

Working Paper 291

**Living Arrangement
Preferences and Health of
the Institutionalised
Elderly in Odisha**

*Akshaya Kumar Panigrahi
T S Syamala*

ISBN 978-81-7791-147-3

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Bangalore

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LIVING ARRANGEMENT PREFERENCES AND HEALTH OF THE INSTITUTIONALISED ELDERLY IN ODISHA

Akshaya Kumar Panigrahi* and T S Syamala**

Abstract

Research work on the living arrangement preferences of the elderly in the Indian context is very scanty. A few studies dealing with the living arrangement preferences of the elderly concentrates on the elderly living in households, leaving out the institutionalised elderly. This study, therefore looks into the living arrangement preferences of the institutionalised elderly in Odisha. This paper is based on the data collected from the three old age homes in Odisha covering 50 respondents. Data was collected through a survey of the inmates of the old age homes and through detailed case studies. This study shows that the elderly residing in these old age homes are poor, helpless, destitute majority are from the vulnerable sections of the society. Older-olds, widowed, economically dependent, childless and sick elderly are more vulnerable compared to others. Family conflicts, lack of money and ill health are the major reasons for the elderly to depend on old age homes. Lack of children is not the major reason for the elderly to depend on institutions as majority of the residents had children. Most of the elderly live in institutions due to various compulsions rather than by choice. The living arrangement preferences of the elderly clearly show that most of them to live with family. Since majority prefers to live with family, large proportions that stay in the old age homes are not in concordance with their living arrangement. The incidence of poor health and disability is higher among the institutionalised elderly. Overall, the elders preferred to live with the family but also considered old age homes as an alternative for care in the event of family conflict. The old age homes may be the next and alternative especially for those who are poor, sick and have no family.

Introduction

The ageing of the population is an obvious consequence of the process of demographic transition where fertility and mortality declines while life expectancy increases resulting in a decline in child population and an increase in that of the elderly. The developed countries have already experienced this phenomenon and made plans to take care of their increasing elderly population. In the developing countries, the ageing phenomenon is of much more recent origin and adequate plans to take care of the elderly are yet to be formulated and implemented. Asia, India and China are the two largest countries with a significant proportion of the world's elderly because of their large population base. India, like many traditional societies today faces a unique situation in providing care for the elderly. The existing old-age support structures, in the form of family, kith and kin are slowly eroding and the elderly are not well equipped to cope alone in the face of infirmity and disability. This phenomenon has given rise to the concept of alternative arrangements for the care of the elderly through institutional support. Although old age homes started functioning from the second half of the 19th Century, the growth and development of these facilities in India is still inadequate. Studies have shown that there has been tremendous growth in old age homes in India accommodating a sizable number of the elderly. Old age homes have also sprung up to cater to the needs of the elderly from different socio-economic backgrounds. In fact, the Government of India's National Old Age Policy (NOAP) demands that old age

* Deputy Director, Govt. of India, M/o Statistics and Programme Implementation, Central Statistics Office (IS Wing), Kolkata-700 001, e-mail: akpstatnet@gmail.com

** Associate Professor, Population Research Centre (PRC), Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC), Bangalore – 560 072, e-mail: syamala@isec.ac.in

homes be established in every district in India as a welfare measure. Traditionally in India, the elderly are supposed to be taken care of by the family. The changing socio-economic and demographic conditions has affected the welfare of the elderly has become a cause for concern in recent years. Further, old age homes have become the best alternative for those who are poor, destitute and disabled.

The recent data shows that there are more than 1,000 old age homes in India with most of them located in the southern India. The old age homes are of two types: free and paid. The "free" type cares for the destitute old people who have no family to care of them. They are given shelter, food, clothing and medical care. In the paid type, services are available for a price. A number of studies have discussed various reasons for the elderly to be in old age homes. Migration of children has been cited as a major reason for the elderly to move into old age homes. However, there are studies, which cite the need for independence as the reason why the elderly live in old age homes. Lack of care within the family, insufficient housing, economic hardship and break-up of joint family are also cited as reasons by many studies (Bansod and Paswan, 2006; Bharati, 2009; Mishra, 2008).

When more elderly are opting to stay in old age homes, it would be interesting to study their adjustment patterns in the new environment, levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction and expectations from family members. A number of studies have looked into the various socio-psychological issues of inmates of old age homes. However, studies on the living arrangement preferences among the residents of old age homes are rather scanty. In this paper, an attempt has been made to understand the living arrangement preferences of the institutionalised elderly and its links with their health and well-being.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the background characteristics and reasons for staying in old age homes among those elderly in Odisha.
2. To study the living arrangement preferences and the health of the institutionalised elderly in Odisha.

Data and Methodology

Data for this paper are drawn from a survey conducted among the residents of selected old age homes in Odisha. The survey data was also supplemented by select case studies. Three old age homes were specifically selected, two from rural and one from urban Odisha, and an attempt was made to interview all the inmates in the old age homes who were available at the time of field survey. In total 50 elderly inmates were interviewed from these three old age homes in Odisha with the help of a list from Help Age India, New Delhi. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were used in this study. The quantitative analysis includes the univariate and bi-variate analysis with the background characteristics of the elderly whereas the qualitative analysis is based on some of the select case studies.

Analysis and Discussion

Profile of the Select Old Age Homes

To understand the living arrangement preferences and health, data were collected from the inmates of old age homes. For this purpose, three old age homes were selected on the basis of location. Two old age homes were selected from a rural areas and one from an urban area. The numbers of inmates of these old age homes are 19, 11 and 20, respectively.

