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## **UNIT 4 NON GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES**

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### **Structure**

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### **4.0 OBJECTIVES**

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At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- describe the role of NGOs in age care;
- enumerate the lacunae in their working and give recommendation for improvement.

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### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In the Block 1 of this Course you have read about the increasing numbers of elderly people in both the developed and developing world. You are also familiar with the psychological and social problems faced with this sector. In turn the increase of this group also call for demands from the society. Government has introduced a number of schemes for the benefit of the elderly which you have already read in the previous unit. In addition, there are also a number of non governmental organizations working for the benefit of the elderly. In this unit, you shall be learning about the role of NGOs.

In the initial section, you will learn how the NGOs evolved for care of the elderly. The functioning of various NGOs in different parts of the country has also been discussed. You must also get an insight into their lacunae, so as to be able to suggest to your elderly persons the correct options carefully. In the end suggestions are provided for improving the services of NGOs. These may prove very useful to you in case you get associated with NGOs involved with elderly care action.

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### **4.2 EMERGENCE OF NGO'S IN GERIATRIC CARE**

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The voluntary sector was the first one to respond to the problems of the elderly in India. Their intervention has brought to public notice private hardship of different kinds of this target group.

Nearly 80 per cent of the NGOs in the field of old age care emerged only after 1949. They provided shelter, food and health care in recent decades the NGOs/Voluntary organizations have intensified their activities for old age care.

In 1983-84, the Government of India decided for the first time to give grants to voluntary organization for services to the aged, for health care, income generation, subsistence training, and old age homes. The eighth five year Plan enunciated a two-pronged approach: encouraging the young to save for their old age, and economic support to the aged.

In November 1992, the Ministry of Welfare started a scheme called Welfare of the Aged which provides financial assistance to voluntary organizations for running programmes like running of old age homes, day care centres and provision for older persons, above the age of 60.

An Old Age Home should be a residential unit for at least 25 poor/destitute elderly. It should have a part time medical officer and a trained social worker.

The Day Care Centres should cater to the needs of at least 50 elderly persons. The aim of this programme is to keep the elderly integrated in their respective families and to supplement the activities of the family in looking after their needs. The well-to-do as well as the poor in this age group may benefit from this programme. There is a need to define the concept of Day care centres in the Indian context. These centre may become widely popular in the cultural set-up of the Indian society of course, if they function properly.

Voluntary organizations set up 212 old age homes, 31 mobile medicare units and many day care centres by 1995 under the scheme. The scheme does not elaborate on the services to be provided to older persons, their monitoring and evaluation. Studies on the actual functioning of programmes under the scheme are awaited.

A scheme of assistance to Panchayati Raj institutions/ voluntary organizations for the construction of old age homes was launched during 1996-97. This scheme aims at providing at least one old age home per district, for at least 25 persons above the age of 65 years, preferably destitute. The outcome is yet to be assessed. However the schemes in general, emphasizes on the provision of institutionalized services will create a demand for it. One point to note is that the expected enthusiasm over involving Panchayati Raj institutions in welfare activities for the old is not yet in sight in a large part of the country.

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### 4.3 ROLE OF NGOs IN THE CARE OF THE OLDER PEOPLE

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CEWA's directory of non-governmental organizations working in the field of the welfare of the aged in India, listed about 380 agencies. About 86% were institutions. Others provided services like day care, geriatric care, medical and psychiatric care, recreation, financial assistance and counselling. These agencies were mainly urban based and provided free services. The Handbook of information by the Association of Senior Citizens, Bombay 1992, lists 665 organizations in India that include old age homes, day care centres, pensioners' associations, institutions providing medical help, Institutes devoted to research, and associations of senior citizens.

