
UNIT 3 SOCIAL REHABILITATION

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you should be able to:

- describe the social problems associated with old age; and
- discuss the various strategies that can be promoted by various agencies in order to achieve social rehabilitation of the aged.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the foregoing units you have learnt broadly about principles of rehabilitation and physical rehabilitation of aged. This unit focusses on social problems faced by the aged and their management. As you know old age constitutes one of the major social problems of the modern societies. It is generally accompanied by a number of problems that the aged have to adjust within varying degrees. These problems are: insufficient income to support themselves failing health, need of recognition, dignity and social participation. Thus, economic dependence, poor health and segregation in the family and the community tend to create among the aged feelings of meaninglessness and powerlessness. When aged have lost friends, spouse, job, influence, income, health, etc., that cannot be replaced, it brings in them intolerance, short-temperedness, rigidity of attitudes, selfishness and suspicion and this shift in their psychological makeup makes their living and adjustment in society more problematic. The loss of decision-making power, consultation status and control of productive resources leads to the problem of isolation, loneliness and a deep sense of worthlessness.

Old age has emerged as a social problem not only due to the rising proportion of the aged people in the population, but to a large extent owing to the rapid changes that the social structures are undergoing in the industrial societies. In such societies unitary families are the rule and extended families are an exception. The roles played by the aged members in the society have been transferred to various institutions. Hence many elderly people who need help and protection have not been able to get from their family members.

Old age emerges as a social problem where economic competition works at every level, thereby creating a decline in the role and status of the old and non-earning members.

The environment of the industrial society is not conducive to the elderly people to get satisfaction of their physical and socio-psychological needs. They have to depend on their own capacity and resources. They are exposed to the vulnerability of the aging process.

Growing old is a painful process in the modern industrial society. However, it is not necessary that every aged confronts all or most of these problems and situations, as the nature and extent of the social adjustment may vary according to his experience, personality make-up and most important being the family and the community environment that surrounds him.

Some cultures side that of India, do accommodate the old and dependent members of the society and lessen the strains and anxieties of old age. In Indian society, family works as an institution, taking up the role of insurance of the individual where, in times of crises, the family members do help each other and the old persons have the scope to secure the tender loving care from the members and lead a peaceful life. Even in a poor family the aged share the miseries and happiness of their family members. There may be arguments and cold-wars between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law, but the old person continues to be a part of the family.

The problem of old age in the developing countries including India is not acute compared to the seriousness of the problem in the western societies. The cultural norms and values still have importance in the society, but considering the gradual rise in the number of the aged in the population of the country and the rapid changes resulting from industrialization and urbanization, it is necessary to use highest caution and protect our cultural norms that provide accommodation to every member of the society.

3.2 THE CONCEPT OF REHABILITATION

The concept of gerontological rehabilitation can be operationally defined as the state of personal happiness and satisfaction with the present life.

All human beings grow through a series of interrelated and inter-dependent age-related life stages and aging refers to the later period of life.

Old age is generally accompanied by a number of changes with which, the aged have to adjust. These changes are reduced income, failing health, changed status and role and restricted participation in the life of the family and the community. This shift in the conditions of life creates among the aged, the feelings of loneliness and deep sense of worthlessness.

In order to adjust to the changing conditions of life and to live in harmony, the aged require a cordial atmosphere in which they can find love, respect and care. The rehabilitation of the aging persons depends upon the degree to which their personal and environmental circumstances offer opportunities.

Consequently, with the objective of finding ways of achieving rehabilitation for the aged, a great deal of research work was undertaken and it was established that sound economic status, satisfactory health, good inter-generational relations, favourable environment and housing and above all an active role in the life of the group are factors positively corresponding with rehabilitation of the aged.

The following factors can be promoted by governments, business, unions, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations etc. in order to achieve gerontological rehabilitation.

