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Recognition Of Elderly Women - The Need Of The Hour

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Abstract: Aging is a global phenomenon. It is the normal process of time-related change which begins with birth and continues until death. These changes include how a person feels and functions with respect to physical or mental competences. It is important for individuals to increase their knowledge and understanding of aging so as to prevent discrimination and maltreatment of the elders in the society today. The public's perception of elderly people particularly elderly women is very unpleasant and can implant fear into individuals who are approaching the 60 years of age. In India, seventy five percent of elderly persons reside in rural areas out of which about 48.2 percent comprise of women. Today these elderly women face miserable life. Their health problems coupled with emotional wellbeing like depression, isolation, loneliness and frustration are serious crises. This may pose mounting pressures on various socio-economic fronts including pension outlays, health care expenditures, savings levels, and so forth. If these problems are not dealt effectively, they can become a source of tension and stress. There is an emerging need to pay greater attention to the life of elderly women and to promote holistic policies and programmes for dealing with the aging society.

***Index Terms* – abandoned, elderly, frustration, isolation etc.,**

I. Introduction

Population aging is a worldwide phenomenon, and India is no exception. Its population has approximately tripled during the last 60 years and the number of elderly Indians has increased more than fourfold. It is a known fact that aging is a story of change in individuals and families. To be specific, it is a story of loss: loss of physical and mental function, loss of family and friends, and loss of spouse. These losses take place at different rates for different individuals and groups; people and families often adapt to losses with changes in their behaviour or environment, making aging a complex and dynamic process. The experience of aging is quite different for women than it is for men for a number of reasons.

II. ELDERLY WOMEN IN INDIA:

Elderly persons in India are facing multiple challenges, and when it comes to elderly women, the plight is all the more alarming. Not only they are being mistreated, but also abandoned by their families. Rural elderly women who are single, abandoned or widowed face multiple hurdles due to illiteracy, malnourishment, abuse, lack of housing and exclusion from economic benefits. About 90 percent of them hail from unorganized sector with no social security. Migration of children causes problems of isolation and unsatisfactory life for rural elderly. Thus they face lot of discrimination and most of the time they are unable to raise their voices against the ill-treatment and discrimination.

Actually families are considered to provide the most important support in taking care of the elderly persons particularly elderly women. Earlier, Children were the main economic supporters. But, today the situation has changed drastically. Majority of the rural elderly women are found to be engaged in work force for their livelihood. It is also reporting that the rate of participation in work has increased after entering into old age. Most of them are engaged in some kind of unorganized work to meet their economic needs and wanted to be a partially dependant.

III. HEALTH STATUS OF THE ELDERLY WOMEN:

Elderly women usually suffer from chronic conditions. They often suffer from multiple health issues like diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, dementia and so forth. Besides this, visual defects, hearing impairments and deterioration of speech cause social isolation among the elderly women. The rural elderly women are also affected by poverty, lack of education, poor nutrition, and increased risk of accidents and non-availability of advanced health care services. Pity that health care services extended by the family members are weakening and they are often denied for availing medical aid.

IV. ISOLATION AND LONELINESS OF ELDERLY WOMEN:

Superficially, isolation in old age is one of the most common issues of elderly women. Even the elderly women who are living with their children and grandchildren are also emotionally suffering from separation and isolation issue. It has been observed earlier that the instances of loneliness of elderly women living in the cities are more compared to that of elderly women living in rural areas, where family structure and social relationship was strong. But now, the situation has changed. Even the rural elderly women are experiencing loneliness more because their children and grandchildren are busy with their jobs and their own interest and development. Invariably, the gap between the present generation and elderly women is widening due to the fast pace of life. Younger generations do not find much time to communicate and share ideas with their elders. The nuclear family structure and increasing self-centeredness is also taking a toll for the elderly women's isolation. Added to this, the difficulty of elderly women is aggravated by the life time gender-based discrimination. The gendered nature of aging is such that universally, women tend to live longer than men. In the advanced age of 60 years and above, widowhood dominates the status of women. Social mores inhibit women from re-marrying and hence they remain alone subjected to various restrictions and exploitations.

V. MARGINALIZATION OF ELDERLY WOMEN:

The traditional family structures were meant to care for the elderly. This function started to shrink as urbanisation grows and resources become scarce in rural areas. The elderly women had to face many problems like marginalisation and isolation due to gender discrimination. They are often treated as unpaid caregivers to their grandchildren and made to do household chores in return for a roof over their heads. In many Indian households, women are not encouraged to be decision-makers even in their productive years. In old age, the widowed woman is completely at the mercy of her family and often suffers abuse. The gender disparities faced by women get heightened in old age since the woman often has no income or assets and is completely dependent on her family. Many suffer morbidities and emotional stress but are unable to seek help for lack of resources. There are government schemes meant to help older people but only few older women are aware of it. This depressing situation for elderly women is found across the country.

VI. INTERVENTION OF GOVERNMENT IN EMPOWERING ELDERLY WOMEN:

Seeing the rising negligence of elderly population particularly elderly women, the government has introduced some intervention programmes and policies to create legal awareness, free travel passes, mandatory provision of healthcare for elderly women, universal pension scheme, tax concessions, reforms and developing post-retirement skills, thus safeguarding the elderly from discrimination and exploitation. The provision of legal security against abuse and harassment also ensure the elderly women to feel comfortable and lead the remaining span of life peacefully.

One has to understand that old age is a natural process. It should not be identified as a problem of the individual. It is the most important phase of life which everyone has to live. Government is playing a crucial role in safeguarding the elderly women from struggle. Respecting and caring elderly women should be reinforced through education and interventions. The younger generation should be made to understand that the elders are the pillars of society. The tradition and culture along with religion and history get passed only through the elderly persons (particularly elderly women) to younger generations. In the modern industrialized society, parents do not have much time to spare with their children. But children can spend time with their grandparents who are always ready to spare their time to share their life experiences and impart norms and values which books cannot teach. Thus it can be imparted that elders play a major role in character building of the future generation. As far as health is concerned the elderly women are the first one at home who offers remedies for any kind of health issues. They not only suggest but also provide proper remedy to the issue suffered by the members of the family. They follow the traditional method and prepare home medicine with the ingredients available at home. Added to this, supplement will be followed in the food which they cook especially for the sick at home.

Another fact that cannot be denied is that elders are often good decision makers not only in the family but also in community and society. And hence elders easily make decisions for the functioning of the family, community and society. They are often best planners in executing activities meticulously. They plan ahead systematically, analyse the pros and cons of each and every aspect in different dimensions and able to provide solution to the problems in an effective manner.

VII. CONCLUSION:

To conclude old age should be treated as a time for creativity, social engagement and productivity; rather than a period of decay and dependency. The elderly can play an important role in sustainable development. Their contributions in providing wisdom and advice to younger generations and the society as a whole should be recognized and acknowledged.

It is recommended that groups or campaigns be set up so as to ensure that elderly women in our societies are valued and respected by caring and protecting them from ageism and elder abuse. This will further promote how the elderly women have contributed to society and developed new initiatives in which they can add more valuable contributions to society. Added to this, ageing related educational programmes should be implemented and geared towards all age groups of society, more so to those groups that portray negative attitudes towards older people. These programmes should also branch over to schools in the society, both primary and secondary so as to target children and adolescents with respect to ageism. Education programmes could also be implemented strongly in the community; for example health centres, community centres, and youth groups. These community educational programmes should consist of some elderly women so as to ensure elderly women feel valued and acknowledged rather than isolated or socially excluded. Involvement in these community activities will also allow for enhancement of their quality of life.

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