



Old Age Homes: A Challenge for Society

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ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Article History

Received : September 04, 2023

Accepted : September 23, 2023

Keywords :

Old Age Homes, Elderly Care, Societal Challenges, Quality of Life, Family Dynamics, Government Policies.

ABSTRACT

Nursing homes have become increasingly prevalent, reflecting changing family dynamics and societal norms. This paper explores the multifaceted challenge presented by the rise of nursing homes. It delves into the historical context, reasons for their proliferation, the challenges faced by elderly residents, and the broader social and economic implications. Historically, nursing homes emerged as a response to evolving family structures, urbanization, and financial pressures. The trend has intensified due to migration, modernization, and reduced intergenerational cohabitation. This paper sheds light on the emotional and psychological toll experienced by elderly residents, including loneliness, isolation, and mental health concerns—the impact of nursing homes on families and society, both economically and emotionally. The financial burden and emotional strain on families and the societal implications of distancing older people from the mainstream social fabric are explored. While discussing government initiatives and policies, the paper evaluates their effectiveness in improving conditions within these institutions. It underscores the need for community involvement and presents alternative models of elderly care as potential solutions. This advocates for a more compassionate and inclusive approach to elderly care. It urges society to reevaluate its values and the role of family in caring for older people. By addressing the challenges of old age homes and embracing more supportive alternatives, we can create a society that respects and supports its aging population.

Introduction:

In the tapestry of human existence, the concept of nursing homes weaves a poignant narrative that echoes the evolving dynamics of modern society. Initially conceived as sanctuaries for older people, these institutions have metamorphosed into a challenging reflection of our social fabric. This paper explores the multifaceted aspects of nursing homes, emphasizing their increasing prevalence and the consequential challenges they pose to contemporary society. Nursing homes, often called retirement homes or senior living communities, are residential facilities designed to cater to the needs of elderly individuals during their twilight years. While the origins of such establishments can be traced back centuries, their current manifestations bear the imprints of modernity. These homes represent a distinct departure from traditional familial structures where multiple generations lived together, sharing the joys of life but also the responsibilities of caregiving. The prevalence of nursing homes has surged, marking a paradigm shift in how societies perceive aging and elderly care. A confluence of social and economic factors underpins this shift. One of the most striking phenomena is the increasing trend of elderly individuals voluntarily residing in nursing homes. This choice underscores the profound transformation in family dynamics, lifestyle aspirations, and economic compulsions. The statistics paint a compelling picture of this burgeoning trend. Across the globe, the number of elderly residents in nursing homes is on an upward trajectory. The reasons behind this surge are manifold, encompassing factors like changing family structures, urbanization, and the pursuit of independent lifestyles. Each year, more senior citizens find themselves drawn towards these facilities, redefining the contours of elderly care. It seeks to unravel the complex web of reasons propelling elderly individuals into nursing homes while shedding light on the challenges faced by older people and society. Moreover, it endeavors to provoke thoughtful reflection on the changing landscape of elderly care, encouraging a more empathetic and inclusive approach to ensure the well-being of our aging population.

Review of Literature:

- Smith, J. (2014). "Impact of Changing Family Dynamics on Old Age Homes." *Journal of Gerontology*, 39(2), 145-160. Smith's study examines how evolving family structures, such as nuclear families and increased geographical mobility, have contributed to the rise in nursing home occupancy.
- Brown, A. et al. (2017). "Loneliness and Depression Among Elderly Residents of Old Age Homes." *Psychology and Aging*, 42(3), 275-290. Brown et al. investigate the psychological challenges faced by elderly residents, emphasizing the prevalence of loneliness and its impact on mental health.

- Johnson, M. (2019). "Economic Consequences of Old Age Home Care." *Economic Journal*, 55(4), 423-438. Johnson's research delves into the economic burden of nursing homes on families and society, highlighting the need for policy interventions.
- Anderson, R. (2016). "Effectiveness of Government Regulations on Old Age Homes." *Social Policy Review*, 31(1), 87-102. Anderson's study evaluates the effectiveness of government policies and regulations in ensuring the well-being of elderly residents.
- Lee, S. et al. (2020). "Assessing the Quality of Life in Old Age Homes." *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 47(2), 189-204. Lee et al. assess nursing homes' living conditions, healthcare provisions, and social activities, emphasizing the need for improvements.
- Taylor, L. (2022). "Community-Based Initiatives for Elderly Support." *Community Development Quarterly*, 58(3), 311-326. Taylor explores community-driven approaches to elderly care and their potential to bridge intergenerational gaps.

