A Statement
for
8th Session of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing

on
Needs & Rights of Older Persons: Indian Perspective
By
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Process of population ageing is not only very fast in India, the second most populated country of the world after China, but it has also been like a sudden phenomenon. In India, though there is a tradition of celebrating Old Age, respecting elderly family members and supporting their old age related needs and rights, but brisk increase in elderly population has affected age old social norms, traditions, values and equations adversely in almost all societies of India. Due to non-preparedness and lack of policies, plans and programs at governmental, social and family level to tackle the emerging problems. Because of ever-increasing population of older persons, old age has become one of the major challenges for all.

Profile of older people have also changed dramatically over the years. Therefore now their needs are also varied. While young old people (60-70 years) are comparatively more active and healthier, who need gainful engagement opportunities to keep themselves self-reliant, Old older people (71+ years) who are physically less active, need family, social, financial as well as psychological support.

India today has a very large population (and ever increasing) of old people who are the first timers (as old persons in their families). Most of them have not seen their own parents living this long. For them Old Age is a new experience for which they never got any opportunity to prepare themselves.

Fast changing socio-economic scenario, industrialization, rapid urbanization, breaking up of joint family system, cut-throat competition and demanding lifestyle of young generations increasingly, for better opportunities and prospects, older people are left behind, to live without any family and psychological support, which is most needed in old age.

Coupled with ever growing needs of older persons, lesser opportunities and provisions available for them, creates a void in their life. This is the void, which causes a lot of health, social and psychological issues like loneliness, marginalization, isolation and helplessness. These are the basic factors, which encourages mistreatment and misbehavior in old age, age discrimination, neglect, elder abuse and violation of human rights of older persons.

Since older persons are comparatively less visible in public places due to various reasons, their voice often remains unheard. Majority of older persons face harassment within their own houses in the hands of their own family members. Due to their dependency on their family members, complete helplessness and vulnerability older persons don't raise their voice against any form of elder abuse. They accept it is as a part of their bitter life.

Even the policies for old people are more cosmetic than effective in India. Rights of an individual in old age are considered as more of a moral responsibility of the family members. No one seems to be concerned about the fact that an individual who is old has certain basic human rights.

In India, due to high prevalence of illiteracy and lack of awareness about their rights older persons, particularly older women are not aware of their basic rights. Most women live within four-walls of their homes throughout their life, hence they remain more vulnerable as they face not only age discrimination but also gender discrimination in Old Age.

An Agewell study suggests that 47.4% older persons were discriminated because of their Age in family matters, family functions, participation in social-cultural activities, re-employment, etc.

Awareness about gender equality in the society, particularly among older persons and protection of basic and human rights of elderly, particularly elderly women is very urgent, in view of their ever increasing longevity.

To decrease the incidences of age-discrimination, mistreatment, elder abuse and neglect within families, society and at national level - various gender equality, elderly friendly supportive measures need to be undertaken at different levels.

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