The role of NGOs in the Care of the Older People

a) **Old age Homes**

There are 329 old age homes in India looking after 15,471 older persons in 1989. Around 80% accommodated both men and women, 14% were run only for women and 6% were run only for men. A majority of these homes were run by missionaries and provided free services.

b) **Multiservice Centres**

Some voluntary organizations have set up multi service centres. These are Action for Social Help Assistance (ASHA), Centre for the Welfare of Aged, Cheru Resmi Centre, Geriatric Society of India, Meals on Wheels, Help Age India, and so on in different parts of India, and Family Welfare Agency and Dignity Foundation in Mumbai. There are a number of smaller organizations working in various regions with assistance from the government and different larger organizations or donor agencies. For example, several organizations are successfully experimenting with 'Adopt-a-Granny Programme', mainly inspired by Help Age India and Help Age International.

- c) Attempts are being made in a few cases to provide assistance to the old to enhance their status in their families. They thus remove the necessity of the old leaving their families and ensure the involvement of the family and the community in showing proper consideration to the dignity of the old and providing services to them.
- d) Some NGOs in the field are disseminating knowledge and information in the field of the care of the old. They facilitate exchange of knowledge and help, however feebly, coordination of activities of different NGOs catering to elderly people.

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#### 4.4 PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED BY NGOS

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The experiences gathered by the NGOs working for the target group of the aged identify the following main problems be setting older persons.

**Economic Constraints:** of the aged arising out of the aged arising our poverty or low income and meagre savings and depletion of savings to meet the needs of a life that may continue for 10,15 or 20 years with out any earning to fall back on.

**Neglect and Abuse:** *Elder abuse* becomes manifest in adverse acts of omission or commission where persons are maltreated and rejected in the form of verbal and physical attacks, with holding of emotional, economic or physical support, terrorizing, isolation, cheating, desertion and imposition of hard physical labour. The situation gets worsened by the reluctance on the part of the aged to admit and make known the occurrence of abuse our of fear, guilt, shame or cultural silence and their ignorance of legal measures or refusal to take such measures against their family members.

**Voluntary Desertion:** The reasons of voluntary desertion of their families by the older persons are varied such as the lack of living space in the house as the family becomes large, the need for peace and tranquility, the desire for freedom from the authority of the young, the desire for an independent life of the sudden death of the spouse, leaving a vacuum in the person's life.

**Problems of Institutionalization:** Even through the institutions or OAHs are called 'home', or 'home away from home', *the approach towards the inmates or the elderly in many of these homes is highly institutionalized, depersonalized and bureaucratic. The elderly face problems of adjustment with the tight and rigid schedule, total or near total separation from the familial/social milieu, anxiety over entrusting oneself to an unknown and new environment, lack of mental stimulation, diminishing physical faculties, and closer and more frequent encounters with deaths and ailments in the institution. All these may create for the elderly the problems of depression, apathy, and a process of resignation to fate.*

**Gaps in Services:** From the above, it is clear the despite the commitment of a number of voluntary organizations to facilitating of happy and peaceful aging, the voluntary organizations suffer from the malaise arising out of overemphasis on *institutional rather than non-institutional services and the perception of older persons more as beneficiaries than as human resources.*

That the above *criticism is applicable* not only to NGOs or voluntary organizations working in Maharashtra but also *to those in almost all the parts of India*, is shared by social workers or representatives of NGOs all over India.

#### Check Your Progress I

- 1) Enumerate the role of NGOs in care of older people.

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- 2) List out the problems identified by NGOs.

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#### 4.5 LACUNAE IN NGOs AND SOCIAL WORK ORGANIZATIONS

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Analysis of the NGOs and social work organization revealed a lot of lacunae in the working of these organizations.

- It was found that NGOs participating in the regional workshops addressed themselves more to macro or global aspects of the care of the aged rather than on concrete and empirical information regarding micro situations where actually the service to the old are offered. Neglect of micro level information and lack of exchange of information of concrete experiences gathered by social workers of NGOs in the practical field of conducting services to the old, prevents the understanding of the empirical reality.
- Whatever narration of the experience of particular NGOs is available seems to respect a degree of complacency of the representations or social workers of NGOs. There is a glaring absence of critical self-awareness of the social workers working in NGOs/voluntary organizations that offer services to the aged. Cultivation and encouragement of this critical self awareness is an immediate necessity.
- An emphasis on the institutionalization of services to the old (OAH) seems disturbing.
- There are hardly any signs of innovations in organizing programmes which would ensure the involvement of the community in taking care of the aged.
- In homes, most often there is routinization of life of the inmates who buds a sense of redundancy or irrelevance in their minds.
- Most of the homes do not have adequate medical facilities such as the ready availability of doctors and trained nurses and medicine and equipment for the inmates.
- Hardly any appreciation of emotional and other kinds of psychology problems of the old is shown.

