

Foundation Course
Semester 1
UNIT 6
GROWING SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN INDIA

PROBLEMS OF THE ELDERLY

Objectives

The chapter helps to identify the problems of the elderly. It throws light on the causes of the problems faced by the elderly in day to day life. It tries to understand the effects of these problems on the elderly person's life.

Introduction

The Elderly or the Senior Citizens are the persons who are above 60 years of age. Due to decreasing mortality rate in India, the population of Senior Citizens is increasing. Some of the Senior Citizens are healthy and fit. People who are of 80 years of age are found to be still working in movies, dramas, offices and other such arenas of life.

However many Senior Citizens are retired from their service and they suffer from various major and minor health issues. Many of them are not looked after properly by their families. The materialistic nature of the society is getting it more and more alienated towards the problems of the Senior Citizens.

Problems of the Elderly

Decline in physical abilities: Back pain, Knee pain, decline in vision, hearing problem etc are common physical problems of the elderly. It affects their routine life very much. **Decline in mental abilities:** The Elderly lack self-confidence and they develop a sense of fear in the mind. They face the problems related to the lack of short term memories while their long term memories are intact.

Financial Burden: During the old age expenses are likely to increase due to medical treatment for their health. Hospitalization and medical expenses are costly and for this the Elderly have to depend on their children. **Loneliness:** The children of the elderly are busy with their own life. They do not have time for their parents. Moreover, the death of spouse or change of residence makes the Elderly more and more lonely.

Generation Gap: The values of the elderly and that of the young children at home do not match. The Elderly try to dominate the youngsters and many times they directly interfere in the matters of their children at home. This is not liked by the young generation at all. The children may either revolt against their parents or they may simply ignore their parents. Thus

generation gap develops between them.

Crimes in Urban areas: Many elderly in urban areas live alone in flats. After their children are out of home they are alone and advantage of this fact is taken by the criminals. They make excuses and enter the premises of the building and they find out in which flat only elders stay and by making excuses they will enter the flat and kill the elderly for ransom.

Limited mobility: The elders find it difficult to cope with the fast life of the cities. They are not able to catch a bus or a train nor are they comfortable in walking on the road. Thus their mobility is limited.

Inability to adjust with retired life: After retirement a sudden decline comes in income as the salary is stopped and the elderly feels that he is a burden on his family. The elderly have to depend upon their children for their well being. If they have a good pension or if they had good investments then it is not difficult for them to handle the pressure of retired life.

Housing problem: The housing problem arises if they are bed ridden for various diseases. In a metro city like Mumbai the housing problem are acute and the sick elderly have to face the brunt of it. They have to stay in one corner of a room without adequate ventilation. Even they are not allowed to meet with the guests or visitors.

Health Problems: Naturally if you are old then you have to face several health problems associated with old age. Heart palpitation, hypertension, asthma, knee pain, joint pain, poor vision, poor hearing, paralysis etc make the elderly a burden on the family.

Death of Spouse: In many societies marriage is considered as a boon to companionship and love. What a person needs to live is the unbounded friendship and love of spouse. However if one of the spouse dies living the other in the middle of life, then it creates a space in the life of a person. Death of spouse increases the loneliness of the elderly.

CAUSES OF THE PROBLEMS OF THE ELDERLY

1.

Old Age: Ageing is a natural process. However it has its own disadvantages. Old age effects the physical and mental strengths of a person. The weakness of the elders makes them soft targets of robbers and also of unfaithful family member and servants at home.

2.

Health Factor: Health problems are a part and parcel of old age. The problems like heart attack, respiratory problems, cough, paralysis etc., are more common among the elders.

When the body becomes weak, resistance power becomes low and the body becomes a homw for several deceases.

Psychological Factor: The psychological problems are generally connected with retirement. A sudden change from a respectable powerful official life to a retired life free of daily tensions makes the people mentally weak. Frustration, neuroticism, psychosis, schizophrenia, hallucinations, etc psychological problems are developed in the elderly.

Neglect by family members: The family of a person matters in old age. If the family is ready to look after them willingly then the old age becomes easy. But if the family members think that the elderly are a beast of burden then it affects the elderly very severely. The prolonged illness will make the family members think of the elderly as a burden especially when the elderly is bedridden.

Generation Gap: The elderly find it difficult to accept the values and standards of new generation. For example, the son, daughter-in-law and grand children like pizzas, burgers and pastas, they listen to pop music instead of classical Indian music, they wear capris and jeans which is totally condemned by the elderly. The elderly may express their disgust either verbally or being completely silent over the issues. They may even interfere in the activities of their grand children which is often not liked by the grand child.

