

A Study on the Well-Being and Support Needs of Elderly People Living in Old Age Homes in Guwahati, Assam.

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Abstract:

In any human life getting old is a natural process which is highly influenced by the social, cultural and economic conditions. In the modern society, whereby even the family ties are becoming looser and people are increasingly separated by busy schedules, many older adults tend to lose love, care and belongingness in their families. Besides, the nuclear family has been replacing the joint family leaving behind many lonely ones with insecurities. The fact that old age homes are being further increases day by day in places like Guwahati, Assam, indicates that there are changes of social values and lifestyles. In old age homes, the geriatric caregivers help the old people to learn how they can successfully cope with the everyday tasks, stay independent and cope with mental and social problems (Talukdar, 2019). Functional assessment of their daily lives helps to understand of how well elderly perform their tasks, similarly emotional needs assist in determining sadness, anxiety, loss of love ones or health issues and lastly social assessment is the connection that an elderly individual has with his or her relatives, friends and people. Geriatric care should be provided in a proper manner not only in terms of medical treatment but also in terms of emotional counseling, social interaction, and frequent communication with family members and community. It is also important that social advocacy should be carried out so that older adults are enlightened of their rights, could use government welfare schemes and be treated fairly in the society. Thus, this research will be based on identifying functional, emotional and social needs to strengthen older adults, the difference between services provided by government and non-government old age home and the important roles of social worker at old age home, which will support their overall well-being and create a supportive environment, so that older adults would not be considered as dependent rather, as the valuable members within a society who would continue playing significant roles in their later years. Data were collected from three selected old age homes in Guwahati, Assam. A qualitative method was used and in-depth interviews were conducted with 30 elderly participants selected through purposive random sampling. The findings of this study will help families, social workers; policymakers design geriatric care and social support programs for senior citizens.

Keywords: Ageing, Functional assessment, Emotional needs, Geriatric care, social advocacy

INTRODUCTION:

Old age is a phase in a person's life when a person passes the maximum period of their life and enters a new stage. At this age, physical strength, morale, and ability to work decline, as elderly people cannot

function as they used to, and need the help and care from another to live. At this stage of life elderly is not only the last chapter of life but also the period of accumulation of all past life experiences. In today's society, the elderly are becoming more helpless due to the formation of family systems, lifestyle changes and the tendency to live alone. Young people become focused on their work and life and are often neglected by their parents or older relatives. As a result, many elderly people take refuge in old age homes. Although legal protection for the elderly, such as the maintenance and welfare of parents and senior citizens, many elderly people are unable to claim their rights or not to claim government welfare privileges. This gap emphasizes social awareness and the importance of education (Borah & Jayalakshmi, 2020). According to the World Health Organization, "the well-being of the elderly means healthy aging' means the ability to lead a healthy life physically, mentally and socially". An old age home is a place where older people who are isolated from society or family find shelter. It provides them with food, medical treatment, rest and some mental comfort. Moreover, all old age homes do not offer the same facilities, and all residents do not have the same needs. Some need physical care, others lack emotional support, conversation and social connection. Guwahati is a rapidly developing city in Assam due to population growth and urbanization. Hence the family structure here is also getting smaller and more individualized. Many adults become lonely as young people leave home for job, education or a better life. In such circumstances, old age homes provide them with a safe place (Bordoloi, 2024). Well-being of the elderly does not only mean physical health but it also includes feelings of peace of mind, social respect, and support. It is often heard from the elderly that "We are not old, but it is loneliness that makes us old." This sentence expresses both societal responsibility and lack of support. Protection of the lives of the elderly, health care, peace of mind and a life of dignity - these are fundamental rights. When society, family and government work together, old age can also be enjoyable and dignified. Therefore, it is very important to study the well-being of elderly people in the old age homes of Guwahati and their need for assistance. This study raises a question to society that how responsible are our youth towards the elderly? How attentive we youth are to their rights and needs? So that, the study of old age homes in Guwahati is not only academic, it is an attempt at social awareness in the society.

Literature review:

(Talukdar, 2019) In the study of Ageing and its impact on the health of elderly citizens in old age home in Guwahati. Assam journal shows how the growing social concern has become a cause of social concern due to rapid demographic change and division of traditional family structures. The study found that urbanization and modernization have deteriorated joint family systems in India which has forced many elderly people to stay in old age homes.

