whereas population of people at 60 years and above will increase by 326% and those in the age group of 80+ by 700%. The increasing number of elderlies is a challenge for families, communities and governments.

The elderly face unique challenges-physical, emotional, social, financial (Malik et.al 2021). Elderly living alone or with their spouses struggle with domestic responsibilities, remain worried with personal health issues, safety of life and property and other such issues. Those who live with their children may face neglect, abuse and feel unwanted. Such elderlies may opt for old age homes. For generations Indian families have taken care of their members including the elderly. Social change has brought about change in the structure, function and value system of the families. Families struggling to meet the needs of their members take help of different service providers-paid domestic helps, untrained nurses, creche, boarding schools, nursing homes and hospitals, day care centres, old age homes etc. Families lacking in resources (time/finance/space etc) and struggling with elderly care may send their elderlies to live in old age homes.

Responding to situations stated above, old age homes as an alternative system of caregiving to the elderlies have come up. Elderlies without financial means, those with no care givers, widowed or destitute, view the old age homes (free homes) as their only hope. Some elderlies move to old age homes by choice- for care, support, companionship, security, personal space, peace of mind etc. Homes for the elderly in India are maintained by the government, non-governmental organisations and voluntary organisations, religious groups etc. Though old age homes are not in consonance with Indian culture, the perception about old age homes is changing. Old age homes are no longer places to dump the elderlies-where they spend the last days of their lives waiting for death. Instead, they are places where the elderly experience well-being, enjoy peace, security, companionship. After completing all their responsibilities, they deserve to live in peace and happiness. Old age homes give them an opportunity to move out of

soporific/sedentary life styles and enjoy life. pursue hobbies and fulfil their desires. Independent minded elderlies stay connected to their children but prefer to live on their own in old age homes.

However, the inmates have to go through some challenges in both paid and free homes. They have to adjust to unfamiliar surroundings, unknown residents/home mates, loneliness, emotional issues, loss of independence, lack of privacy, small living space, loss of purpose, physical ailments, mental health problems etc. The highly institutionalized, depersonalized and bureaucratic atmosphere in old age homes leads to feelings of loneliness and dehumanisation (Social Policy Research Foundation, n. d.). The elderlies wait for their family members, to take them back to their homes. They feel insulted, ignored, neglected and betrayed by their family members. Hence just as we care for our children we have to care for our elderly and prevent institutionalization of the elderly unless absolutely necessary.

With a rise in the elderly population, there is a steady increase in the demand for old age homes. Living in an institution, away from the loved ones is not a desirable situation for anyone. The researchers would like to explore the situations that force/compel the elderlies to leave their homes, children and family members and live in old age homes. An exploration of the causes will help in finding ways to prevent institutionalization of the elderly and help them live in their own homes-among their family members where ever possible.

2.0 . Literature Review

Rajkumari (2021) conducted a study in four elderly homes in Manipur to study the social and economic status of the inmates. She also explored the reasons that compelled the inmates to stay in the homes. It was revealed that majority of them were from rural areas, had little or no education, were widows and were financially dependent on others. There were more women residents than men. The common reasons for living in old age homes were loss of self - respect, physical abuse, verbal abuse by son and daughter in law, financial difficulties, no care giver at home, health issues etc

Desai (2019) states that some elderly voluntarily choose to stay in OAHs where they enjoy independence, companionship and security. The old age homes are places where they live in their own terms and enjoy life. The author mentions the names of a few paid old age homes across the country where elderly enjoyed good quality lives.

Anil and Hemamala (2018) concluded that multiple factors have caused erosion of societal and family values causing a change in social institutions, change in family relationships etc. Unable to cope with such changes, elderlies with and without children prefer to stay in old age homes. This has led to an increase in the number of old age homes in the Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

A study conducted in 14 old age homes located in three different districts- Bareilly, Lucknow and Varanasi (UP) found mainly women with poor education staying in the homes. More than half of the residents were widow/widower. Disrespectful behaviour of children and financial crisis had forced the inmates to leave their homes. Other causes of shifting to old age homes were feeling of loneliness, problem of adjustment with family members, not having a boy child, children living away/abroad, physical & mental health problems of the respondents, receiving life threats from children and availability of desired services in old age homes (Akbar et al., 2014).