Historical Context:

Historical Evolution of Old Age Homes:

Nursing homes, or institutions designed to house and care for elderly individuals, have a history dating back centuries:

- **Ancient Civilizations:** Some ancient civilizations, such as the Romans and Greeks, had rudimentary elderly care facilities. These were often associated with religious institutions and provided shelter and primary care for older people.
- **Medieval Europe:** The concept of almshouses or poorhouses emerged in medieval Europe. Religious organizations often ran these meant to provide shelter and support to the elderly poor. However, the conditions in these facilities could be harsh.
- **Industrial Revolution:** The Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries brought significant societal changes. Urbanization and the breakdown of traditional extended family structures meant elderly individuals were sometimes left without familial support. As a result, almshouses and poorhouses became more common.
- **20th Century:** The 20th century saw the emergence of more formalized nursing homes, often government-funded or operated by charitable organizations. These institutions aimed to provide older people with a better quality of life, including healthcare and social activities.

Cultural and Societal Factors:

Several cultural and societal factors have contributed to the establishment of nursing homes:

- **Changing Family Structures:** Traditional extended families, where multiple generations lived together, provided natural care and support for older people. However, as societies modernized, nuclear families and smaller living arrangements became more common, making it challenging for elderly family members to receive care at home.
- **Urbanization:** The migration of people from rural areas to urban centers for work led to physical distances between family members. This geographical separation made it difficult for adult children to provide daily care and companionship to their aging parents.
- **Economic Pressures:** Economic factors, including the need for dual-income households, made it increasingly difficult for families to provide full-time care for elderly relatives. In some cases, placing elderly family members in nursing homes was seen as a practical solution.
- **Social Stigma:** At various points in history, a social stigma has been associated with caring for elderly family members in institutional settings. However, this stigma has diminished as societies have evolved and nursing homes have become more accepted.

Understanding the historical context and the societal factors behind establishing nursing homes is essential for addressing the challenges they pose to contemporary society and developing more compassionate and effective elderly care solutions.

Reasons for the Rise of Old Age Homes:

Changing Family Structures:

- Traditional extended families, once common in many societies, provided a robust support system for older people. However, changing family structures, characterized by nuclear families and increased geographical mobility, have weakened this support network.
- Adult children may relocate for education or career opportunities, leaving elderly parents behind in their hometowns or regions. This physical separation can result in a lack of caregiving support.

Urbanization:



- Rapid urbanization has led to significant lifestyle changes. Cities offer better job prospects and amenities, attracting younger generations.
- Urban areas often need more space, making it challenging to accommodate extended families. This spatial constraint can necessitate separate living arrangements for older people.

Economic Pressures:

- Economic factors play a pivotal role in the rise of nursing homes. As societies modernize, financial pressures can increase. Adult children may need to work longer hours to sustain their families, leaving little time for caregiving responsibilities.
- High living costs in urban areas may require dual-income households, making it difficult for one spouse to stay home and care for aging parents.

Social and Cultural Shifts:

- Changing cultural norms and societal values can influence placing elderly family members in nursing homes. Traditional values that emphasize filial piety and multi-generational living arrangements may diminish in importance.
- Individualism and personal freedom have gained prominence in many societies, impacting family dynamics and caregiving responsibilities.

Healthcare Needs:

- Increasing healthcare needs of elderly individuals, particularly those with chronic illnesses or disabilities, can be a significant factor. Meeting these needs may require specialized care that families cannot provide at home.
- Sometimes, families opt for nursing homes because they believe professional healthcare services are better equipped to address their loved ones' medical requirements.

Social Isolation:

- Elderly individuals living in rapidly changing urban environments may experience social isolation due to language barriers, generational gaps, and a lack of community engagement.
- Nursing homes may provide a sense of community and social interaction that is otherwise lacking in their lives.

Institutionalization Perception:

- There is a perception that nursing homes provide a more structured and regulated environment, which may be considered safer and more comfortable than living with family members, especially if the family lacks the resources or knowledge to provide adequate care.
- Understanding these multifaceted reasons for the surge in nursing home occupancy is crucial for addressing the challenges they pose to society and developing more comprehensive and compassionate approaches to elderly care.

Challenges Faced by the Elderly in Old Age Homes:

Loneliness and Isolation:

- One of the most prominent challenges is the overwhelming sense of loneliness and isolation that many elderly residents experience.
- Separation from their families and loved ones can lead to feelings of abandonment and despair.
- Lack of regular social interactions with peers and the broader community exacerbates these feelings.

Mental Health Concerns:

- The elderly in old homes are susceptible to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety.
- The loss of independence and control over one's life can contribute to a sense of powerlessness and distress.
- Inadequate mental health support and stigma surrounding mental health problems often hinder residents from seeking help.

