

Population Ageing: Health and Social Care of Elderly Persons

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India has over 100 million older persons (Census 2011), which is projected to triple by 2050. The growing cohort of elderly especially the 'oldest-old', has implications for the health and social systems, as they have greater demand for long term care. Given the changing social-cultural context withering inter-generational bonding and filial piety, the State will have to play a greater role in caring for them. This paper examines the role of age, morbidity, limitations in ADL and IADL, disability and dementia among elderly viz-a-vis long-term care availability and unmet needs in terms of both health and social-care by presenting a situational analysis of health and care needs of elderly people. It presents the factors leading to changing demand, access to and supply of care that need to be considered while designing care models for them. Strengthening primary health care and innovative community based models can be a possible solution to address their needs.

I Introduction

Ageing population is increasing in India at a rapid pace with over a hundred million elderly (60 years and above) population recorded in 2011. It will grow by 300 per cent and triple by 2050 (UN, 2015). This demographic change is accompanied with an epidemiological transition where the prevalence of chronic diseases and multiple morbidities have been increasing at a fast pace, especially among elderly, along with still high incidence of communicable diseases in developing countries like India. In addition to public health concerns of the growing elderly population, it has implications for social and economic policies. Over the last few decades, the socio-cultural contexts in which population ageing is taking place has changed. Various factors like the decreasing family size, more women participating in workforce, increased individualism due to urbanization, greater number of elderly living alone and unavailability of institutional care for increasing number of elderly having round the clock care needs point towards an urgent policy intervention and a greater role of the state.

Elderly people are a heterogeneous group as illustrated by their socio-demographic profile from Census of 2011 which highlights multiple layers of diversity and vulnerabilities. Among elderly population (103 million) with over 52.9 million older women and 51.3 million elderly men, older women outnumber