Gupta et al., in 2014, conducted a study in paid and unpaid old age homes of Lucknow. They found that most of the inmates lacked care givers at home and so were living in old age homes. The second most important reason for staying in free old age homes was poverty of the respondents. In paid homes the respondents voluntarily wanted to stay independent lives and so had shifted to old age homes. Loneliness, lack of support, mis-behaviour of children and other family members, death of spouse, etc were other reasons cited by respondents for staying in the old age homes.

Mokashi (2013) conducted a study on 40 inmates living in the old age homes of Kundapur, Udupi, Karnataka, to explore the reasons that compelled them to stay in old age homes. The elderly stated the following reasons (in descending order of importance)for staying in the old age homes – problems of adjustment with son/family members, children disowning parents, desire to live independent and peaceful lives, children living abroad, lack of care givers, loneliness, misbehaviour of son, desire to serve the almighty god, having no male child, unwillingness to stay with married daughter and her family. The author felt that since the elderly long for social interaction and emotional support, old age homes are good alternatives for the elderly to live in.

Mishra (2007) studied four homes run by the government with the help of NGOs and two run by Christian missionaries in Orissa. Inmates came from villages and were widows or widowers. All female residents had come to the old age homes only after the death of their spouses. Some male residents had spouses residing with their sons or other relatives. Findings revealed that lack of money, lack of care givers, disagreement with children, ill treatment and cruelty meted out by children forced the elderlies to seek shelter in the homes. Some respondents had previously

worked as daily wage earners and were now dependent on their children who were engaged in low paid jobs. Considering themselves to be a burden on their sons they had decided to move into old age homes.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Objectives

- To study the socio-economic profile of the respondents.
- To find out the reasons for living in the old age homes.
- To learn the challenges faced by the respondents in the old age homes.

3.2 Research Design

The researchers had adopted a descriptive research design. The research was conducted in four old age homes of Kolkata. One was run by a Christian missionary group (services to the residents were provided free of cost) and the other three were run by private bodies. The study included 100 elderly respondents living in the old age homes for at least one year. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study. Those respondents who voluntarily agreed to take part in the study were only included. 53% of the respondents stayed in charity based unpaid old age homes and other 47% stayed in paid old age homes. 32 men and 68 women voluntarily agreed to take part in the study. Interview schedules containing open and closed ended questions were used to collect primary data from the respondents. Secondary data were collected from on line resources.

The study could not be conducted on a bigger sample because of COVID 19 restrictions. Many respondents expressed disinterest in being a part of the study. All respondents were informed about the purpose of the study. Respondents had the freedom to choose whether to be a part of the study or not. Identity of the respondents were kept confidential. The researchers have presented all data as accurately as possible in their research.

4.0 Findings

The researchers interviewed 100 respondents staying in four old age homes of Kolkata. 53 (53%) respondents did not need to pay for their maintenance. Others (47%) paid for their stay in the homes. The demographic and socioeconomic details of the respondents are discussed below.

Table 1: Demographic and Socioeconomic Profile of the Respondents

Variables	Percentage
Payment status of the residents	
Residents who stayed free of cost	53
Residents who paid monthly rent between Rs3,000-Rs 6,000	26
Residents who paid monthly rent between Rs7000-Rs10,000	21
Years of stay in the old-age homes	
More than 1 year-Less than 4 years	42
4yrs - less than 7 years	17
7yrs-less than 10 years	21
More than 10 years	20
Age wise distribution of respondents	
60-70 years	22
71-80 years	48
81-90years	22
91 and above	8
Gender wise distribution of the respondents	
Male	32
Female	68
Religion wise distribution of the respondents	
Hindu	55
Christian	42
Muslim	03

Marital status	
Still married	09
Unmarried	15
Widow	46
Divorced	30
Educational status of the respondents	
Below class X	40
Class X-XII	22
Graduation	21
Post-Graduation	17
Occupation of the respondents prior to retirement	
Private jobs	20
Government jobs	08
Business	12
Housewife	56
None	4
Sources of financial support	
Pension	18
Savings	12
Family	17
None	53