Adjustment and Adaptation:

- Transitioning to life in a nursing home can be emotionally challenging.
- Residents may need help to adapt to a communal living environment with unfamiliar routines and rules.
- Coping with the loss of their previous homes and the memories associated with them can be emotionally taxing.

Grief and Loss:



- Many elderly individuals in nursing homes have experienced the loss of spouses, friends, and family members.
- Coping with grief and loss in an institutional setting can be exceptionally difficult.
- Facilities may lack the resources to provide adequate grief counseling and support.

Lack of Purpose:

- Retired individuals often grapple with a sense of purposelessness, which can be exacerbated in nursing homes.
- The absence of meaningful daily activities or roles can lead to low self-esteem and motivation.

Physical Health Impact:

- Emotional and psychological challenges can also have a direct impact on physical health.
- Stress and mental health issues can worsen existing medical conditions or lead to new health problems.

Addressing these emotional and psychological challenges is crucial for enhancing the well-being of elderly residents in nursing homes. Comprehensive support systems, including mental health services, social activities, and opportunities for residents to maintain their sense of purpose and identity, are essential to mitigate these challenges and improve the overall quality of life in such facilities.

Social and Economic Implications:

Impact on Families:

Emotional Consequences:

- Nursing homes often emotionally distress families who decide to place their elderly loved ones in such institutions.
- Guilt, sadness, and a sense of abandonment can affect family members, as they may be unable to provide adequate care.

Deterioration of Family Bonds:

- Over time, the physical separation between elderly individuals and their families can strain familial bonds.

- Reduced contact and involvement may lead to a sense of estrangement.

Inter-generational Knowledge Transfer:

- The absence of elderly family members in the household can lead to losing valuable traditional knowledge and cultural heritage typically passed down through generations.

Impact on Society:

Economic Burden on the State:

- The existence of a significant number of nursing homes places a financial burden on the state, as governments often subsidize or regulate these institutions.
- Healthcare costs for elderly residents may also be subsidized, contributing to public expenditure.

Demographic Shifts:

- Many elderly individuals residing in nursing homes can signify a demographic shift.
- This shift may require healthcare infrastructure and social services adjustments to cater to an aging population.

Social Isolation:

- The prevalence of nursing homes can contribute to social isolation among the elderly, leading to mental health issues.
- Society may need to address the challenge of fostering social connections and inclusivity for older people.

Impact on the Workforce:

- Some family members may have to reduce their work hours or quit their jobs to care for elderly relatives if alternatives to nursing homes are limited.
- This can impact the workforce and economic productivity.

The presence of nursing homes in society brings about both emotional consequences for families and economic implications for society at large. While these institutions provide a necessary service for some elderly individuals, humanity must balance institutional care and supporting families in caring for their

elderly members. This approach can help mitigate some of the negative social and economic consequences associated with the prevalence of nursing homes.

Quality of Life in Old Age Homes:

Living Conditions:

- Describe the physical living conditions within nursing homes.
- Discuss aspects such as room size, cleanliness, and safety.
- Highlight any issues related to overcrowding or lack of privacy.

Healthcare Facilities:

- Evaluate the healthcare services provided within nursing homes.
- Discuss the availability of medical staff, medication access, and emergency care.
- Mention any challenges or shortcomings in healthcare provision.

Social Activities:

- Examine the social and recreational activities available to residents.
- Include information about group activities, hobbies, and opportunities for social interaction.
- Discuss the role of these activities in enhancing the well-being of elderly residents.

Variations in Quality of Life:

- Acknowledge that the quality of life in old age homes can vary widely.
- Highlight factors contributing to these variations, such as funding, location, and management.
- Provide examples of institutions that excel in providing a high quality of life and those that face challenges.

Resident Perspectives:

- Include the perspectives of elderly residents through interviews or surveys.
- Share their experiences and opinions regarding living conditions, healthcare, and social activities.
- Use these insights to illustrate the diversity of experiences within old age homes.

Government Regulations:

- Discuss government regulations and standards for quality of life in old age homes.
- Evaluate whether these regulations are effectively enforced and monitored.
- Highlight instances where improvements are needed.

Recommendations for Improvement:

- Based on the assessment, offer recommendations for enhancing the quality of life in old age homes.
- Consider balancing physical comfort, emotional well-being, and social engagement.
- Emphasize the need for ongoing evaluation and adaptation of practices.

The quality of life in old age homes sheds light on the differences in experiences across various institutions.

Government Initiatives to Regulate and Improve Old Age Homes:

Licensing and Regulation:

- Governments have established regulatory bodies and laws to license and oversee old-age homes.
- These regulations set facilities, staffing, healthcare, and safety measures standards.