3.3 ECONOMIC SECURITY

One of the problem areas in old age is the aged person's financial position. Poverty is a major disadvantage associated with aging in the modern societies. Poverty in old age is an outcome of population rise, rapidity in technological advancement and illiteracy. Occupation is the determinant of one's economic status. But job opportunities for the aged shrink due to population rise. Rapidity in technological advancement renders the aged person unfit to hold technical jobs and the aged are forced to retire from service and depend upon their

pension. For persons belonging to the lower social classes, where the level of literacy is low, only the unskilled occupations are available with which they can hardly earn enough for their survival. In the absence of old age benefit schemes in the unorganized sector, the aged are compelled to work till they are well advanced in age, till their death or till they are incapacitated by sickness.

The economic resources of the individual reflect his social status and have a strong impact upon his emotional and psychological set up. The living arrangements of the aged, their relationship with family members and friends and the nature and extent of social interaction are determined by their economic status. The phenomenon of dependence on others and its implications are closely associated with the aged person's capacity to earn and the adequacy of his income to maintain himself.

The condition of the aged becomes worse with advancing years since earning capacity declines with decline in health and vigour. The diseases affecting the poor aged are the deficiency diseases caused by unhygienic living conditions, malnutrition and lack of adequate medical aid.

A poor aged person is thus left with no other choice but to forego the satisfaction of many needs, leading to frustration and dejection. An individual's feeling of economic adequacy or deprivation has strong effect upon his adjustment or morale. The chances of personal adjustment are worse for older people in lower class position.

Thus you must have realised that great anxiety in old age relates to financial insecurity. When the issue is seen in the context of fact that one-third of the population is below the poverty line and about one-third are above it but belong to the lower income group, the financial situation of two-thirds of the population 60+ can be said too fragile. Some level of income security in old age is a goal, which is to be given very high priority. Policy instruments to cover different income segments needs to be developed. These can be enumerated at below:

- Promote economic activities that lead to a standard of living adequate for individual and family well-being;
- Give both women and men full and equal access to economic resources, including the right to inheritance, the ownership of land and credit, as well as the opportunity to acquire their own rights in social security systems where they exist;
- Establish or adapt social security or other economic security systems to protect young and old, ensure intra and intergenerational equity and solidarity, and remove gender biases;
- Ensure the protection of labour laws and social security or other benefits for part-time, temporary, seasonal and home-based workers;
- Create an environment that encourages good financial planning through all stages of life and facilitates saving for economic security in old age, as well as for other contingencies of life.

3.4 HEALTH

Health is an asset to a person in all the stages of life. For an elderly with chronic disease extraordinary amount of time, attention and financial resources, often beyond the capacity of the family is required. By falling sick and getting physical disabilities, he does not want to add to his already existing problems. More than the severity, the duration of the illness had a direct bearing upon the social functioning of the aged person. To him with illness is attached the fear of incapacity for locomotion.

Since health is the central factor in every aspect of the elder person's life, it is necessary to understand the phenomenon of health in its full meaning. World Health Organization (1946),

defines health as “state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. “Health of an aged person as a well-being, measured by subjective assessment of overall health and mental satisfaction, and by physical functioning capacity, the complexity of an aged person’s health status is observed. Being healthy does not refer to only the normal working condition of the body, but it also includes the sense of well-being of the aged persons.

The factors responsible for the physical and mental well-being of the aged persons are, cultural patterns, level of socio-economic status, environmental factors, and social attitudes of the community. The importance of food and nourishment in the maintenance of health in old age cannot be under estimated. Our bodies need simple, wholesome food to build and maintain efficiency. Under-nourishment and malnutrition show adverse effects on old age.

Study of health is important since, health is an important factor in the adjustment of the old person to the process of aging. A sick person cannot lead a normal life even if he has plenty of money.