The table above shows the socio-economic profile of the respondents. 53% of the respondents received free services from the old age homes as they did not have the financial capacity to pay for their stay in the homes. 42% of the respondents have been staying in the old age home for more than a year but less than 4 years, 17% have been staying for more than 4 years but less than 7 years, 21% have been living in the homes for more than 7 years but less than 10 years and 20% have been living for more than 10 years. Among the respondents 48% belonged to the age group of 71-80 years. There were 22% respondents each in the 60-70 years and 81-90 years age group. 8% of the respondents were in the age group of 81-90 years. This shows that there are more elderly living in the old age homes in the older age group than in the younger age groups. The researchers found that there were more women (68%) than men (32%) living in the old age homes. Since the study included an old age home run by the Christian missionaries, the number of respondents from the Christian community was high (42%). 55% of the respondents were Hindus and 3% were Muslims. Among the respondents, 9% of the elderly were still married but were staying alone in the old age homes. Others were unmarried (15%), divorced (30%) and widows (46%). Findings of the study revealed that 40% of the respondents had not completed their high school education, 22% had completed their higher secondary education, 21% had completed graduation and 17% were post graduates. Regarding the occupation of the respondents, it was found that 60% of the respondents were not engaged in any paid work (56% were house wives and 4% were not engaged in any work), 20% worked in the private sector, 12% were engaged in business and 8% were government servants. The researchers found that 70% of the respondents had no personal sources of financial support (17% were supported by their families and 53% had no source of income and no family support). 30% of the respondents had their own financial resources to fall back on (18% received pension and 12% had savings to meet their expenses).

Table 2: Reasons for Staying in the Old Age Homes

Reasons for staying in the old age homes	Percentage
Living independently	18
Family member not taking care	08
Children staying out of state	03
Mother of a daughter	07
No family member to take care	05
Staying on the streets	21
Medical problem	16
Property problem	05
Economic deprivation	17

Respondents shared different reasons for staying in the old age homes.18% of the respondents shared that they wanted to live independently and so had decided to stay in the old age home. 8% of the respondents said that their family members refused to care for them and so they had come to stay in the old age homes. Some respondents (3%) had children living outside West Bengal and so they stayed in the old age homes.7% of the respondents had daughters and no sons. Such respondents did not want to stay with their married daughters and so stayed in the old age homes.5% of the respondents shared that they had no living family member to care for them, 21% respondents said that they were destitute and were living on the streets when they were rescued by the missionaries and brought to the homes.16% said that they were suffering from medical problems and were unable to bear the cost of treatment.Their children also did not have resources to support them.5% of the respondents were deprived of their property and so were living in the homes and 17% respondents have gone through economic deprivation and had no resources to support themselves.

Table 3: Health Issues Faced By the Respondents.

Type of diseases	Percentage
Diabetes	18%
Blood pressure	03%
Problems related to the nervous system	12%
Arthritis	10%
Mental health problems	22%
Problems related to vision	18%
Heart problem	02%
Gastric problem	03%
Multiple diseases	30%

All respondents were suffering from some health problem or the other.30% respondents shared that they suffered from multiple health issues. Mental health problem was found to be the most frequently occurring health problem (22%) among the respondents followed by problem in vision (18%) and diabetes (18%). Nerve related problems (12%), arthritis (10%), gastric (3%), blood pressure (3%) and heart problems (2%) were other problems faced by the elderly.

Table 4: Leisure Time Activities Undertaken By the Respondents in the Old Age Homes

Leisure time activities	Percentage
Watching television.	16%
Reading	12%
Writing	9%
Tailoring	4%
Religious activities	5%
Multiple activities	10%
None	44%

The researchers found that respondents took part in different leisure time activities in the old age homes.16% of the respondents watched television,12% enjoyed reading, 9% kept themselves busy in writing,4% respondents did tailoring, 5% respondents performed religious activities and 10% respondents were engaged in multiple activities. However 44% of the respondents were not involved in any activities.

Table 5: Daily Life Activities Missed by the Respondents in the Old Age Homes

Types of activities	Percentage
Staying with family	32%
Cooking	21%
Household work	06%
Going to work	16%
Going outside	07%
Multiple activities	08%
None	10%

The researchers found that staying in the old age homes, the respondents missed some daily activities which they did when they stayed in their own homes. 32% missed staying with their families, 21% missed cooking in their daily lives, 6% missed their household work, 16% missed going to their place of work, 7% longed to go outside the home, 8% missed multiple activities that they did at home. However 10% of the respondents did not share such feelings.

