



CHANGING ATTITUDE TOWARDS ELDERLY IN KERALA: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Population ageing is a demographic phenomenon emerging in the world today and India too is experiencing such a demographic transition. Population ageing is the most significant result of the process known as Demographic transition; India has currently the second largest elderly population in the world, the first being China. Compared to other states in India, the population of Kerala is ageing most rapidly; Kerala has 11% of its population in the age group 60 years and above as against 7.5% in all India level. Ageing is a developmental phenomenon, which is accompanied by a number of changes in the physical, psychological, social and hormonal conditions. Old age brings a kind of helplessness among the elderly which makes them increasingly dependent on others. In the earlier times ageing as a social problem did not exist in the society, the few who lived over 60 years of age were considered as the reservoir of wisdom and cranium of family and society. Today there is a drastic change in the attitude of present generation towards elderly; against this backdrop the paper makes an effort to explore the changing attitude towards elderly in Kerala and its consequences.

Key Words: *Attitude, Population Ageing, Accommodation, Burden, Deteriorated.*

Introduction

Kerala occupies 1.2 percent of the total area of Indian union and accounts for 3.4 percent of the India's population. Research shows that the demographic transition under gone by Kerala is unique when compared to other states. Kerala ranks number one among the states with 11% of the population comprising of the elderly. The steady fall in fertility rate & mortality rate in recent years has led to steady increase in elderly population in Kerala. Given the rapid increase in the elderly population, their needs and problems needs special attention. The study focuses on the problems confronted by the elderly on account of the attitudinal changes towards them and suggest certain measures to overcome the same.

Earlier years saw the easy accommodation of old and disabled in the joint family system, economy being agricultural was again a blessing as it provided enough space for them both in family and society. They hence occupied a respectable position in both the realms. But the modern institutions and conditions have totally changed their life, changes in value system, family, influence of western culture and media have brought about changes in attitude towards elderly in Kerala. Dr Indira Jai Prakash states that there is a lowering of status of elderly in India. They may be perceived as burdens due to their various disabilities and dependence(Prakash, 1999).

The advancement in geriatric care and medical science has led to a large proposition of elderly living longer than earlier. Increase in life expectancy has led to greying of population which has in turn become a social issue in the present society. Elderly surviving long is viewed with concern by the younger generation; it not only causes economic hardships and financial burden but also creates psychological stress on them. On one hand elderly depend on the family for support and on the other hand the younger generation desire to spend its resources on the their own advancement or for their children, this leads to serious problems (Gulati & Rajan, 2014). Fast growing economy and commercialization of agriculture has further reduced the roles of the elderly.

Modern urban and industrialized life and break down of joint family system to nuclear family system has further deteriorated the position of elderly in the society. The respectable position and recognition given to the elderly is dwindling day by day. There is a drastic increase in the number of working women; this has further worsened the condition of elderly as it has led to the reduction of caregivers which in turn has reduced the care available to them. Demographic projections suggest that by 2030, the age dependency ratio will surpass the child dependency ratio in the state. It may be inferred that, in the coming decades the burden of a large group of aged people will have to be borne by relatively smaller younger population. In India and Kerala the female dependency ratio is higher than males but this gender-gap in dependency ratio is more in Kerala.

Traditionally, it is held that the family should care for the aged, and in particular One's own parents, to look after one's parents is one of the main duties of the children, a culturally pre-scribed norm is so internalised that it is likely to hold for a long time. The average family in Kerala, irrespective of class, caste and religion, respects its elderly members, and often the oldest member, male or female remains the head of the household. However with the change in the feudal system and with families increasingly not owning much land and depending mainly or completely on earnings from wage work, the power and control of the elderly is diminishing as compared to land-owning families (Gulati & Rajan, 2014).