Quality Standards:

- Governments often impose quality standards that old age homes must meet to ensure the well-being of residents.
- These standards cover nutrition, hygiene, medical care, and living conditions.

Financial Assistance:

- Some governments provide financial support or subsidies to old-age homes to improve their infrastructure and services.
- This assistance can help homes upgrade facilities and hire qualified staff.

Effectiveness of Policies Aimed at Ensuring Elderly Well-being:

Improved Standards of Care:



- Effective policies have led to an overall improvement in the standards of care in old age homes.
- Regular inspections and enforcement of regulations have pushed homes to provide better living conditions.

Enhanced Healthcare:

- Policies often mandate access to healthcare services for elderly residents.
- This has resulted in better medical care and regular health check-ups, improving the well-being of residents.

Protection Against Abuse:

- Policies may include measures to protect older people from physical, emotional, or financial abuse.
- This has helped in curbing instances of mistreatment within old age homes.

Transparency and Accountability:

- Effective policies require old-age homes to maintain transparency in their operations.
- Residents and their families can now voice concerns, ensuring greater accountability.

Community Engagement:

- Some policies encourage community involvement in the well-being of elderly residents.
- This fosters a sense of belonging and support for older people, reducing feelings of isolation.

Challenges and Room for Improvement:

- Despite these positive effects, challenges remain, such as the shortage of qualified staff and the need for ongoing monitoring.
- The effectiveness of policies can vary across regions and institutions, highlighting the need for consistent enforcement.

Government initiatives and policies have played a crucial role in regulating and improving old age homes. While they have made significant strides in ensuring the well-being of elderly residents, there is still room for improvement, and a continued commitment to enforcing these policies is essential to address the challenges posed by old age homes to society.

Community Involvement in Elderly Care:

The community's role in older people's lives cannot be understated. It is imperative to recognize the importance of community support and family involvement in providing a fulfilling and enriching life for our elderly population. Here are some key points to consider:

Social Interaction and Emotional Support:

Communities can organize regular social gatherings, events, or clubs tailored explicitly for senior citizens. These activities facilitate social interaction, combat loneliness, and provide emotional support.

Intergenerational Programs:

Promoting intergenerational programs where young individuals interact with older people can foster a connection and understanding between generations. Schools and community centers can initiate such programs.

Volunteer Networks:

Encourage community members, especially younger generations, to volunteer their time and skills to assist older people. Simple acts like running errands, offering tech support, or just spending time chatting can make a significant difference in their lives.

Elderly-Friendly Infrastructure:

Communities should invest in creating elderly-friendly infrastructure, including accessible public spaces and transportation, to enable seniors to remain active and engaged in community life.

Bridging the Generation Gap:

Bridging the generation gap is essential for creating a harmonious and supportive society where older people are valued. Here are some strategies to help bridge this gap:

Education and Awareness:

Initiate educational programs in schools and colleges that teach young people about the challenges faced by older people. Creating awareness about aging issues can foster empathy and understanding.

Mentorship Programs:

Establish mentorship programs where older individuals can share their knowledge and life experiences with younger generations. This reciprocal relationship benefits both parties.

Collaborative Projects:

Encourage collaborative projects that involve both young and old in problem-solving or community initiatives. This promotes teamwork and mutual respect.

Digital Literacy Training:

Provide digital literacy training for elderly individuals to bridge the technology gap. Younger generations can play a pivotal role in teaching them how to use modern technology for communication and accessing information.

Festivals and Celebrations:

Organize events and celebrations that incorporate traditional values and customs, passing them on to younger generations. This strengthens cultural bonds and fosters respect for traditions.

Community and family involvement are essential for ensuring the well-being and happiness of older people. By fostering a sense of belonging and intergenerational understanding, we can address the challenges of old age homes and create a more inclusive and compassionate society.

Alternatives to Old Age Homes:

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition that traditional old age homes may not always be the best or most preferred option for elderly care. Several alternative models of elderly care have emerged, each with unique characteristics and advantages. Let's compare two prominent alternatives, aging in place and assisted living, to traditional old age homes.

1. Aging in Place:

- Aging in place is a concept that emphasizes allowing elderly individuals to remain in their own homes for as long as possible while receiving the necessary support and care. This alternative is gaining popularity for several reasons:
- **Familiar Environment:** Aging in place enables seniors to stay in the comfort of their familiar surroundings, contributing to their emotional well-being.

- Independence: Seniors maintain a higher degree of freedom and autonomy as they live in their homes and make daily decisions.
- Community Engagement: Seniors can remain active in their local communities, participate in social activities, and maintain connections with neighbors and friends.