Table 6: Challenges Faced by the Respondents in the Old Age Homes

Challenges faced	Percentage
Dissatisfaction with the quality of food	12%
Dissatisfaction with medical facilities	19%
Loneliness	9%
Little recreational activities	12%
Restrictions in the home	10%
No involvement in any work	7%
Multiple Challenges	26%
No Challenges	5%

It was found that 12% of the respondents were unhappy with the quality of the food provided in the homes. 19% of respondents were unhappy with the medical facilities provided to them. 9% felt lonely in the home. 12% felt that there should be more recreational activities in the homes. 10% of the respondents felt that there were too many restrictions in the home. 7% wanted some kind of involvement in work, 26% faced more than one challenge mentioned above and 5% said that they faced no challenges in the old age homes.

Table 7: Suggestions given by the Respondents to make their Lives more Meaningful

Suggestions	Percentage
Arrange recreational activities	54%
Involvement in activities	22%
Arrange for short tours	18%
No suggestions	6%
Total	100%

54% of the respondents want more recreational activities, 22% respondents want to be involved in different activities, 18% respondents wanted to have short tour and 6% respondent had no suggestions.

Table 8: Nature of Relationship Shared by the Inmates in the Homes

Opinion of the respondents about the nature of relationship shared with the inmates of the homes	Percentage
Good	72
Not so good	03
Ambivalent	25
Opinion of the respondents about the nature of relationship shared with the staff of the homes	Percentage
Good	68
Not so good	04
Ambivalent	28

The researchers found that 72% of the respondents shared good relationship with the inmates and 68% shared good relationship with the staff of the homes. However 3% of the respondents shared not so good relationships with the inmates and 4% did not share good relationship with the staff members. 25% respondents shared ambivalent relationships with the inmates and 28% shared ambivalent relationship with the staff members

Table 9: Opinion of the Respondents on their Decision to Stay in the Old Age Home

Respondent's opinion regarding their decision to stay in the old age homes	Percentage
Happy with their decision	65%
Not happy with their decision	35%
Total	100%

65% of the respondents expressed that they were happy that they had taken the decision to stay in the old age home. 35% were not satisfied with their decision and said that they had no choice but to live in the old age home.

5.0 Discussion

The researchers found that more than half of the respondents (53%) lived in the old age homes free of cost and only 30% paid for their own maintenance. Families paid for the maintenance of some respondents (17%) Such data shows the financial vulnerability of the elderly. Without the service of the old age homes, these elderly would have been reduced to paupers. The indispensability of such welfare programmes is reflected from the findings of the study. Some respondents have been living in the homes for more than ten years (20%). The old age homes have become their own homes. They would (probably) stay there till the end of their lives. So they should be provided with all necessary care to make their lives comfortable in the homes. It has also to be kept in mind that the respondents will grow older and would need increased assistance and varied kinds of services. Hence, it is imperative that old age homes (both public and private ones) should be equipped with necessary services to make life comfortable and enjoyable for the respondents. The researchers found fewer respondents (22%) in the younger age group (60 -70 years) and more respondents (48%) in the higher age group of 71-80 years. It may be that, the respondents remained active in their 60s and moved to old age homes once they felt that they were no longer able to take care of themselves. It may also be that they lost their spouses in their 70's and then moved to the old age homes. Number of respondents in the older elderly age groups (80-90 years and 90 years and above) were lesser (22% and 8% respectively). The average life expectancy of an Indian being 71 years (The World Bank, 2022), it is expected that there would be lesser inmates in the older age groups. The researchers got more female respondents than male respondents because there were more women living in the old age homes than men. This is because elderly women (widowed women, unmarried women, women without children, women with daughters, sick women etc) are considered as a burden and sent to old age homes. Besides most women in India are not into paid work, have no income, no savings and may not inherit property. As a result of financial vulnerability, elderly women have no other way but to move into old age homes. Staying alone in their own homes after the death of their husbands, is also unsafe for elderly women. So, such women also move to old age homes. The life expectancy of elderly women being more than elderly men, there may be more women living in the homes than men. All such factors contribute to the high percentage of women living in the old age homes. Majority of the respondents in the study were Hindus. Since the study included an old age home run by Christian missionaries there were Christian respondents in the study. The researchers found three Muslim elderly living in the homes. It was found that 91% of the respondents under the study were single (widows, divorced, unmarried). This shows that single men and women with or without children, find it difficult to stay alone or with their families. They may be considered as a burden by their families. Couples support each other, gain power from each other and cope with family situations together. With death of one spouse, or divorce, they lose power and fail to cope with changing family dynamics. Family conflict, property issues, conflict in values, lack of resources, etc may cause situations where elderly are forced to move to old age homes or do so voluntarily. The findings revealed poor academic and occupational status of most of the respondents. Poor academic and occupational status had resulted in poor socio-economic status of the elderly. Most of the women had spent their lives as housewives. Gender discrimination, early marriage, lack of educational opportunities, social and family restrictions on the movement of women etc may have led to their poor educational-occupational status. Few enjoyed pension and had savings to maintain themselves in their old age. Financial dependency on their families had made them vulnerable and a burden on their families.