All the three old age homes cater to the elderly from the poorer sections of society. Free boarding and lodging facilities are provided to the inmates and no fee is charged for admission. The elderly who are helpless, destitute, widowed and economically poor are given preference. There are 50 inmates in the three old age homes and all were interviewed. The mother tongue of all the inmates is Oriya. Irrespective of religion and caste, the inmates of the old age homes are staying together and enjoying good interaction and co-operation. All these three old age homes are sponsored by the government and there is no significant difference in terms of facilities available. Table-1 presents the description of the old age homes in Odisha.

Table 1: Description of the Old Age Homes in Odisha

Aspects	Descriptions
Criteria for selection of inmates to the old age home	Age above 60 years, ability to do their work, economically poor, no body to take care, widow, and destitute.
Type of accommodation	Dormitory
Accommodation and Food	Free of cost
Source of income	Grant from state and central government, donations
Recreation facilities	Newspaper, TV, Radio, Prayer, Bhajan and Kirtan, occasional trip to temples etc.
Medical care	Regular health check up by the consultant doctors

Characteristics of the Respondents

Demographic Characteristics

The background characteristics of the respondents are given in Table-2. Out of the total sample, 52 per cent of elderly are female and 48 per cent are male. The age profile of the respondents shows that 40 per cent are 60-69 years, 36 per cent are 70-79 years and 24 per cent are above 80 years. The marital status shows that nearly half of the inmates are widowed and a surprisingly sizable proportion is currently married. Nearly 52 per cent of the respondents have at least one surviving child and therefore, not having children is not the main reason for the elderly to live in old age homes. Among the respondents, 48 per cent do not have any surviving children.

Table -2: Demographic Profile of the Inmates in Old Age Homes in Odisha

Demographic Variables	Sex of the respondent (%)		Total (%)
	Male	Female	
Age (Years)			
60 – 69	41.7	38.5	40.0
70 – 79	37.5	34.6	36.0
80 and above	20.8	26.9	24.0
Marital Status			
Never married	12.5	0.0	6.0
Currently married	58.3	26.9	42.0
Widowed	29.2	65.4	48.0
Divorced/Separated	0.0	7.7	4.0
Number of Surviving Children			
No child	29.2	65.4	48.0
One child	20.8	23.1	22.0
Two and more children	50.0	11.5	30.0
Number of Surviving Sons			
No son	37.5	80.8	60.0
One son	29.2	15.4	22.0
Two and more sons	33.3	3.8	18.0
Number of Surviving Daughters			
No daughter	41.7	73.1	58.0
One daughter	12.5	23.1	18.0
Two and more daughters	45.8	3.8	24.0
Total	100 (24)	100 (26)	100 (50)

Socio-economic Characteristics

Table -3: Socio-Economic Profile of the Inmates in Old Age Homes in Odisha

Variables	Sex of the Respondents (%)		Total (%)
	Male	Female	
Level of Education			
No education	37.5	76.9	58.0
Below 10 th Standard	45.8	15.4	30.0
10 th Standard and above	16.7	7.7	12.0
Assets(Rs.)			
No asset	58.3	92.3	76.0
Up to 40000	12.5	3.8	8.0
Above 40000	29.2	3.8	16.0
Received Old Age Pension			
Yes	20.8	23.1	22.0
No	79.2	76.9	78.0
Economic Dependency			
Partially dependent on others	8.3	3.8	6.0
Fully dependent on others	91.7	96.2	94.0
Total	100 (24)	100 (26)	100 (50)

The socio-economic characteristics of the respondents (Table-3) show that majority of the respondents are illiterate with no income or assets to support themselves and are dependent on others. The male-female differentials show that females are more vulnerable than males in terms of education, ownerships of assets and economic dependency.

Reasons for Staying in Old Age Homes

It is difficult to understand the reasons for staying in old age homes by talking to the inmates because there could be multiple reasons. However, an attempt has been made here to understand the major reason that forced to elderly to stay in old age homes. Table-4 shows that ill health and lack of money are the two major reasons reported by the elderly for choosing to reside in old age homes. Various studies conducted in India also support this finding (Bansod and Paswan, 2006; Devi and Murugesan, 2006; Mishra, 2008). Family conflict is yet another reason cited as intention for staying in old age homes. Nearly 38 per cent of the respondents reported not having children as the reason for residing in old age home. A small proportion also reported that they preferred independence they enjoyed in old age homes.

Table -4: Reasons of Staying in Old Age Homes in Odisha

Variables	Sex of the respondent (%)		Total
	Male	Female	
Reason of staying in old age home*			
No money to support self	79.2	84.6	82.0
Family conflict	66.7	26.9	46.0
Poor health	87.0	88.0	87.5
No child	20.8	53.8	38.0
Daughter got married	-	11.5	6.0
For Independence	4.3	-	2.1
Children refused to stay with parents	-	4.0	2.1
Number	24	26	50

*Percentage will not add to 100 because of multiple answers.

The data on the gender differentials regarding the reasons for staying in the old age homes shows that economic and health related reasons are the major ones for both males and females. However, a higher proportion of males reported family conflict as the reason for opting to reside in old age homes. More females than males reported lack of children as the major reason for staying in an old age home. Mishra, (2008) also reported that family conflict was one of the reasons for elderly males to stay in old age homes. In majority of the cases, family conflict arises due to economic constraints. The elderly who reported family conflict are mainly landless and economically dependent.

Table 5 presents data regarding various issues such as who brought the elderly to old age homes, their relationship with their children, preference for a particular old age home etc. Data show that a majority of the elderly opted for a particular old age home mainly because the services are

available free of cost and a small proportion (6 per cent) reported that they preferred a particular old age home because it was close by. About 84 per cent of the elderly came to the old age home by themselves and the remaining were brought by son, daughter, other relatives or friends.