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#### 4.6 GREY AREAS THAT NEED TO BE ATTENDED

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Analysis of the social workers and other personnel in the NGOs showed that their knowledge and understanding of the elderly, their situation and environment was lacking. These can be summarized as:

- Knowledge and understanding of the emotional and psychological aspects of the old living in homes or in families is lacking. Without this knowledge no programme of helping the old through the regeneration of their self-confidence and feeling of dignified existence can ever be successful. This knowledge is necessary so that the old can be helped in adjusting themselves with the new environment or changing milieu. While social scientists should be encouraged to undertake scientific studies in the area, social workers may be properly sensitized, rather, "conscientized", to the task of paying adequate attention to the emotional and psychological aspects of the life of the elderly.
- Adequate information regarding the extent of utilization by the old their savings, property, pension by themselves, for meeting their needs is not their. Also, it is not known whether and how far they are aware of and capable of using the existing

legal and other institutional measures to vindicate their rights and fight against the suffering, cheating and deprivation hurled on them. Spreading of basic legal literacy among old people as well as others, including social workers is an important task that remains more or less unattended to.

- Information and appreciation of the peculiarities of the specific socio cultural milieu does not seem to be adequate. Without it, a programme for providing service to the old may prove to be a failure. It is not often known whether it is because of the 'izzat' or prestige of the family or the material interests of the family or the material interests of the family members in the pensions and/or savings of the old, that stands in the way of the old availing themselves of services provided by homes. In certain cultural contexts only the first may be true, in some others the second may too be the valid reason, while in certain situations both the factors may operate together.
- Services to the old depend on specific financial status or income, caste, religion, gender, status, familial background and physical and mental capacity of the old. Differences in any of these factors would demand corresponding variations in the nature of service provided. Serious and systematic thinking in this arena is yet to begin.
- Discovering and encouraging new avenues of creativity by the old require more attention.

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## 4.7 SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Steps may be taken to further strengthen the positive aspects or points of strength of the NGOs/voluntary organizations. Attempts should be made to fill up the lacunae. Greater attention may be paid to grey areas to enhance the effectiveness of the NGOs catering to the old. More specifically, the following recommendations are made.

- Greater and more specific encouragement needs to be given to voluntary organizations working for the care of the old. Measures should be taken to encourage and strengthen grass-root level organizations where voluntary activities have not picked up yet.
- In view of the increasing intensity of aging as a social problem, a nation's organization for dealing with it is an utmost necessity. It will stand at the apex of a series of bodies running through the state level and district level and ultimately reach the village level through panchayats. The channels of communication between different levels would be free bureaucratic mentality and there would be scope for free-flowing feed back from the bottom to top. This two-way communication will ensure the realization of the goal decision-making through participatory democratic process.
- Concomitantly, the various needs of the old like shelter, day care services, legal aid, health services, counselling, etc., should be assessed at the micro-level so that the necessary policies and programmes be realistically formulated for the well being of the elderly.
- Programmes of health services and schemes for income generation ought to be necessary components of any programme designed for the well-being of the older persons.
- The currently prevailing urban bias in the field needs to be corrected immediately through accentuation of efforts to extend the services to rural areas. Indeed, all programmes, particularly health programmes, should reach the unreached including not only the rural poor but the poorest slum dwellers in the cities.
- A positive perception of older persons is a prerequisite for the acceptability and viability of any programme meant for the well being of the old. A large number of the old are useful human resources and not dependent liabilities. The needs and

capabilities of older persons generally vary from the young-old (61-75) to the old-old (76-90), to the very old (90+). Most of the young old are productive in the informal sector, particularly in rural areas. Their capabilities and potentialities need be harnessed to their well being as well for the society at large.