The researchers wanted to explore the different reasons that lead the elderly to stay in institutions. 17% mentioned that financial difficulties forced them to leave their own homes. After the death of their spouses (mostly husbands) their children refused to care for them. Without any means of sustenance, they had no choice but to seek shelter in free government old age homes. Some respondents said that family members (relatives, children) had deprived them of their property. Relatives-taking advantage of the powerless situation of the elderly, wrongfully deprived the elderly of their property. Unable to fight for their rights, the elderly moved to the old age homes. Elderly women may not even know where to seek help from. The elderly may not have financial resources to seek legal redressal.

Some respondents were sick and had nobody to bear the cost of their treatment. They added that their children found it difficult to bear the treatment cost of diseases like cancer and so to relieve their children the elderly moved to the old age homes. Some sick respondents with living spouses were living in the old age homes alone because their family members lacked financial resources to bear their medical expenses or were finding it difficult to balance their paid work-household responsibilities and care work. Some sick elderly shared that they have moved to the homes themselves to give relief to their family members. Neither did they want to burden their families nor did they want to become dependent on their family members. The researchers found that some respondents (21%) had been living on the streets before joining the old age homes. Such elderly had no fixed sources of income, earned little, were unmarried and had no family members of their own. With increasing age and deteriorating physical health, they got less work and were unable to support themselves. During the pandemic, all avenues of earning dried up and respondents living on the streets/in railway stations faced survival challenges. The missionaries took the elderly to the homes and they survived. Some respondents had no living family member and so lived in the homes. Some respondents had lost their husbands and children and so did not want to stay alone in their homes. They left lonely and were concerned about their personal security. Unmarried respondents moved to old age homes to avoid loneliness and to receive care. Some (7%) stayed in the old age homes because their married daughters were not in a position to care for them. After the death of their spouses they felt uncomfortable to reside with their daughters because such a practice was socially unacceptable. They shared that their daughter's in laws may not like such living arrangements and their daughter may be shamed because of her dependent parents. Such social restrictions/practices harm the well-being of the elderly. Some respondents (3%) shared that their children lived outside West Bengal and the elderly did not want to move around with them. They wanted to live in their own neighbourhood-among their own friends and acquaintances. Since it was difficult to manage everyday life alone and staying alone may be a threat to personal security, the elderly, in consultation with their children had shifted to old age homes where they received care, companionship and security.

Their children also felt relieved that their parents were in safe hands. Family conflict was cited as a reason for staying away from their homes in the last days of their lives. Respondents shared that they found it difficult to live with their sons and their families in an atmosphere of conflict and tension. While the elderly thought that their guidance and advice would be helpful to the younger generation, the younger generation considered it as unnecessary interference into their personal lives. With change in value system, availability of services like hospitals, creche, drop in shelters etc and the information boom, the elderly is no longer considered as support systems by the younger generations. The researchers found that 18% of the respondents wanted to stay in homes where they would pay and receive services and live independent lives. In the last phase of their lives, they did not want to burden others with their emotional or health issues. The home would take care of all their needs-the most important being personal security, medical attention and care. Such reaction of the elderly may be a result of abuse/neglect that they have received from their loved ones.