An attempt was also made to understand the type of living arrangement enjoyed by the elderly before shifting to old age homes. The data shows that nearly 44 per cent of them were staying either alone or with spouse. Economic constraints and ill health, forced many of the elderly who were staying alone to shift to an old age home. Death of the spouse was another reason for the elderly to move in to old age homes. Family conflict was the major reason for the elderly who were staying with their spouse and children to shift eventually to old age homes. There are also some instances where the elderly were living in other old age homes or with relatives or non-relatives before joining a particular old age home. Efforts were also made to understand the family ties among the inmates. Majority of the inmates reported that they do not have good relationship with their children and this proportion is higher among males than females. Surprisingly, around 90 per cent of the inmates reported that they are satisfied with their stay in old age homes. A few of them even stated that given an opportunity they would not like to return to their family and even hesitated to recall the bad memories while they were with their families. Since majority of inmates reported that they are satisfied with their life in old age homes, an attempt was also made to understand the reasons for this response. Informal discussions with the inmates brought out various reasons. Many felt that old age homes give them an opportunity to live with peer groups. Many of them also opined that they could avoid family conflicts and tensions and live in peace. Lots of them felt there was no risk or responsibility for them in old age homes. Most members also felt that they had more time for prayer and spiritual pursuits in old age homes. Further, many felt that they were able to live without being abused.

Table -5: Living Arrangements Profiles of Inmates in Old Age Homes in Odisha

Variables	Sex of the respondent (%)		Total (%)
	Male	Female	
Reason of choosing this old age home			
Near to my village	12.5	0	6.0
Free service	87.5	100.0	94.0
Who brought you to this home?			
Own	91.7	76.9	84.0
Son	4.2	7.7	6.0
Daughter	0	7.7	4.0
Relative or friends	4.2	7.7	6.0
Living arrangements before coming to old age home			
Alone	29.2	57.7	44.0
With spouse and children	54.2	38.5	46.0
Ashram or old age home	8.3	3.8	6.0
Others (relatives and non-relatives)	8.3	0	4.0
Living arrangements before 60 years of age			
Alone	8.3	34.6	22.0
With spouse	16.7	23.1	20.0

With spouse & children	66.7	19.2	42.0
Without spouse but with children	0	15.4	8.0
With spouse, children & other family members	0	3.8	2.0
Ashram or old age home	0	3.8	2.0
Other family members	8.3	0	4.0
Relation with your children			
Good	23.5	45.5	32.1
Not good	76.5	54.5	67.9
Satisfaction in old age home			
Yes	91.7	88.5	90.0
No	8.3	11.5	10.0
Total	100 (24)	100 (26)	100 (50)

Living Arrangement Preferences among the Institutionalised Elderly

Living arrangements among the elderly was never an issue a few decades ago in most of the developing countries, including India, because families were expected to take care of them. However, in the recent past, issues concerning household structure and support for older persons in developing countries are becoming increasingly important because the aging population is making its presence felt. The increase in the numbers of old age homes is a clear indication of the changes in the care meted out to the elderly. Studies conducted in India show that co-residence is the most popular living arrangement pattern. However, living alone is also prevalent in certain sections of the society (Panigrahi, 2010). Further, a small proportion of the elderly also depend on old age homes for their stay.

Studies on living arrangement generally presumed that there is a convergence of the preferred and actual place of stay of the elderly in any society. However, very little information is available on the preferences and concordance of the elderly with their living arrangements, especially in the Indian context. A few studies dealing the living arrangement preferences of the elderly indicated that most of them preferred co-residence while only a small proportion preferred to live alone. This signifies the important role of the family in the care of the aged (Panigrahi, 2009). The living arrangement concordance (that is the extent of match between the actual and the preferred place of stay) shows that nearly one-fourth of the elderly are not in concordance with their living arrangement (Panigrahi, 2009). These studies have, no doubt, helped in understanding the hitherto unknown issue of the living arrangement preferences of the elderly in the Indian context. However, the major drawback was that these studies covered only the elderly who live in households and ignored the elderly who live in institutions. Therefore, in this study an attempt is made to understand the living arrangement preferences of the inmates of old age homes.

The living arrangement preferences of the inmates of the old age homes have been presented in Table-6. The data show that nearly 32 per cent of the elderly preferred to live in old age homes whereas 68 per cent preferred to live with spouse and children. In other words, 68 per cent of the institutionalised elderly do not stay in their preferred place of residence. This data clearly show that a majority of the elderly who stay in old age homes do not actually prefer to do so but they are compelled to do so for various reasons.

Table –6: Percentage Distribution of Preferred Living Arrangements among Inmates in Old Age Homes in Odisha

Preference in Living Arrangements***	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
With spouse and children	50	85	68
Old age home	50	15	32
Total	100 (24)	100 (26)	100 (50)

Significant at *** $\chi^2 < 0.01$

This table also brings out the gender differentials in the elders' living arrangement preferences. Clearly, the proportion of female elderly who prefer to live with family (85 per cent) is higher compared to males (50 per cent). Alternatively, there is a higher proportion (50 per cent) of male inmates preferring to live in old age home in comparison to females (15 per cent). It is perhaps quite true that Indian elderly are taken care of by the family and that it is the norm is also shown in their preferences—majority still prefer to live with the family rather than in institutions. The chi-square test statistics also found significant association of gender of the elders in old age homes with preference for a particular living arrangement.

Reasons of Preferring a Particular Living Arrangement

In the field survey, an attempt was made to collect information from the inmates in old age homes in Odisha on the reasons for preferring a particular living arrangement. It is interesting to note that nearly one-fourth of elderly males who preferred to live in old age homes did so mainly because of the need for privacy or independence (Table-7), whereas all the elderly females mentioned economic constraints as the major reason for preferring old age homes. Nearly three-fourth of them stated that they preferred old age homes because they have neither money nor family. However, the option to live with spouse and children was preferred mainly because the elderly felt that living with the family was best in the old age. Further, around 6 per cent of the elderly felt that they need physical care and support and preferred to live with spouse and children.