Financial Factor: Money is the root cause of the problems of the elderly. Retirement brings with it financial burden. Health problems make it more worse as a considerable amount of money is spent on the medicines and treatment. These affects the relationship with the family members.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROBLEMS OF ELDERLY

The following is the implication or effects of the Problems of the elderly

1.

Effects on Self: The old age brings with it several physical and psychological problems. They are not able to sleep properly ,their memory power gets affected and every now and then they keep on nagging at the family members.

Effects on Family Members: Nowadays there is a system of a nuclear family consisting of husband, wife and their children and most of the time both the partners are working. As long as the old look after their children everything is OK. But once the elderly falls ill and gets bedridden then it affects the entire set up of the family.

Regular illness collapses the budget of the family. It makes the children to take leave from the office which are mostly without pay and this increases the financial burden of the family.

Effects on Social Life: The elderly are not allowed to go outside. They are confined in the four walls of their home because of lack of physical mobility. They are not able to travel because of shivering and illness. So the family members fear that they will get lost as most of the elderly suffer from

high degree of memory loss. This affects the social life of the elderly.

Effects on Society : Every now and then we read in the newspaper about how an elderly person was tortured and killed by robbers. This increases incidences of crime in the society.

Another most important and less talked issue about elderly is related with their sexual life. A finding suggests most of the criminals involved in rape and child abuse are the elderly.

Nowadays the problem of rape, molestation, sexual harassment is on the rise in the country for which somewhere the lack of sexual mobility of the old people is also responsible. The elderly make the innocent children and women fulfill their uncontrolled physical demands. Since in our country sex is a taboo and old age is respected a lot, this issue is neglected purposely.

RESPONSES TOWARDS THE PROBLEMS OF THE ELDERLY

The following are the measures to be undertaken to solve the problems of the elderly:

1. Personal Response : Many problems of the old age can be solved by taking certain precautionary measures in the early life itself :
 - Maintenance of physical fitness: Diet Control, Adequate and regular exercise, avoiding substance abuse like smoking and drinking keep away ageing.
 - Maintenance of emotional fitness: Yoga and Mediation are a must for today's hectic life. It helps to control our emotions and makes us free from guilt.
 - Developing hobbies: Hobbies help a person to reduce boredom, especially in old age. Hobbies help to reduce loneliness and also mental tensions.
 - Being Active: Elders should keep themselves engaged by involving in various activities which do not require much physical exercise. They can provide their expertise and guidance to others by offering their service in their places of interest. This will also reduce their financial burden.
 - Financial independence: A good financial planning at the young age itself will make the old life calm and comfortable. Pension Plans, Share Certificates, PPF(Personal Provident Fund), etc., will make life better during old age.

- Non-Interference:** If the Generation Gap is annoying the elders then they can restrict the annoyance to themselves. Forgive and Forget attitude will help to maintain better family ties. This will be ensured only if they do not interfere in the life of their children and grand child until and unless any serious matter is calls for interference.

Institutional Response: It involves the legislative remedies given by the government for the solving the problems of the elderly.

Provision of involvement : The elderly should be involved in the social programmes on a large scale. Those who are fit and fine should work beyond the age of retirement. They should provide help and support, motivation and guidance to the young generation.

Prevention of elder abuse: Special Provisions should be made in the Criminal Law to stop crimes against the elderly. It should give compensation to the family of the deceased old person. This will help to provide support to the family members of the elderly.

Old Age Homes: The government should establish Old Age Homes on a large scale and along with it the government should provide funds to the Non-Governmental Organizations to run these homes. Those old people who are homeless or who are not at all looked by their family members should be provided such kind of benefits.

Provision of employment: Those old persons who are physically and mentally fit should be provided jobs by the government according to their likes and dislikes. Moreover many of the old people are ready to work even after retirement. What they need is just an opportunity.

Pension Schemes: The Central Government should start the National Old Age Pension Scheme for the elderly. Those elders who have invested in their early life should receive benefits under such schemes.

Annapurna Scheme: The Central Government started the Annapurna Scheme in April 2000 and now the state governments are implementing the scheme. Its aim is to provide 10 kg of food items free for every month to only those elderly who were capable enough to take pension benefits but who had not received it for some or the other reasons.

Proper Social Security Measures: There should be clear and better social security measures to support senior citizens. There should be uniformity in declaring a person senior

citizen. Today, the age varies from 58 to 65 years.

The Ministry of Social Justice plays a key role in improving the conditions of the elderly. Reserving certain seats in the public transport system only for the senior citizens, concession in hospital services, concession in public utility services will help to solve the problem of the elders.