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Short Communication

Wisdom bridge for elderly people: Helpline

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ABSTRACT

Ageing is a universal phenomenon besides an ascriptive status of an individual. Being continuing process, it is characterised by conception and death. Socio-cultural factors play a vital role in determining the status of an individual as an “old”. It is inevitable stage in which majority of the elderly people undergo through numerous economic, social and psychological problems which vary from individual to individual (Kumar, 2016). Furthermore, the determination of elderly age differs from country and society in accordance with the system and its sub-systems. In general, people reached the old age stage by adding the number of years from time of birth. But there is no one-to-one relationship between the age and the characteristics commonly assigned to that age. The problem is compounded particularly in under-developed countries with wide socio-economic differences, by the fact that some individuals are energetic and dynamic even at the age of 75, while some individuals are lazy and have withdrawn themselves from active life even at the age of 50. On the contrary, in developed countries, the aged are very active even at the age of 70 and above, because of special diet, good health care, physical and mental conditions, healthy environment and the cultural aspect of their work mindedness (Sharma, 2009).

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1. Introduction

Ageing is universal phenomenon besides an ascriptive status of an individual. Being continuing process, it is characterised by conception and death. Socio-cultural factors play a vital role in determining the status of an individual as an “old”. It is inevitable stage in which majority of the elderly people undergo through numerous economic, social and psychological problems which vary from individual to individual (Kumar, 2016). Furthermore, the determination of elderly age differs from country and society in accordance with the system and its sub-systems. In general, people reached the old age stage by adding the number of years from time of birth. But there is no one-to-one relationship between the age and the characteristics commonly assigned to that age.¹⁻⁵ The

problem is compounded particularly in under-developed countries with wide socio-economic differences, by the fact that some individuals are energetic and dynamic even at the age of 75, while some individuals are lazy and have withdrawn themselves from active life even at the age of 50. On the contrary, in developed countries, the aged are very active even at the age of 70 and above, because of special diet, good health care, physical and mental conditions, healthy environment and the cultural aspect of their work mindedness (Sharma, 2009).

Elderly people also define themselves differently. Some are worried of getting old because of stigma and others welcome this age and enjoy it proudly without bothering about social labels. There are significant differences amongst the “young elder” (ages 60 to 70), the “middle-elder” (ages 70 to 80) and the “senior- elder” (80 and over) (Hooyman and Kiyak, 2008). In India, a person is

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considered 'old' when he or she passes above the 60 years of age. By tradition, the 60th year has been considered to be the starting of old age in India. Completion of 60 years; "Shastiabda Poorthi" is an important milestone in the life of an individual. It can say that, the period before man reached sixty is defined by materialistic pursuits and thereafter it is to be defined by his strive towards spiritualism. Usually, Shashti Poorthi is celebrated at the completion of the 60th year and the ushering in of the 61st year.^{3,6-12}

Longevity is a human desire of everyone but most human beings are awfully fear of getting elderly. This is not only due to the fear of declining health in old age but also due to the fact that most human societies place a premium on young aged and seem to ignore the old. The youth dominated societies of today may not have concern and care with hope for those who had been occupying high positions and role performing significant status a few years ago. That is why majority of people are having apprehensions about becoming elder and quite a few of us would prefer an earlier mercy death rather than suffering innumerable diseases with problems linked with senior age group. It cannot be mentioned that only old age has problems; rather a man has to face host of problems at every stage of life. But it is conceivable that the problems required to be faced in old age may be more difficult and of a different nature to the problems of young or middle age (Kumudine, 1996). The elderly people enjoyed high status in traditional societies. This status was assured because of their experience and the knowledge they are possess. They played a vital role in transmitting knowledge and maintaining harmony among diverse communities. For this purpose the joint family provided a basic shelter and a sense of common ownership (Mane, 2016). However, the rapid process of industrialization has altered the structure of joint family altogether with everlasting impact on the life cycle of elderly people.¹³⁻¹⁷ The existing literature reveals that nuclear family is fast growing institution across the world and India is of no exception. It is a well known fact that during the industrialization period, the life expectancy of humans have increased with the advancement of different health equipments, but on the other hand it has damaged the quality of excellence, authority and honour of elderly people. Due to the industrialization and urbanization, specific development, deteriorating of family structure and stress on the individual's idea and materialistic values, the condition of the elderly has drastically changed (Raju, 2011). However the joint family structure breakdown into the nuclear family structure, but this nuclear family emerges with the disintegration of the joint family. This disintegration usually caused by individualism created problems in the family structure. Present living also separates the generations as new young generation go away to pursue their future options, depending less on their guardians and more on their own capacity of earning

money power. Furthermore, because manufacturing & urban community change rapidly, the skills capacity and life experiences that served the old are not relevant to the younger. Finally, the tremendous production of industrial environment means that all members of a society need not to work. Thus most of the very elder and the very young play un-productive role (Randhawa, 1991). However, in fast changed segments of the economic important the advanced areas, several input executives are significantly giving preference to younger people as compared to aged people. Industrial areas often confer senior people merely less contribution in the financial system due to the lack of knowledge as well as training demanded in a present changing market place. The physical decline in old age has not been taken seriously, as this has been considered as a part of elderly people. However, elderly people face more problems and pain which results in confinement of their day to day activities and that is why they are living a life of dependency for their future survival. Countries like USA and other developed nations give more emphasis and puts high values on youthfulness which creates more fear and self doubt in the old age (Muthukrishnaveni, 2010). In spite of various continent, country or place one thing is certain, that future generations of elderly will certainly be addressed in another vision, ageing itself, as well as services are more valuable and productive, reflecting the healthy outlook in this period of their lives. Along with major social services offered to elderly and their families, social gerontologists need to provide a variety of resources and skills to deal with the needful effectively.

National Commission on Population, the share of the elderly in India's population, close to 9 to 11 percent in 2011, is growing fast and may reach 20percent by 2036.

If India is to ensure a decent quality of life for the elderly in the near future, planning and providing for it must begin immediately.

Life expectancy in India has more than doubled since Independence from around 32 years in the late 1940s to 70 years or so today. Many countries have done even better, but this is still a historical achievement.

2. Elder Helpline: Wisdom Bridge

An international organization working in the field of aging Help Age runs a Toll-free Elder Helpline approximately across 21 state capitals of India offering assistance to elders in need. The services offered are with the help of NGOs, Rescue of abandoned elders, Counseling of those in distress, Health care, legal support, Information related to services available etc.

The Helpline links elders to various institutions such as NGOs working for older people, old age homes, hospitals, police, government and non-governmental organizations with collaborations of Universities.

Keeping in mind the vulnerability of elders & our Corona warriors on ground, in the current Covid 19 pandemic situation, HelpAge India is adhering to all the safety and hygiene measures for all its programs on the field, like wearing face masks, regular washing & sanitization of hands, and maintaining social distancing norms at all times, to ensure their safety & protection.

A study was conducted to understand and assess the needs of the elderly, the existing helplines in the country and also some international helplines for senior citizens. Based on the study, the need for a helpline at a national level was recognized. Government of Telangana and Tata Trusts piloted the helpline in Telangana between March 2019 and September 2020.

The experience with elderly suggested that there should be a Action plan implanted through collectively which includes family, society members, and government as well to manage the problems of the elderly.

3. Source of Funding

None.

4. Conflict of Interest

None.

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