Table -7: Percentage Distribution of Reasons of Preferring a Particular Living Arrangement among Inmates of Old Age Homes in Odisha

Reasons of Preferring a Particular Living Arrangements	Sex of the respondent (%)		Total (%)
	Male	Female	
With spouse & children			
Family environment is better for the elderly	83.3	100.0	94.1
Needs physical care and support	16.7	-	5.9
Old age home			
Privacy or independence	25.0	-	18.8
Economic dependence	66.7	100.0	75.0
Needs physical care and support	8.3	-	6.3
Total	24	26	50

The preference in living arrangements may vary with the demographic and socio-economic changes. Due to this, an attempt was made to look into the preference in living arrangements with respect to the demographic and socio-economic background of the respondents in Odisha.

Preferences in Living Arrangement across Demographic and Socio-economic Background of the Elderly.

The analysis based on the demographic background of the inmates of old age homes and their preference for a particular living arrangement is presented in Table-8. The age and living arrangement preferences show that irrespective of age, majority of the elderly prefer to live with spouse and children. Surprisingly, the proportion of elderly who preferred old age homes increased with increase in age.

Table -8: Background Characteristics and Living Arrangement Preference among the Institutionalised Elderly in Odisha

Variables	Preference in Living Arrangements (%)		Total (%)
	With spouse & children	Old age home	
Age* (years)			
60 – 69	85.0	15.0	100 (20)
70 – 79	(55.6)	(44.4)	100 (18)
80 and above	(58.3)	(41.7)	100 (12)
Sex***			
Male	50.0	50.0	100 (24)
Female	84.6	15.4	100 (26)
Marital Status**			
Never Married	(0.0)	(100.0)	100 (3)
Currently Married	85.7	14.3	100 (21)
Widowed	58.3	41.7	100 (24)
Divorced/separated	(100.0)	(0.0)	100 (2)
Place of Residence***			
Rural	53.3	46.7	100 (30)
Urban	90.0	10.0	100 (20)
Level of Education			
No education	72.4	27.6	100 (29)
Below 10 th Standard	(60.0)	(40.0)	100 (15)
10th standard and above	(66.7)	(33.3)	100 (06)
Total	68.0	32.0	100 (50)

?² test statistic is significant at ***<0.01, **<0.05, *<0.10

() Cell frequency is less than 20

Similarly, marital status also makes a significant difference to the preference in living arrangements among the inmates of old age homes. Only around 15 per cent of the currently married preferred to live in old age homes, whereas 41 per cent of the widowed indicated a preference to live in old age home. It is quite possible that the living arrangement preferences of the elderly are shaped by their current marital status because of the options available to them. It might be the reason for a higher proportion of the currently married rather than the widowed elderly staying with spouse and children.

Data on the socio-economic differentials and the living arrangement preferences of the inmates of old age homes have been presented in Table 8. Since all the inmates belong to poorer section of society, income analysis could not be carried out. However, information on the educational background is available and its linkages with living arrangement preferences have been presented. Further, out of the 3 old age homes selected for the survey, two are located in rural areas and one is located in an urban area. This information was used to understand whether the living arrangement preferences of the inmates of the old age home located in rural areas are significantly different from those in urban areas.

The urban-rural differences in living arrangement preferences indicate that a higher proportion of the elderly in rural old age homes preferred to live with spouse and children compared to their urban counterparts. Since almost all the inmates irrespective of location of the old age homes are poor and helpless, the inmates of urban old age homes may not necessarily have urban characteristics. The educational differentials and the living arrangement preferences also do not clearly indicate any significant relationship with the living arrangement preferences among the institutionalised elderly.

Table-9 presents the percentage distribution of living arrangement preferences among the institutionalised elderly according to the number of surviving children. From the analysis, it is found that irrespective of the availability of children, majority of the inmates of the old age homes preferred co-residence. Another important point to be noted is that the highest proportion of elderly who indicated their preference to live in old age homes are not the ones with no sons or daughters but those with more than one child. If the elderly person has only one son, it is presumed that their son will take care of his parents in old age. However, if there are more sons and daughters it could be quite possible that there could be difference in opinion among the children about who should take care of their parents and this confusion might have led the elderly to stay in old age homes rather than with their children. This personal experience of the elderly must have shaped their preference to live in old age homes.

Table -9: Percentage Distribution of Living Arrangements Preferences among the Institutionalised Elderly according to Number of Surviving Children

Variables	Preference in living arrangements (%)		
	With spouse & children	Old age home	Total
Surviving Children			
No child	66.70	33.30	100 (24)
One child	(81.80)	(18.20)	100 (11)
Two or more children	(60.00)	(40.00)	100 (15)
Surviving Sons			
No son	70.00	30.00	100 (30)
One son	(81.80)	(18.20)	100 (11)
Two or more sons	(44.40)	(55.60)	100 (9)
Surviving Daughters			
No daughter	69.00	31.00	100 (29)
One daughter	(88.90)	(11.10)	100 (9)
Two or more daughters	(50.00)	(50.00)	100 (12)
Total	68.00	32.00	100 (50)

() Cell frequency is less than 20

From the above analysis, it is clear that the age, marital status and number of surviving children of the elderly influence their living arrangement preferences. Relatively higher proportion of older, elderly widowed preferred old age homes. Further, a higher proportion of elderly with more than one child also indicated a preference to stay in old age homes than the childless elderly or elderly with one child. This goes against the general belief that children are old-age social security and higher the number of children higher the security for the elderly.

Living Arrangement Concordance among the Institutionalised Elderly

Table-10 presents the living arrangement concordance among the institutionalised elderly according to background characteristics. The analysis revealed that 68 per cent of elderly in old age homes are in discordance with their living arrangements. This is quite expected because old age homes are never the preferred place among majority of the elderly because they prefer to stay with family. The living arrangement discordance, that is the mismatch between the preferred and actual place of stay, is higher among females, younger olds and those with no education.