Das (2019) In the study of socio-economic status and living conditions of older women in the Mother Old Age Home in Assam focused on their economic vulnerability, diminished support of the families, altered family structures, and the growing role of the institutional care and highlighted that old women particularly widows and unemployed women are highly vulnerable and are dependent on old age homes to provide shelter and care.

Bharali (2024) In the study of the prevalence of diabetes, hypertension, and obesity among the elderly in old age homes in Kamrup, Assam demonstrated the high prevalence of chronic illnesses, especially central obesity and indicated that health problems were strongly correlated with a reduced level of physical and general health. The research indicated that lifestyle, social support and environmental factors in addition to medical conditions affect ageing in institutions and it focused on the necessity of

periodic health examinations, prevention programs, and better medical services to ensure better lives of aged populations in old age home.

Sarma and Bardoloi (2024) In the article titled Physical, mental health versus socio-economic status of elderly citizens in old age home of Kamrup metro district of Assam, India revealed that many elderly people have chronic health problems (hypertension, diabetes, etc.), and some elderly people also exhibit indicators of depression or cognitive failure. It was established that the lower educated and some caste groups were more at risk of nutrition. This study also highlighted the fact that old age is determined by many factors such as income, circumstances of living and support at home and emphasized on the need to have better healthcare, social support, and awareness programs in order to increase the overall quality of life of the elderly.

The Problem Statement:

Nowadays the problem of the elderly age is seen as an important social concern in society. Many elderly people are lonely due to family structure, youth lifestyle and urbanization, as a result they lack care and social connection in their lives. In this situation, old age homes have provided them with shelter, but not all needs are met in the same way. There are many needs among the elderly in old age homes in Guwahati city regarding physical care, mental comfort, social connection and rights. However, there is a need to study how aware and sympathetic the society and the youth are in this regard. Therefore, the main problem of this research is that “What are the well-being and support needs of the elderly in old age homes, and how well society can understand these needs.”

The main reason for the increase in this problem is the decline of traditional family bonds and social support systems. Whereas family members used to live together and participate in the care of the elderly, now that culture is being eroded by urbanization, nomadic lifestyles and financial pressures. As a result, many older people experience psychological loneliness, low self-esteem and insecurity in life. In addition, government security schemes, pensions, health care, and social assistance are important issues that do not apply equally to all adults. Some suffer from helplessness others suffer from neglect by their children. Although old age homes provide an alternative shelter in such circumstances, problems of mental isolation, social isolation and deprivation of rights remain within that shelter.

This study aims to cover various aspects of the lives of the elderly people which includes their physical, mental, social and financial well-being, especially in the context of old age homes in Guwahati. This research also attempts to understand how responsible the younger generation and society are towards the elderly, and how much they respect their rights. This research gives a profound understand to society that the welfare of the elderly is not merely a personal matter; it can also be considered a social responsibility and moral duty.

Objective of the study:

1. To study the life background and life experiences of the elderly in old age homes.
2. To understand the daily lifestyle, health status and mental well-being of the elderly.
3. To know the role of family, staff and community support in the well-being of older people.
4. To study the problems and difficulties faced by the elderly in old age homes and gather recommendations for improvement.

Methodology:

This study was conducted on three old age homes in Guwahati - Amar Ghar Old Age Home, Mothers Old Age Home (both private), and Sonapur Government Old Age Home (a government old age home). The main purpose of selecting two different types of institutions was to compare how both public and private management differ in the welfare and support of the elderly. The research adopts a qualitative approach. Data were collected from 10 respondents from each old age home through an interview schedule, with a total of 30 respondents to complete the study. This research used purposive random sampling. Both primary data and secondary data were used for data collection. The primary data have been collected by structured interview schedule and observation methods. The interview schedule was based on different aspects of older people’s lives which covered their health, mental status, relationships with the community and the nature of support. Meanwhile, secondary data are collected from various research papers, books, and government reports, journals, articles and podcast. Thus, this research is an attempt to understand the well-being and support needs of elderly people in old age home by listening to their experience carefully.

Data Analysis and Result

Amar Ghor old age home is a non-government old age home which was established in 2001 under Ambikagiri Memorial Trust Society. It is located at Baikunthapur, Patharquary, Guwahati. The total number of elderly people living here is 60 with 40 being females and 20 being males.