Findings revealed that the respondents were suffering from different health problems both physical and mental (Table 3). Mental health problem was the most frequently stated problem and 30% shared that they suffered from multiple health problems. The causes of mental health challenges can be easily inferred. Staying away from their loved ones, the elderly found it difficult to stay in the old age homes and hence suffered from mental health issues. The other health problems stated by the respondents were mostly psycho-somatic diseases which further establishes that the elderly faced psychological problems in the old age homes. Living with health problems, in an alien environment, with unknown people must be a challenging task for the respondents. The vulnerabilities of the elderly, especially those who receive free services in the homes can be easily guessed from the above situation. Challenges and vulnerabilities of inmates who paid for their maintenance may be less than those who could not pay for themselves.

The researchers found that around half of the respondents did not take part in any leisure time activity in the homes. Some of them watched television, did reading and writing, took part in religious activities, did tailoring etc. None of the respondents mentioned about morning/evening walks, jogging, gardening etc. Unwell physical and mental state may have caused a situation of disinterestedness among the elderly. For general wellbeing it is necessary that they involve themselves in some activity which will keep them happy, give them satisfaction of doing something useful and help them in spending their time fruitfully. The quality of their lives would also improve in the process.

The respondents were found longing for activities that they did in their own homes. They longed to stay with their family members, they wanted to cook and go to their previous work place. Some missed doing household work. The responses reflect their longing for their lives that they have left behind.

Some respondents shared that they faced multiple challenges in the old age homes. They expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of medical services, quality of food, recreational facilities provided to them and the rules they had to follow. They wished to have more opportunities for recreation/to engage in work etc. The respondents suffered from different health problems and so have felt the need of better medical facilities. Being sick causes tension and the elderly may become worried about their wellbeing. The researchers found that the homes did not have their own health facilities. They would call doctors as and when required. This may have caused worry, insecurity, discontent among the inmates and so they expressed dissatisfaction about medical services provided in the homes. The presence of a doctor may give confidence to the elderly that if they fall sick there would be medical expert looking after them. The elderly expressed discontent with the food that was provided to them. For some elderly eating may be the only activity that they looked forward to - a pleasure they enjoyed in their otherwise routine lives. Personal preferences become stronger with age. There may be restrictions in diet because of health problems that the elderly faced. All such issues may have created discontent among the elderly. Some expressed that they suffered from loneliness. The inmates of a home are actually strangers to each other. So, developing a relationship, sharing thoughts, concerns, challenges may take time or may not happen at all at such an advanced age. Hence such feelings are normal for the elderly who stay away from their families and may have no hope of going back to their loved ones.

The elderly interacts and are completely dependent on the inmates and the staff. So, it is essential that they share cordial interpersonal relationships and develop a positive environment/culture in the homes. Though most of the respondents shared that they enjoyed cordial relationships with the inmates and staff, some expressed sharing 'not so good' and ambivalent relationships. Age, gender, physical/mental/personal issues, social background, personal characteristics, life experiences etc play a role in forming interpersonal relationships. So putting aside differences, effort should be made by all concerned to form satisfying relationships.

Regarding the decision to stay in homes, 65% expressed satisfaction despite all challenges. The rest shared that they longed to go back to their families. This reflects the extent of difficulties the inmates have faced in their own homes which forced them to shift to old age homes. Lonely but independent lives are better than dependent living.

6.0 Suggestions

Government has to provide comprehensive elderly care for those who cannot care for themselves, or has nobody to care for them in their old age. Hence there is need of construction of new old age homes (both free and paid) to house the growing elderly population in the country. There should be more free homes for elderly women. The aged are mentally, physically, financially vulnerable. They cannot demand their entitlements. Hence, all old age homes, free or paid, should be regularly monitored and supervised by government authorities to ensure that elderly receive the services that they are entitled to.

Institutionalization of individuals should be discouraged under all conditions. The same is true for the elderly. Counselling services for those who come to stay in the homes and their family members should be done to help them understand the challenges of institutionalisation. Family members should be motivated to understand the crucial role that they play in the lives of their members (IFFD, n.d.) and to take responsibility of their elderlies. Lessons on duty and responsibility of children towards their parents should be the theme of such sessions. Counsellors should try to solve interpersonal conflict if any and help the families to take care of their elderly. All those above 60 years should receive comprehensive free healthcare facilities like the Swasthya Sathi programme of the Government of West Bengal (Government of West Bengal, About the Scheme. n.d.), concessions in travelling, provision of subsidised food products through Public Distribution System, elderly pension, etc. Poor families with dependent elderly members should be provided with all possible support-material and non-material, to maintain their elderlies at home. Financially dependent elderly can be sponsored by governments/corporates (CSR activities of corporates) to live with their family members. Unemployed family members can be financially compensated for taking care of their elderly parents. Supervision of such programmes should also be regularly done.