Table -10: Living Arrangement (LA) Concordance among the Institutionalised Elderly according to their Background Characteristics

Variables	Living Arrangements Concordance (%)		Total (%)
	Not in Preferred LA	In Preferred LA	
Place of Residence***			
Rural	53.3	46.7	100 (30)
Urban	90.0	10.0	100 (20)
Age* (Years)			
60 – 69	85.0	15.0	100 (20)
70 – 79	(55.6)	(44.4)	100 (18)
80 and above	(58.3)	(41.7)	100 (12)
Sex***			
Male	50.0	50.0	100 (24)
Female	84.6	15.4	100 (26)
Marital Status**			
Never Married	-	(100.0)	100 (3)
Currently Married	85.7	14.3	100 (21)
Widowed	58.3	41.7	100 (24)
Divorced/Separated	(100.0)	-	100 (2)
Level of Education			
No education	72.4	27.6	100 (29)
Below 10th Standard	(60.0)	(40.0)	100 (15)
10 th standard and above	(66.7)	(33.3)	100 (06)
Total	68.0	32.0	100 (50)

?² test statistic is significant at ***<0.01, **<0.05, *<0.10

() Cell frequency is less than 20

Health Status of the Inmates of Old Age Homes

Here an attempt has been made to understand the health conditions of the institutionalised elderly. In the field survey, questions were asked on three aspects of health, namely, illnesses, disability and self-perceived health status. The information on illnesses provides the incidence of morbidity among the elderly. The information on disability gives the disability status in terms of locomotors, visual, hearing and conversational disability. The information on self-perceived health status provides the perception of the elderly regarding their current health status, health in comparison with their age-mates and health as compared to the preceding year. Information was also collected on the treatment pattern in case of illness, cost of treatment and hospitalisation details.

Physical Disability

Disability related to walking, hearing, seeing and communication (speech) among the elderly has been measured in this survey. The ability to communicate, see, hear and walk has been graded into three categories, namely, poor, with difficulty or good. If the elderly person rates his or her vision as poor or with difficulty, he or she will be regarded as a person with visual disability.

Table-11 shows the prevalence of physical disability of the elderly in the sample population. From the table, it is found that the prevalence of visual impairment is the major reported disability among the institutionalised elderly followed by disabilities with respect to hearing. These higher disabilities may be one of the reasons that forced the elderly to shift into institutions — probably for better care and support. It could also be non-cooperation from the family members to provide care and support.

Table - 11: Physical Disability Among the Inmates in Old Age Homes in Odisha

Conditions	Physical Disability (%) N=50			
	Conversation	Hearing	Vision	Walking
Poor	6	26	28	12
With difficulty	28	46	56	36
Good	66	28	16	52
Total	100	100	100	100

Illness among the Elderly

Illness among the elderly is one of the important indicators of their current health status. Illness suffered by the elderly during last 15 days prior to the date of interview is considered here. The illnesses are classified into major and minor illnesses — the minor illnesses being fever, cough, common cold, joint pain, toothache, stomach pain, diarrhoea, and accidents, and the major illnesses being eye-problems, skin disorders, blood pressure, cardiac problems, arthritis, kidney problems, asthma and paralysis. The general morbidity prevalence rate is calculated based on this information.

Although the sample size is only 50 respondents, an attempt was made to understand the morbidity profile of the institutionalised elderly (Table-12). Out of the 50 elderly interviewed, 29 (58 per cent) had suffered some kind of illness during the last 15 days. Illness and disability may be reasons for the elderly to move into old age homes and it is quite natural to expect higher prevalence of morbidity among the inmates of the old age homes.

Table - 12: Morbidity Prevalence Rate among Inmates in Old Age Homes in Odisha

Illness in last 15 days	Frequency	Per cent
Total Morbidity Prevalence rate	29	58
Short term morbidity	25	50
Fever	13	26
Cough	2	4
Common cold	4	8
Joint pain	1	2
Stomach pain	3	6
Diarrhoea	2	4
Long term morbidity	4	8
Skin disease	2	4
Blood pressure	2	4
Total		50 (N)

Self-Perceived Health Status

The data show that the self-perceptions about the health status of the institutionalised elderly are poor. A majority rated all the three components of the self-perceived health — current health status, health in comparison to their age mates and health compared to their previous year — as poor. The percentage of elderly who perceived their health as poor is highest among the institutionalised elderly. The poor self-perception of one's own health among the inmates of old age homes may be a reflection of their actual health status.

Table - 13: Self Perceived Health among the Inmates in Old Age Homes in Odisha

Self-Perceived Health	Percentage	Number
Current state of health		
Good	16	8
Average	38	19
Poor	46	23
Compare with your age-mates		
Good	16	8
Average	38	19
Poor	46	23
Compare to previous year		
Nearly same	26	13
Somewhat worse	40	20
Worse	34	17
Total	100	50

Treatment Pattern

The managers of old age homes are expected to take care of the health issues of the inmates. Old age homes have provision for regular visits by a doctor to check-up and treat elderly inmates. In case of any emergency, the doctor attends to the patient immediately. The routine treatment includes some of the minor medical tests, health check-up and supply of medicines required for the patient. It is the responsibility of the administration of the old age home to take care of the health needs of the elderly. In order to understand the health care received by the elderly, information was collected on the treatment received by the elderly who were ill during the last 15 days. The data show that almost all the inmates received treatment for their illness in the old age homes free of cost.

In conclusion, one can say that the elderly who stay in these old age homes are poor, helpless and destitute. Lack of money and poor health are the major reasons for the elderly to depend on old age homes. Lack of children is not the major reason for the elderly to depend on institutions. Most of the elderly often live in institutions due to various compulsions rather than by choice. The living arrangement preferences of the elderly clearly show that most of them want to live with family. Hence, large proportions that stay in the old age homes are not in their preferred place of stay. Majority of the institutionalised elderly suffer from poor health and disabilities.

