

## **NEED FOR PROMOTING POSITIVE AGEING: SOME EMPIRICAL EVIDENCES**

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Population ageing in developing countries is much more rapid than in the developed regions. In 2013, 55.8% of the world's elderly were in Asia, which is also home to 48.3% of the world's oldest old, a percentage which is expected to increase in the next half century. The second largest number of the elderly in the world are in India. The elderly population has increased several fold between 1950-2001, and it is expected that by 2050, one out of 6 older persons in the world will be in India.

Positive ageing looks to change societal perceptions about ageing, so that it is viewed with acceptance and positivity as a new phase of life. This is particularly important, given that research on ageing adopts a problem-oriented approach that tends to explore the negative aspects of ageing, which in turn affects interventions. However, taking on a different approach that of positive ageing will impact the way in which interventions and solutions are sought.

Prakash states that ageing should not be looked at as problematic but considered, instead, in the light of its positive aspects, now often indicated by terms such as productive ageing, active ageing and healthy ageing (Prakash, 2012). A doctor in Mauritius who still continues to work considers retirement as a unique phase that should not be considered as an end to one's professional practice but as continued practice, provided one's health permits it. He also feels that the government could provide schemes to offer a monetary token to those who participate in society through service, as well as constructing homes and improving roads to assist elders. A fisherman in Mauritius, who cannot contemplate retirement as he requires a steady income to support his family, expresses the view that training can be provided to facilitate adaptability to new environments for those who wish to work after retirement. He also feels that the state and the media can do more

to enable the elderly not to be exploited or become victims of crime (Club le Flamboyant, 2014).

As far as positive ageing is concerned, tips are offered on how to keep active in old age ranging from keeping fit, meditating and engaging in cultural activities, as well as healthy eating, focusing on good conduct, good thoughts, good behaviour with others and recreation all of which are part of ancient practices in India to keep healthy even in old age. The importance of knowing about ageing and understanding it as a stage of life, much like youth or infancy, requires plans to be made ahead of time order to prepare for it. Understanding ageing is important so as not to summarily dismiss problems as being part of old age, and also to have a fuller sense of life in the later years, and for policy makers and planners to accordingly be sensitized and prioritize work as well (Prakash, 2012).

However, it must also be seen that the elderly are frequently engaged in activities such as care giving, advising and mediating in conflicts as well as being mentors, which are frequently not considered contributions in formal ways. For example, in India, elderly grand parents look after the grandchildren while the parents go to work. The elderly are also sources of knowledge, which are of used in times of crises, such as a natural disaster occurring in their communities. Much of such contributions are considered part of their existence in society and is non-monetized. These are a few instances of engagement with the community, which can be encouraged in so far as it is beneficial to the elderly and enhances their quality of life, promoting positive ageing (Siva Raju, 2014).

The role of the community towards this end can also be seen through the lens of community care. Community care for the elderly includes any kind of service, based in the community and extended to the elderly. Community-based programmes are able to enable the participation of families and the elderly in involvement in society, enhancing well-being. Care can therefore also be given by an organisation, and the elderly's involvement in it may be active such as with regard to making decisions and through the implementation of programmes. There is an example of a day care centre in a poor neighborhood, wherein an organisation enabled professional health services, with a weekly clinic for the elderly and special trips made to

the homes of those who cannot make it there. The centre was managed through associations of the elderly and social workers from the organisation enabled activities (Nair, 2013). In Mauritius, residential centres have been set up by the government for recreational activities for the elderly, said to be so successful that other centres are being set up. There are also about 750 senior citizens' associations that have been set up to benefit the elderly in a range of activities (Jayraj Ramjada, 2014).

Also important for positive ageing are policies that enable support from the family towards the elderly through a provision of financial support. In addition, day care centres that enable work participation programmes would be greatly beneficial to the rural elderly in order to assist them, given that many are poor, have little or no education and lack adequate access to health facilities. Older persons can also be encouraged to build skills through adult literacy programmes. Old age pension schemes for the poor elderly can be made available through a better/more effective implementation of the social security policy in India, and social welfare services oriented towards the particular needs of the elderly, alongside minimum standards for old age homes need to be enacted. Comprehensive research on the elderly providing a wealth of detail, ranging from income to family life are necessary so that the government can take proper steps towards addressing these needs. Also important is the need for in-depth studies on how elderly women, and particularly the widowed, utilise their social support networks for survival. Further state governments may consider setting up commissions for older persons so as to work towards their needs at the state level (Nair, 2011).