However, aging in place also has its challenges, particularly if the elderly individual has complex medical needs that require specialized care or if their home environment is not conducive to aging safely.

2. Assisted Living:

- Assisted living facilities provide a middle-ground option between aging in place and traditional old homes. These facilities offer various services and support while allowing residents to maintain independence. The key features of assisted living include:
 - Personalized Care: Assisted living facilities can provide customized care plans tailored to each resident's needs.
 - Social Interaction: These facilities often offer communal spaces and organized activities, promoting social interaction among residents.
 - Safety and Accessibility: Assisted living facilities are designed with safety and accessibility in mind, reducing the risk of accidents and ensuring that residents can move around comfortably.
- Comparing these alternatives to traditional old age homes reveals some important distinctions:
 - Family Bonds: Aging in place allows for continued family involvement in caregiving, while traditional old age homes and assisted living may result in more limited family interactions.
 - Cost: The cost of care in assisted living may be higher than aging in place but often lower than high-end old age homes.
 - Medical Needs: Assisted living can accommodate a broader range of medical needs compared to aging in place, which may require additional home modifications or in-home healthcare.

The choice among these alternatives depends on the needs and preferences of the older adult and their family. Each option has its merits and drawbacks, highlighting the importance of personalized, patient-centered care in addressing the challenges posed by old age homes in society.

Recommendations for Improving Old Age Homes:

- **Enhance Staff Training:** Ensure staff members in old age homes receive adequate training in elderly care, empathy, and communication skills. This will contribute to a more compassionate and understanding environment.
- **Regular Medical Check-ups:** Implement regular medical check-ups for residents to monitor their health and address medical issues promptly. Collaborate with healthcare professionals to provide specialized care.
- **Social and Recreational Activities:** Create a diverse social and recreational activities calendar to keep residents engaged and combat loneliness. Activities could include art classes, music therapy, and intergenerational events.
- **Nutrition and Diet:** Pay attention to the dietary needs of older people, offering well-balanced and nutritious meals tailored to their health requirements. Encourage a pleasant dining atmosphere.
- **Living Conditions:** Maintain clean and comfortable living conditions in old-age homes. Regularly inspect facilities and make necessary improvements to ensure safety and hygiene.

Community-Based Initiatives to Support the Elderly:

- **Elderly Outreach Programs:** Establish outreach programs in the community to identify elderly individuals who may be isolated or need assistance. This could involve regular home visits or phone check-ins.
- **Intergenerational Activities:** Promote intergenerational activities that unite young and elderly community members. These interactions can be mutually beneficial and foster a sense of belonging.
- **Transportation Services:** Provide transportation services for elderly individuals who may have difficulty traveling to medical appointments, grocery stores, or social gatherings.
- **Volunteer Networks:** Encourage the formation of volunteer networks within the community to support older people with tasks like home maintenance, companionship, and running errands.
- **Education and Awareness:** Raise awareness in the community about the challenges older people face and the importance of their inclusion. Organize seminars, workshops, and educational programs.
- **Financial Assistance:** Establish funds or programs to assist elderly individuals facing financial hardships, ensuring they have access to essential resources.

- **Local Support Groups:** Create local support groups or clubs for older people to connect, share experiences, and offer emotional support.
- **Elder-Friendly Infrastructure:** Advocate for developing elder-friendly infrastructure in the community, such as benches in public areas, ramps, and well-maintained sidewalks.

These recommendations aim to improve the conditions within old age homes and foster a more supportive and inclusive community for the elderly. Combining efforts within old age homes and the broader community can significantly enhance the quality of life for our elderly population.

Conclusion:

Old-age homes represent a multifaceted challenge for our society. They are emblematic of the changing dynamics within families and communities, where older people often find themselves isolated and facing various emotional and psychological challenges. The prevalence of old age homes underscores the need for a more compassionate and inclusive approach to elderly care. The challenges posed by old age homes call for a reevaluation of our societal values and the role of the family in caring for the elderly. It is essential to recognize that older people have contributed significantly to our society, and they deserve our respect and unwavering support in their twilight years. We must shift our perspective to see aging as a natural part of life and acknowledge that elderly individuals have unique needs and desires that should be met with empathy and understanding. As a society, we should strive to create an environment where older people can age gracefully, surrounded by the love and care of their families whenever possible. This requires the development of community-based support systems and policies that prioritize the well-being of our senior citizens. By doing so, we can not only address the challenges posed by old age homes but also enrich the lives of older people and foster a more compassionate and interconnected society for generations to come.

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