Most of the residents of old age homes come from the vulnerable sections of the society. Older olds, widowed, economically dependent, childless and the sick are more vulnerable compared to others. This information was collected from a survey conducted in the selected old age homes in Odisha. However, a survey alone cannot bring out detailed information on the various circumstances that forced the elderly move into old age homes. In order to throw more light on the circumstances under which the elderly shifted to the old age homes, a few case studies were carried out. The selected eight case studies are presented in the following section.

1. Mr Sudarshan (name changed) is 75-year-old and is currently married. He belongs to the Hindu general caste has studied up to Standard 3. He has been staying in the old age home for the last 5 years. He has one son and two daughters and all are currently married. Sudarshan and his wife were staying with their son in their native village. He used to work in the agricultural fields and contribute to the family income. Eventually he had a paralytic stroke and needed physical care and support for day-to-day functions. He also needed a variety of medicines to sustain him and could not work anymore in the agricultural fields. He felt that he had become burden to the family. Slowly the son and the daughter-in-law started troubling him. The son used to beat him if he asked for some help, money or medicine. The daughter-in-law neglected him and on several occasions even denied him food. Physical and verbal abuse became part of his daily life. After a few months, he was able to walk by himself. Then he decided to leave the house. He was worried that if he continued to stay with his son, he might soon die because of their abuse. One day he walked out of the house and stayed in the nearby caves in the forest. He says "While I was active and earning, there was no problem or conflict in the family. However, when I was sick I could not work or earn money for my expenses, including medicine. Then my own son started abusing me." During his stay in forest caves, he got the information about a nearby old age home from one of his friends. This friend guided him to move to the old age home (which is four km away from the village). He has already spent 5 years in the old age home. Presently he does not have any source of income and depends on old age home for everything. Since then he has had no contact with his family. He is satisfied with the present living arrangements at the old age home and wants to live there until his death. He promised not to see his children and spouse who abused him physically and mentally. He strongly feels that the old age home is the best place for the elderly who are neglected and abused by their families. The respondent was also strongly in favour of old age home because he feels it gave him a new life; otherwise, he might have been dead by now. Presently his health status is not so good. He has also problems with vision, and walking. Sudarshan says, "I am very thankful to government for providing old age homes as many neglected and abused elderly like me will find a new life here."
2. Mrs Sulabha, (name changed) is 71 years old, currently married and has studied up to Standard 3. She has one son and is an upper caste Hindu. She has been staying in the old age home for 8 years. Before moving into the old age home, she was staying with her spouse and children in the village. Everything was fine until her son got married against her wish. He fell in love with a girl of a lower caste. His mother was against that marriage and pleaded with the son not marry to girl.

She felt this marriage would bring great shame to the family. However, the son was adamant and married the same girl. This created great tension at home and slowly the son and daughter-in-law started abusing the mother. They did not give any money to the mother nor were they very keen on keeping her with them. The son restricted the movement of the mother and she was not allowed to talk to relatives or friends. She was under a kind of house arrest. Since she did not have any income or assets, she was dependent on her spouse and son. One day her spouse and son took her to Puri Jagannath temple darshan and while returning home they asked her to sit at one place and told her that they would return immediately. She believed them and sat there waiting for them but they did not return to take her home. Later she realised that they had left her in an old age home. Since then there has been no information or contact with her spouse or son. She has been in that old age home for 8 years now. In spite of such long stay, she is yet to adjust to life in the old age home. She still thinks that her son will come back one day and take her home. When she was narrating her history of illnesses, she had tears in her eyes. She still misses the family, son, grand children etc. She still prefers to live with spouse and children and is hopeful that one day they will realise their mistakes and take her back. Since she has no alternative she had to live in this old age home. She is not at all happy and she says old people should be looked after by their children as 'we have looked after them'. Currently, she is suffering from multiple diseases including high blood pressure and arthritis. She says, "The old age home is great blessing for people like me. I interact with all the inmates and we try to help each other. We are also busy in prayer, watching TV, occasionally visiting to temples. This keeps us going."

3. Mr Harihar, (name changed) is 69 years currently married and educated up to Standard 5. He belongs to the backward caste. He has two daughters and two sons. Presently his wife is staying with his elder son. He has been staying in this old age home for about a year. His children were married and lived separately. Initially both the parents were staying with the elder son. Eventually the elder son said that he alone could not take care of both the parents. The younger son refused to keep the parents. After an argument between the sons, the younger son agreed to keep them for some time. After few months, the sons quarrelled again and told the parents that they could not take care of both the parents. They decided that elder son would take care of the mother and the younger son would take care of the father. The parents reluctantly agree to this arrangement. Initially there was no problem but slowly the daughter-in-law started abusing the father-in-law. She often used to shout at the father-in-law and even beat him when his son was not around. The son also did not support the father and took his wife's side. Harihar used to do tailoring but because of his ill health, he was not able to work. He was dependent on the son. His children are also not well educated and work as daily labourers. Their earnings are not adequate to cover the additional expenditure of food and medicine for their father. He blames his financial dependency for his problems. He is also suffering from multiple diseases like blood pressure, arthritis and gastric problems. Harihar says, "The daughter-in-law abuses with bad words which shocked me very much. At this age it is very difficult to tolerate the verbal and physical abuse." Harihar finally decided to move into an old age home. Presently his only income is an old age pension of Rs 200

from the government. He does not have any wealth/property or alternate sources of income and is dependent on the old age home. He says, "I do not like to live in the old age home but I have no other alternative. My sons do not want me because I am more of a burden to them. I hope and pray that my situation should not come to any other father. Sometimes, I wish that one day they will come and take me home and we all will live happily. However, I also know it is only a distant dream. I know that I have to die in this old age home."