Elderlies facing property issues, property deprivations from children and relatives, should be helped by ward councillors/panchayat members/ civil society organisations/police, to seek legal remedy through free legal aid services available to the elderly. No elderly should be wrongfully denied of their property. Elderlies find it difficult to stay alone in their own homes because of security issues. Improving general law and order situation, some form of supervision by local government bodies, ward councillors /panchayat members, civil society organisations/the police, etc. can help the elderly live independently in their own homes. Children, especially daughters from an early age should be sensitised about their duties towards their parents in their old age. Counsellors and social workers can help women to talk to their in-laws/husbands about their responsibilities towards their parents. The psychological

condition of the sick elderly, separated from their spouse/loved ones, living among unknown people in an unknown environment may be devastating. Medical treatment, specially treatment of chronic diseases is expensive and beyond the financial capacity of most middle class families. Comprehensive free healthcare facilities like the Swastha Sathi programme of the Government of West Bengal can reduce the mental agony of the elderly and receive treatment in the company of their loved ones. Families taking care of their financially dependent elderly can be provided tax benefits as an incentive.

Government should provide free and paid homes for those who voluntarily want to stay in homes. Monitoring and supervision of such homes by government authorities is essential to ensure that beneficiaries receive their entitlements as promised by the home authorities.

Preparation for old age should begin early in life. Introduction of Family Life Education in schools /colleges can help children learn about the life cycle of human-beings, the task-roles-challenges of different stages, old age being an inevitable stage in life, the special challenges of the elderly, their responsibility toward the elderly, need of planning/saving for old age etc. Family life education can help children prepare for each stage in life and understand-accept-and help other members of the family who would be in different stages of the life cycle. Family Life Education can help young girls understand the need of education and employment, help them take care of their own selves, develop the habit of saving and build financial capital for a secure future. This would improve the status of girls/women in future.

Participation of inmates in running the homes may reduce their discontent regarding the quality of food served, the recreational activities available to them or the rules and regulations of the homes etc. Social Workers and counsellors should motivate the inmates to get involved in some recreational activities for their physical and mental wellbeing. Home authorities can help interested inmates to get involved in activities that would help them earn and also keep them occupied.

All old age homes should be rightly staffed with qualified and trained staff/care givers. Caring for the elderly is a difficult task. Staff members and care givers should be provided proper working conditions and sensitized about the unique challenges of the elderly. Such sensitization may generate empathy of the care givers towards the elderly, help them manage situations of conflict/dissatisfaction/discontent in an amicable way and help improve the quality of relationships between them and the elderly. Psychologists, social workers, counsellors attached with old age homes can guide the elderly to develop cordial relationships among themselves and enjoy their stay in the homes.

7.0 Conclusion

The size of the elderly is rapidly increasing. Poverty among the elderly would increase in the near future (Khanna & Bharadwaj, 2022). Keeping in mind the UN Principles For Older Persons (U.N.1999), the Central and state governments should plan policies, programmes, activities to make life happy and comfortable for the elderly. Governments have to take care of those who cannot care for themselves. Governments have to set up more old age homes (both paid and free) especially for women keeping in mind their vulnerability. Family is the best institution to take care of its members. All effort should be made to keep the elderly in their families. For children it is said that institutionalisation should be the last resort (The Hindu Bureau,2022) For elderly also, it should be the same. Family is the best institution to take care of them in the last days of their lives. Families should be helped in all possible ways to care for their elderly. School and college curriculum must include Family Life Education. Family Counselling Centers should be available to families within easy reach to deal with issues of family conflict. Family Counselling Centers should conduct awareness programmes in open communities on the responsibilities of families towards their elderly family members. Elderly with financial resources can pay and live either in government run homes or in private homes. Homes should provide proper care to the elderly, be rightly staffed and regularly monitored and supervised by government authorities.

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