The following articles in the special issue of the journal discuss different aspects of positive ageing and these are briefly presented below. In the article, "Institutional Care for Elderly: Positive Ageing", Dr. Gangadharan discusses the connection between emotional and psychological perceptions during ageing and how best to facilitate positive ageing. He gives examples of including daily exercise in one's routine, engaging in activities that stimulate the mind such as participating in group quizzes maintaining one's lifestyle, citing the example of residents in an old age home being cared for by other residents themselves, building up one's social networks through

community involvement and pursuing goals such as a daily walk, adapting one's expectations to changing realities such as children migrating, aiming for preventive health through health check-ups and so on. He also gives examples of many positive programmes that are engaged in by foundations catering to the elderly such as regular picnics and “second career” workshops and placement centres. He cites examples of elderly persons and the activities they take part in to stay active and involved in society. All these determine the quality of life.

The second article, “Active Ageing Status of Rural Elderly Women in Tamil Nadu” by Hannah Sangeetha and Raja Samuel presents a study that looks to understand the factors that enhance the quality of life of elderly women in rural Tamil Nadu. They use the WHO framework of active ageing to analyze their findings, which looks at opportunities that encourage health participation and security in the ageing process. They discuss various social theories of ageing in their paper. The authors collected data from 12 villages in a rural area in Tamil Nadu, through the mobile medical unit of Help Age India, studying respondents between 60 and 75 years in the entire population, statistically analyzing the data collected with the help of interview schedules and an active ageing scale. Some of the main findings from the study reveal that the majority or 60.3% of the respondents expressed satisfaction with their life, and for elderly women, it was seen that the number of family members and their quality of life was positively correlated. It was also seen that 75% were involved in daily activities in their life, ranging from occupational to household activities. However, 84% of the respondents did not have an old age pension, and 90% of the widowed women did not have a widow's pension. The study recommended that programmes and schemes with the support of the government and NGOs be planned to enhance the quality of life of the elderly, focusing on needs such as financial security and engaging in active learning.

This is followed by an important discussion on, “Social Capital, Community Participation and Quality of Life: A Case of Older Women from an Urban Context in India”. Nidhi Gupta, discusses how social networks are an important aspect of social capital that impacts the quality of life of older persons. A literature review on social capital shows it being comprised of social networks and social connections

and participation in these networks is a part of active ageing. She discusses the findings from a cross-sectional study that was carried out to understand the link between social capital and the quality of life of older women in an urban region in India and its determinants. Nidhi Gupta's study involved data collected from 450 respondents across classes in a suburb of Mumbai, using the disproportionate sampling method, with a special interview tool designed for the study and statistical methods deployed. Her findings suggested that social resources such as social networks and social support are linked to socio-economic and demographic variables such that the older women among the poor had the least frequent social contacts and networks, increasing by class division. The findings revealed that social capital and its components such as social networks were an important determinant. Nidhi Gupta suggests a multi pronged approach to strengthen family and social relationships, and infrastructural improvements such as age-friendly designs in transportation in order to promote positive ageing, and to encourage community engagement through mahila mandal programmes.

In the article, "Volunteerism among the Elderly: The Way to Participatory Empowerment", Anjali Raje discusses volunteerism as a way for older persons to involve themselves in the community by volunteering their skills and interest to others in society, especially where it is most needed, which enables the elderly to stay busy and active. She discusses volunteerism within the framework of 'productive ageing', which goes beyond paid work in the formal arena but includes participation in activities that enable inclusion in development processes. Anjali Raje also discusses productive ageing in the Indian context and volunteerism as of great value in the Indian philosophy of giving without expectations, as well as non-monetized activities that older persons engage in the household or caring for grandchildren. She therefore discusses volunteerism as a means to age actively and as a means of participation and empowerment. Anjali Raje presents a case study of an older person's experience with volunteerism and the ways in which he has enjoyed it and benefited from it.