4. Mr Chandramani (name changed) is 83 years old and a widower who belongs to the Hindu general caste. He is illiterate. His major occupation was agriculture. He has two sons and 3 daughters and all his children are married and staying in the nearby village. He has been staying in the old age home for 7 years. At the age of 68, his wife passed away. Presently he does not have any source of income and is dependent on the old age home. Before moving into the old age home, he was staying with his sons. He says that his problem started after the death of his wife. He says when husband or wife dies the other old partner becomes highly vulnerable and they will be at the mercy of their children. When both the parents are together, he feels there is some strength and no one can do anything to them. Although he does not have any regular income, he had 5 acres of land that costs around Rs 5 lakh at the present market price. Slowly quarrels started between his sons regarding the sharing of his property. The father tried his level best to settle the issue amicably but the sons were not ready to accept his suggestions. This brought a lot of unhappiness into the family. In order to get the property, sons started torturing the father both physically and mentally. Finally, the father had to leave his house to save himself. He knew that there was an old age home near their village and he took shelter there. He has been there for about 7 years and since then has had no contact with his sons. He said, "In spite of having 5 children no one comes to see me." He had tears in his eyes. He also does not have any major health complaints. Now he feels that old age homes are the best alternatives for the abused elderly and is completely satisfied with the arrangements.
5. Mr Raghunath, (name changed) is 84 years old and a widower belonging to Hindu Brahmin caste. He has studied up to Standard 3. His wife passed away at the age of 70 years. He has 3 sons and 3 daughters. He had 2 acres of land in his name. In his early days, he was an actor in Odisha Akashbani (radio). Presently he is getting Rs 500 per month as pension. He has been in the old age home for the last 5 years. Before joining this old age home, he and his wife were staying with his eldest son. The sons started quarrelling about who should take care of their elderly parents. The eldest son felt that all brothers should share the responsibility. In the meanwhile, his wife passed away and the quarrels intensified. The sons decided that the father should stay with each one of them for few months. The father did not like this arrangement because at his age he did not want to move from house-to-house. He felt very sad that now he has become old no one needs him. Then he shifted to an old age home and occasionally the children come to meet him. Now he is very happy in the old age home because he is getting proper care. In his words, "It is better to live in old age home rather than to live with children. Each one of them will be busy with their day-to-

day activities and they never even realised the presence of an elderly person in the family.” He says now-a-days children consider old parents are a burden. As long as children do not realise their responsibilities towards parents, it is better for the elderly to stay in the old age home where no one will interfere in your activities and you can lead an independent life with dignity. Now he prefers to stay old age homes rather than with his children.

6. Mr Budhadev, (name changed) is 75 years old and unmarried. He is educated up to Standard 4 and is an upper caste Hindu. His major occupation was agriculture. Since he does not have any close family members, like wife or children, he was staying with his nephew (brother's son) and his wife. Now he has become very old and due to ill health, he is not able to work or earn any money. When he became completely dependent on his nephew and his wife, they started ill-treating him. They started quarrelling with him and asked him to leave their house. He feels that if he were married and had children things would have been different. At least the wife and children may not behave his nephew. Since he has no savings or property, they continued to torture him physically and mentally and finally he decided to leave the house and took shelter in an old age home. He says, “When I was physically active and was able to work there was no conflict in the family. Once I became physically weak and economically poor my relatives did not want me any more. They are forgetting the fact that one day they are also going to become old like me.” He strongly feels his problem is mainly because he has neither family nor money. Presently he stays in the nearby old age home and receives Rs 200 as old age pension. He is fully dependent on the old age home. He has been in this old age home for nearly 10 years. He says he is very happy with the old age home because here he gets proper care including food and other basic necessities. He feels better in the old age home and he also spends enough time in prayers and other spiritual activities. According to him, the old age home is the best alternative for the helpless old people.

7. Mrs Laxmi, (name changed) is 86 years old and a widow. She belongs to Hindu upper caste and is illiterate. She has no children. At the age of 46, her husband passed away. Since then she was living alone as she does not have any siblings. She said that after her husband's death she had mental disturbances and had to cope with the loss of her husband besides the stigma of being a widow. In her younger days, she worked in different houses cooking and cleaning. Slowly she became old and ill and was unable to work. Initially she started begging to survive. She attributes all her problems to being a widow with no children. She says that in our culture children are supposed to take care of the parents when they are old. She has neither husband nor child and she feels no one will take interest in her care. In the meanwhile, she came to know about the old age home where she can stay without any payment and decided to move in there. She has already spent around 10 years in the old age home. Currently she does not have any source of income and is fully dependent on old age home. She is suffering multiple disabilities, illnesses and nearly bed ridden. She needs help even for the daily activities like bathing, eating etc. She is being assisted by the inmates of old age home. She feels that without old age home she would have died.

8. Mr Sachitananda (name changed) is 72 years old, a widower who belongs to Hindu general caste and educated up to Standard 10. At the age of 67, his wife passed away. They do not have any children. During his active life, he worked as a peon in a bank. He also owns four acres of land. After the death of his spouse, he started living alone. He had lots of problem in managing the day-to-day activities like cooking, cleaning and other household activities. Slowly his health started deteriorating and he was not able to manage alone. At this juncture, he realised that he had no children or close relatives with whom he could possibly stay. He explored other possibilities and he came to know about an old age home, which was only two kilometres away from his village. He finally decided to move in to that old age home. He has been there for about three years. He had a paralytic stroke recently. Still he keeps himself busy by teaching orphan children near the old age home and earns Rs 300 per month. He says he is very satisfied with the arrangement in the old age home and feels much better than when he was staying alone and struggling. He never feels lonely in the old age home because there are lots of peers around him. However, he also confesses that if he had children, he probably would have been looking after the grandchildren and staying happily with them. He also expressed his gratefulness to the government for providing such a facility for helpless old people.