- There should be an integrated approach to the formulation and development of projects.

For example, an old age home can have an orphanage attached to it. These two segments can play complementary and supplementary roles.

- There should be programmes for generating awareness in the community of the problems as well as the potentialities, dignity and the rights of the elderly.
- Also, there should be room for community participation in the programmes of the elderly.
- Programmes for legal literacy among the old should be initiated to make the old aware of their rights and of the available legal remedies against the infringement of such rights.
- NGOs should also have programmes of legal aid for the old to fight against the deprivation of their right to enjoy their savings, pension or property alongside programmes for persuading the other members of the family to honour the rights of the old.
- The procedure involved in project formulation, approval of projects and release of grants are complicated. They need to be continuously examined for improvement.
- In order to ensure a balanced and even distribution of funds for age care work in the country, the government should involve leading voluntary organizations at state and district levels.
- Voluntary organizations should be involved in social sector planning right from inception. They should also be involved in the legislation process from the very beginning.
- There is a need for attitudinal change among the field officials dealing with the voluntary sector.
- Voluntary organizations as well as funding agencies should recognize the importance of training. Training should include the areas of capacity building, running income generation projects, projectization, management of projects, counselling and training in careers.

The specialized nature of counseling the old, and the young related to the old, should be appreciated and emphasized. The emotional and psychological aspect need special attention.

- The bias of agism in social workers as well as medical practitioners and health workers should be consciously and continuously fought against.
- There should be some mechanism to ensure co-operation between research and implementation.
- The media can play a very vital role in empowering the NGO sector by giving more importance to development journalism. It can encourage voluntary action by creating awareness, writing appreciatively on the work of NGOs doing good job as well as highlighting their draw backs.
- To avoid negative criticism, all voluntary organization should practice the core values of openness and transparency in all their dealings.

Such transparency and proper utilization of funds will help the NGOs raise funds. They should recruit fund raising staff with commitment and the staff themselves should believe in the cause of the NGOs and of a particular programme. NGOs should try to make the potential or actual donor a partner in their cause. The donor should feel that he/she can make a difference in this world.

- The financial policies should create an environment that encourage younger people to save for their old age.
- Voluntary organizations must play an important role in sensitizing the younger generation towards the needs of older persons, resulting in the strengthening of family relationships. Family based and community based programmes of age care are widely preferred.

### Check Your Progress 2

Write true or false :

- a) In old age homes, there is routinization of life.
- b) Old age homes have adequate medical facilities.
- c) The knowledge and understanding of emotional and psychological aspects of the old living in homes or families is lacking.
- d) We do not think of attaching orphanages with old age homes.

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## 4.8 LET US SUM UP

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NGOs are nonprofit voluntary agencies taking care of the people affected by specific deprivations. They play the role of activists, executing programmes and delivering services and also as the mobilizers of opinions, awareness and support of the people concerned with and affected by social, economic and political problems.

Nearly 80% of the NGOs in the field of old age care emerged only after 1949. They provided shelter, food and health care. In view of the absence of social security measures for older people, the initiative taken by the NGOs to deal with the problems of the aged is a positive feature.

But the emphasis on the institutionalization of the aged is disturbing and there are hardly any signs of innovations in organizing programmes which would ensure involvement of the community in taking care of the aged.

Greater and more specific encouragement needs to be given to voluntary organizations working for the care of the old. Measures should be taken to strengthen grass root organizations where voluntary actives have not yet picked up.

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## 4.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The role of NGOs can be enumerated as:
  - a) Old age homes
  - b) Multiservice centres
  - c) Provision of assistance to old to enhance their status in their families
  - d) Disseminating knowledge and information in the field of care of the old.
- 2) The problems identified are:
  - Economic constraints
  - Neglect and abuse
  - Voluntary desertion
  - Problems of institutionalization
  - Gaps in service

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) a) True; b) False; c) True; d) False

**NOTES**