We also get to know about, "Active Ageing through Volunteerism: A Review", as Sabiha Vasi focuses on the impact of volunteerism amongst the Indian elderly towards successful ageing. She reviews

work on the theoretical understanding of ageing, including social theories of ageing and models that explain the motivations of those who volunteer and also discusses the situation of the elderly in India, touching upon the feminization of the elderly and the range of discrimination experienced. Also discussed is the connection between ageing and the quality of life, the WHO framework of 'active ageing', and a review of literature on volunteerism in society, including new forms that are emerging and the difficulties encountered in researching volunteerism as well as older persons' engagement in volunteer work, which facilitates social involvement and a different, altruistic motivation. She talks about the gaps in the research on older adult volunteerism in India, particularly given that volunteerism is found to be especially low amongst poor and female elderly, and the need for further inquiry into the ways in which older persons and largely, older women can be encouraged to participate in volunteer work and its role in creating a more inclusive society, and conceptions of volunteerism in the Indian context, on a more general note.

A study on, "Living Arrangements, Housing and the Subjective Well-Being of the Elderly" by Ananya Biswas and Khushboo Ahire discusses a study conducted in an urban region in West Bengal with an aim to understand the quality of life of the elderly with regard to their living arrangements. They discuss the literature on living arrangements and its connection to the subjective well-being of the elderly and the changes taking place, owing to changes in family structures overall. Also discussed was the relationship between living arrangements and a susceptibility to disease, access to healthcare and perceptions towards health, differences between the rural and urban elderly, and the social and economic systems available. The study has taken a proportion sample from urban housing and urban slums, comprising 250 respondents from independent houses, slums and group housing with the area of residence and the type of housing indicative of their socio-economic status. An equal number of male and female respondents are interviewed for insights into gender differences. The findings indicated that more than half of the sample of the elderly were in families that had four or less members, with a majority staying with their children. Around 30% were uncomfortable with their living arrangements, and the lower the socio-economic group, the more the distress experienced

with regard to their living conditions. It was also seen that perceptions of comfortable living and, good housing facilities were positively correlated to the well-being of older persons. Therefore, the study indicates a clear correlation between living arrangements and the perception of well-being of the elderly. The authors suggest that research on ways to assess the subjective well-being be furthered in order to understand it better, particularly in terms of the elderly living in rural areas.

Finally, we are given insights into the role of “Environmental Factors influencing Active Ageing amongst Elderly Women”. Vibha Singh discusses how the environment impacts the active ageing process for elderly women in an urban environment. She states the importance of supportive environments in promoting healthy ageing, using the active ageing framework. Vibha Singh presents data from a study conducted to understand the role of environmental factors, including physical and social to encourage or constrain elderly women in ageing actively. The study was conducted in Delhi in 2013 with the objective of understanding the life experiences of older women living in the community and at home in terms of their health, security and societal participation, using qualitative methods. Help Age India enabled participant selection, particularly of those who were between 60-70 years and, living within the community, with an emphasis on their uniqueness, so as to understand their range of experiences. The data was analyzed through the active ageing framework and themes were gathered from the data. The results of the study indicate that concerns with regard to the physical environment were in terms of how friendly the community is with regard to age, shifting residences, and public transport. That is, respondents fear leaving home as there are no lifts and they might, consequently, fall and so affect their health and general well-being. Vibha Singh raises questions about problems that are encountered when external help may not be available or cannot be afforded. There was also the fear of venturing outside alone because of potholes on the roads, or in crowded public spaces such as parks. A change of residence was also mentioned, as adapting is difficult and causes great discomfort to the elderly. Further, relationships with family members may affect the experience of old age, particularly in terms of the inclusion of the elderly in the family, as also the lack of a spouse as a companion or for those with a spouse and the accom



panying sense of security that goes with it. Overall, the study shows that irrespective of the status of the elderly, relationships and support systems have weakened over time. Neighbourly relations also differ by class and neighborhood, as those in less privileged sections are more dependent on their neighbours. The author suggests that all these factors highlight the fact that the elderly can be encouraged to be socially active, and NGO's, the police and other agencies can work together to facilitate such opportunities.

From these articles, we can see that positive ageing can be conceptualized and approached in several ways. The empirical data reveals that there are many examples and opportunities that encourage positive ageing, as well as others that illustrate the ways in which there are challenges to ageing. It is hoped that this variety of perspectives will offer a platform for further discussions on the concept and advance its work in society.

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