The case studies presented above depict the real circumstances in which the elderly people are forced to move into the old age homes. All the case studies presented in the previous section show that old age in general is a very vulnerable situation. However, the vulnerability is observed to be higher among oldest old, those who are sick and physically dependent and those who are economically dependent. Vulnerability is also higher among the widowed and those who do not have any children. The case studies presented show that when the elderly are very old they have to face higher incidences of physical and mental abuse. As the age increases, the elderly become more frail and ill and this makes them more vulnerable. Many of the elderly who are sick were abused by the family members and they were finally forced to move in to the old age home. Majority of them preferred to leave their families because of ill health and lack of care from the family members. They had to take shelter into old age homes because they could not find any alternative arrangements. Old age homes, therefore, can be seen as the last resort for elderly persons.

Each case presented here can be treated as a special case because they are unique with respect to some special parameters, though there are some common features. The case studies show that many elderly persons felt their economic dependency was the major reason for rejection by their family members. Many of them expressed the view that if they had some income or any kind of asset, the family members would have treated them better. Once they become economically dependent, their own children and other relatives felt that the old people were a burden and found ways to ill-treat them and put them old age homes. Changing views regarding the care of the elderly is also another reason for the elderly to find shelter in the old age homes. The case studies show that if the old person had more than one son they quarrelled over who should take care of the old parents and finally none came forward; then the parents ended up in old age homes. There are also instances where mother is taken care of by one son and the father by another. In certain other cases the parents are taken care of by

their children on rotation basis; for certain months in a year, one son takes care of them and then they move to another son for the rest of the year. Parents are generally very unhappy with this arrangement. To avoid conflicts within family they finally move into an old age home. Quarrelling among the children and family conflict is yet another reason for the elderly members to take refuge in old age homes. The major reason for family conflict is economic dependency and ill health on one side and lack of adjustment with younger generation on the other. Although traditional wisdom says that in India children are considered as security in old age, it is not always true. Further, widowhood also adds to their vulnerability. The case studies show that many of the older people felt more vulnerable after the death of their spouse. A study by Bharati (2009), which is based on the old age homes in Hyderabad and Secunderabad, concludes that economic dependency is the major reason for elders to move into old age home. Similarly a study of the elderly staying in old age homes in Odisha by Mishra (2008) concludes that poverty and family conflicts forces many elderly parents to stay in old age homes in Odisha. Another study on old age homes in Amaravati district of Maharashtra by Bansod and Paswan (2006) concludes that family conflicts and economic dependency are the major reasons, which forced majority of elderly to stay in old age home. Similar observations hold good in this study also.

By supplementing the survey data, the case studies show that old age homes are not a preferred place of stay for majority of the old people. In old age all of them prefer to stay with family but due to various constraints they end up in the old age home. Ill health, economic dependency, widowhood and not having children are some of the major reasons for the elderly to move into old age homes. Therefore, as the survey data indicated that the elderly members residing in the old age home are likely to have higher morbidity, poor self-perceived health and suffer higher incidences of loneliness, frustration and isolation.

It is clear that the elderly who do not have surviving children are the most vulnerable and forced to stay in an old age home. When both the spouses are alive there is no problem for the childless. After one spouse dies the other has to search for alternative living arrangement. Most of them live alone and manage their household work till they are physically and economically active. Once they are physically disabled and economically dependent on others, it is very difficult to stay alone. Therefore, majority of the childless elderly prefer to live in an old age home, which is the next and best alternative.

The case studies presented throw light on the multidimensional aspects of the complex vulnerability of the elderly. Age related vulnerability is natural and an inevitable part of ageing; however, feeling vulnerable can be partly influenced by attitude or personality. It can also be influenced by broader social structures and policies. This research suggests that risk factors such as physical dependency, cognitive impairments or poverty can be offset, in part, by other factors such as access to appropriate formal supports, old age pension and low cost health care services. Similarly, threats that increase vulnerability such as the death of a spouse or loneliness can be counterbalanced by safeguards such as good social networks and contact with others.

Overall, this paper brings out various issues on living arrangement and health of the institutionalised elderly. The characteristics of the inmates of the selected old age homes show that the inmates are mainly illiterate and older olds from poor socio-economic sections. Sizable proportions of

the inmates are currently married and have children. Lack of money to support them, ill health and family conflicts are the major reasons for the elderly to depend on old age homes. Overall, the study brings out interesting observations on living arrangement preferences of the institutionalised elderly in Odisha. Majority of the institutionalised elderly prefer to live with family however, a sizable proportion (32 per cent) indicated a preference to live in institutions. Therefore, majority of the elderly who are housed in institutions do not prefer to stay there but circumstances forced them to live there. It is generally observed that a higher proportion of older olds, males and widowed preferred old age homes. The data on the living arrangement concordance indicates that a higher proportion of institutionalised elderly are in discordance with their living arrangement.

The health of the institutionalised elderly was also found to be poor. The inmates of the old age homes reported higher incidence of physical disability, morbidity levels and poorer self-perceived health. Since ill health and disability are the contributing factors for the elderly to take refuge in old age homes, it is quite natural for them to have poorer health.

Overall, the elders viewed the family as the best place to live but also considered old age homes as an alternative for care in the context of family conflicts. The old age homes may be the next and best alternative especially for those who are poor, sick and do not have a family.

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ISBN 978-81-7791-147-3



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Dr V K R V Rao Road, Nagarabhavi P.O., Bangalore - 560 072, India
Phone: 0091-80-23215468, 23215519, 23215592; Fax: 0091-80-23217008
E-mail: lekha@isec.ac.in; Web: www.isec.ac.in