Mother’s old age home is a non-government old age home which was established in 2009 under Monalisa Trust Society. It is located at Hatigaon, Sijubari, Guwahati. There are total 70 elderly people where 60 are females and 10 males.

Sonapur Government Old age home is a government old age home which was established in 2021 under Monalisa Trust Society with support from the state government. There are total 100 elderly people where 85 are females and 15 males.

The current study was conducted between 30 elderly people of each 10 from three selected old age homes in Guwahati: Amar Ghar old age home, Mother's old age home, and Sonapur Government old age home. The study emphasized on their background, daily lifestyle, health and mental health, the role of family and employees and understanding the challenges faced by the elderly people in old age home.

Table 1: Age Composition of Respondents

Age group(year)	Amar Ghar old age home	Mother’s old age home	Sonapur govt. old age home	Total respondents
60-64	2	1	1	4
65-69	3	2	2	7
70-74	2	3	3	8
75-79	2	2	3	7
80 and above	1	2	1	4
Total	10	10	10	30

Source: Field Work by the researcher

The list above is clear that most of the respondents fall in 70-80 years. The youngest one who was recorded was 60 years old, while the oldest was 99 years old, most of the residents were between the

ages of 65–75, indicate that relatively active adults can engage in the discussions of lighting and groups. The age range was slightly wider in the age, 75 years and above showed that the elderly and the elderly in poor health had a tendency to be more dependent on government benefits.

The findings highlight that while private homes often house elderly people with some financial or family background, government homes mostly serve destitute or abandoned elders, many of whom are in their late 70s and 80s.

Discussion

The main aim of the study was to understand the life-background, daily lifestyle, mental state, role of family and society, as well as the problems faced by the elderly.

1. Life background and life experience

The participants were 60 and above and the highest number of groups aged 70-80 years. Some participants said they worked in jobs, teachers, business or house management. But due to age and illness, they could not perform their duties and had to come to the old age home. Some have been left in the old age home by their children, while others have been brought by members of the community or acquaintances. The same important fact is that many elderly people are found together by the police on the streets, alleys or near hospitals and brought to the old age home themselves. Such cases are especially increasing in metropolitan areas, where the elderly are completely separated from their homes and families.

Through all these experiences, a clear picture emerges that a story of the lives of the elderly within the community running together over time and then escaping together. Several participants said, “We used to have houses, but now there are no houses, no people, only this place is left.” This kind of thing means that the old age home is the last refuge of their lives.

2. Daily life and social relationships

The day of the elderly in the old age home begins with the old rules such as getting up in the morning, meditating, singing holy songs, then eating. Several old age home offer small exercises and games, they enjoy games like ludo, carrom, chess and also read newspapers and books etc. Some old age home offer music, bhajans, meditation, and simultaneous festivals on weekends. This group activity builds friendship and mental strength among them. Some of the elderly women said, “It is relieving to be together here, we miss home but we feel at home among so many people.” There are different kinds of religion such as Hindu, Christian and Muslim elders stay together and they celebrate all festivals like Durga Puja, Eid, Diwali and charismas together. These reunion events erase religious differences and create unity and brotherhood. The environment of old age home has been shown to increase social bonds, mental strength to live together among the elderly, which has taken the form of social therapy.

3. Health status and mental well-being

As the research found, almost all participants have some health problem. High blood pressure, diabetes, back pain, vision and hearing problems, knee pain, and memory loss are the most common. A few have developed dementia or Alzheimer's, which sometimes prevents them from recognizing familiar people. Psychologically, feelings of loneliness, distance from family and neglect of children have affected their morale. Some have said, “They have left me, but now this employee loves me like a parent.” Such experiences show that mental care and support are key components of mental stability in the elderly. Old age homes usually have links to local hospitals. When elderly people get sick the caretaker takes them to hospital. Many elderly people said that there are little government facilities but most of it comes from

donations from the society.

4. Family relationships and social support

Most of the participants said that their children or families were not regularly contacted. Some children come once a year, others never.

The role of the old age home staff is very important. They provide food, care, medical treatment, and mental comfort. Several voluntary organizations, schools, and local people organize charity or cultural programs from time to time, which keep them mentally strength and stay positive in old age homes.