Lekshmi v Nair states that globalisation and westernization has changed the outlook of the people towards elderly and ageing is having more implications to the individual and society. Demographic transitions, social conditions and political environment of the last few years are the important reasons for the changing views of the concept of ageing. She further says that advances in telecommunications and spread of internet have increased opportunity but also increased struggle(Nair, 2014). According to Morgan and kunkel, in the traditional society ageing was regarded as a natural process, but today ageing is a shared feeling of the organized groups namely family, peer group and society. (Morgan and kunkel, 2001)

According to Lekshmi V Nair the impact of globalisation on the old is multi-faceted. Primarily the old has to face two types of challenges, one from the family and the other from the society. The present day old who had a different socialization are at a cultural shock for the way the old is treated in the society(Nair, 2014). Due to the breakdown of joint family system, selfishness, lack of adjustment, refusal to compromise and with more and more younger women entering into jobs, the care and attention given to the elderly persons are affected(Moli, 2004). Young generation migrate from the state for education and work, though they support the elderly financially, their problem is often loneliness and the need for emotional support for which younger generation has no solution to offer.

Balachandren M states that in the old age elderly men experience less alienation compared to elderly women(Balachandran, 2007). Sex ratio among elderly women being highest in Kerala, women are often triply disadvantaged, being women, poor and widow. In Indian society it is quite common that the status women is entitled to, is attached to their husband, studies show that in Kerala in the 70+ age group 81% of women are widows, once they lose their husbands they are less cared for and their position in the family and society diminishes. According to studies conducted by Agewell research and Advocacy centre "In the old age women face an emotional void in their life. This is because of their leading family-centric life since their childhood. Their world revolved around their families and when they get old they get side-lined by the same family because it no longer requires their services or they are not fit enough to serve family interest (Agewell research 2011)."

Inter-generational interaction through communication is absolutely necessary for the integration of the society. However, in modern times inter-generational interaction through communication is getting diminished. This is a very serious type of change that is occurring in all societies. Communication being the bridge between the old and the young, shortage in it creates detachment between the generation and discontinuities in the culture.

According to Srinivasan and Sandhya Gupta elderly face multiple medical and psychological problems. Elders are abused by trusted individuals; it ranges from physical abuse to neglect of basic needs of older persons (Srinivasan and Sandhya, 2015). In the fog end of their life, when they are in need of at most care and attention they are subjected to physical abuse and neglect that can be detrimental.

Suggestion and Conclusion

Changing structure of population can have long term economic and social implications. It also creates imbalances within the generations which in turn lead to elderly being ignored and alienated. The life of elderly is frequently affected by the social and economic security that accompany demographic and development process. The growth of individualism and desire for independence and autonomy of the young generation to a large extent affect the status of elderly. Research on elderly show that the condition of elderly women is even more critical considering their vulnerable condition. Poverty adds to their troubles as they are forced to compromise on their basic needs as their earning capacity reduces with their age.

Adding to their agony is the attitude of their children and young generation who often consider them to be a burden and a nuisance. This has led to emergence of old age homes in Kerala, but that to seems to be inaccessible to the poor, the private old age homes demand huge sums of money which the poor cannot afford. The government run old age homes are few in number and their standard too low.

Above all the gravest problem faced by elderly is abuse, they are repeatedly subjected to abuse from the hands of their dear ones; their helplessness is time and again exploited by their children and relatives. The abuses against elderly may be either intentional or unintentional; it may be physical in nature or psychological or involve financial or material needs. Whatever the form of abuse, it will result in unnecessary suffering, injury and pain. The mental and psychological impact it has is immense.

Public education plays a very important role in preventing abuse and neglect of elderly. It is often due to ignorance and lack of awareness of the necessity to look after elderly that young generation shy away from their duties. Parents who ought to guide and provide their children proper direction often behaves indifferently. Through public education people can be



educated regarding the need to respect and care for the elderly. It enables to promote tolerance towards demands of the elderly. Public should be made aware of how to identify abuse and were to approach for help.

Social networking sites and media can be used to bring about changes in the attitude of the public towards elderly and this change in turn can bring about positive changes in the life of elderly. Physical presence of dear ones is of great importance to them, they should not feel isolated and marginalised. Young generation should provide them support and hope and make their life meaningful.

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