The research reveals a sobering truth that in place of the family, it is now the community and employees who are the 'new family'. It gives a new definition of social responsibility.

5. Major problems and propositions

The main problems of the participants are -

- Neglect and lack of support from family,
- Financial dependence and insecurity,
- Loneliness and depression,
- Physical illness and limited medical facilities,
- Memory loss and panic disorder.

To reduce these problems, it is necessary to -

- Regular health check-ups and psychological counseling camps,
- Increase in social interaction and recreational activities,
- Senior Citizens Honors Program with participation from local communities and schools,
- Simplify the process of government assistance and make it available to the public.

6. Comparative evaluation and analysis

There are differences in the number of services provided between government and private old age homes. Private old age homes such as Amar Old Age Home and Mother's Old Age Home both contain more personal attention, care and management. These services usually depend on money, i.e., some cost to avail more benefits. On the other hand, government old age homes such as Sonapur Government Old Age Home are available, but facility and care for more residents are limited and at some point.

In private old age homes, more emphasis is placed on the mental and social care of the elderly people. Family travel is relatively more visible, and there are more facilities for food, health services, entertainment, etc. Although there are free services in government old age homes, there is a slightly lower value due to lack of population and resources. Despite this, both types of old age homes organize various programs for the peace of mind and happiness and peace of the residents.

Both kinds of old age homes provide peace of mind for working together, prayers, celebrations and eating together. Although there are differences in systems and conveniences, such social activities provide similar mental and social support to the elderly people. Therefore, both private and government old age homes try to maintain good health of the lives of the old age people.

This research shows that the main needs of the elderly are not only goods, money or properties, but a sense of human support, dignity and social security. This means, the goodwill and connection of the family, staff, and society are essential to ensure the lives of the elderly and the mental health of the elderly. Research data shows that while private care and social activities are more common in private old age homes, there are different kinds of social events, activities, prayers and celebrations also help

maintain the mental health of the elderly in government old age homes. This explains that there is no limit to the basic needs of the elderly, but the experiences of community connection, interrelationships, dignity, and support are essential in their lives. From this perspective, it is difficult to meet the standard of living without the combined responsibility and support of family, society and government for the welfare of the elderly.

The role of social worker at old age home:

The social workers play a very important role in enhancing the quality of life of the elderly within the old age homes. They help older adults to overcome psychological, emotional and social challenges by counseling and therapeutic guidance and assist the family in knowing how they should be able to give proper care to their ageing members. Social workers also provide emotional attention in the form of meaningful conversations, empathetic listening and providing a comfortable atmosphere where older adults feel free to express their feeling of sadness, loneliness or being rejected. In order to reduce social isolation, they promote group activities, cultural celebrations, recreation and contact with the communities, volunteers and students, which makes the elders feel that they are connected, appreciated and psychologically empowered. The social workers also help the older people to access government welfare programs like pensions and medical amenities and law provisions to ensure their social and economic safety. They serve as a link between the families and the old age home promoting family participation and supporting failure to relationships where necessary. Most importantly, the social workers create awareness in the society about the need to respect, be polite and responsible to elderly citizens, so that encouraging empathy and social responsibility. They advocacy and support make it possible to create a society in which ageing is respected and the elderly can live significant, confident and independent lives. Their participation contributes to the continue of care and also enhances the general well-being of aged people.

Conclusion:

This research reveals a profound social truth that the old age home in Guwahati provide a safe haven in the lives of the elderly, but the decline in social responsibilities and family bonds has created the need for these old age homes. Many elderly people who have been abandoned by their children or relatives, and several who are found by the police abandoned on the streets, in hospitals or on temple steps, eventually take refuge in these old age homes. This situation highlights the changes inside society, the erosion of family values and the lack of love for the elderly. This research has shown that old age homes bring stability to the lives of elderly by providing food, medical services, shelter and love. But mentally they are suffering from loneliness, lack of children and isolation from society. If society and government together take steps for the mental and social welfare of senior citizens and provide facilities such as, regular health check-ups, legal advice, social opportunities and emotional stability to the elderly so that their lives will be more dignified and satisfying. In conclusion, this study clearly shows that what the elderly need is not material protection, but a social environment where they can be loved, respected and feel people's love. The elderly are the basis of society experience, so a civilized society can only be built if they are given a safe, dignified and loving life.

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