Health care should therefore involve the health and social sectors and the family is improving the quality of life of older persons. The following factors need to be stressed:

- Promote a healthy lifestyle, including education about lifestyle choices which contribute to healthy and long lives, such as decisions related to nutrition, exercise, and high risk behaviours involving tobacco, alcohol and drug use and certain sexual practices.
- Promote knowledge about strategies combating cognitive and physical decline with aging among older persons and continuing gerontological training among primary health care workers and other health professionals.
- Ensure universal and affordable access to adequate health care, which, in time, should include the development of a broad continuum of community and institutional health services to provide early diagnosis and treatment of both mental and physical illnesses and dysfunctions at all ages, appropriate treatment and rehabilitation to reduce disabilities and diseases associated with aging, and care for chronic conditions.
- Promote the use of appropriate technology to support people with their health needs and appropriate self-care practices.
- Recognize the role that living meaningful or spiritually fulfilled lives can play in overall health and well-being.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Name the factors responsible for the rehabilitation of the aged.

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2) List the policy matters that may be considered to cover the different income segments.

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3) List the factors responsible for the physical and mental well being of the aged persons.

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3.5 THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF GENERATIONS

The conflicts sometimes evident between members of different generations or even of the same generation can mask our common needs for love, emotional support, physical contact respect and recognition, for the exchange of knowledge and experience, and for economic support and care. The extent of need will vary from individual to individual, from age group to age group, and from culture to culture. Each generation also stands on contributions made by earlier generations, instilling both respect for those who have gone before and a sense of stewardship towards future generations. At the same time, each generation brings unique skills or qualities. The old are the only group that has lived many of the experiences that younger generations have yet to encounter and can serve as valuable role models. Older persons may be carriers of unique cultures or traditions threatened with extinction or repositories of valuable skills, such as knowledge of traditional health practices. The young, in, turn bring a special energy and enthusiasm to life from which older and more conservative temperaments can benefit. Some of their unique skills, such as knowledge of latest technologies, can be very useful to older people. Different generations, by supporting one another, can strengthen both their societies and themselves. Providing opportunities to and meeting the needs of older persons holds the potential for enhancing the lives of all age groups and in society. Among the key strategies that can be promoted by governments, business and unions, educational institutions, Non-Governmental Organisations, and other appropriate parties to support and strengthen intergenerational ties are to:

- Assist in keeping families and other social networks intact, while at the same time, promoting tolerance for diverse family structures.
- Facilitate multigenerational exchanges and collaboration in the pursuit of both personal and public interests, including monitoring relationships between different age groups.
- Encourage openness to the experiences and insights of all individuals and age groups, recognize the unique perspectives they bring because of where they are in their life stage at a particular time in their society's history.
- Advance the active role of older persons as custodians and transmitters of cultural heritage, history, and skills and as role models, particularly for at – risk groups, such as orphans and children of broken families.
- Promote caring attitudes and practices towards more dependent individuals of all ages and honour the contributions of family and other care givers.

3.6 ENVIRONMENT AND HOUSING

Adequate living accommodation and agreeable physical surroundings are necessary for the well-being of all people, and it is generally accepted that housing has a great influence.

On the quality of life of any age group in any country, suitable housing is even more important to the elderly, whose abodes are the center of virtually all of their activities. Adaptations to the home, the provision of practical domestic aids to daily living and appropriately designed household equipment can make it easier for those elderly people whose mobility is restricted or who are otherwise disabled to continue to live in their own homes.

Shelter is a basic human need. The stock of housing for different income segments should be increased. Housing schemes for urban and rural lower income segments should earmark 10 per cent of the houses/house sites for allotment to older persons. Earning persons should be motivated to invest in their housing in their earning days so that they have no problems of

shelter when they grow old. Layouts of housing colonies should have to respond to the life styles of the elderly. It will have to be ensured that there are no physical barriers to mobility, and accessibility to shopping complexes, community centers, parks and other services is safe and easy. You have already read about there in the Block 4 of Course 1. Care must be taken to:

- Assure an environment providing a safe water supply, controlled levels of noxious substances, a sound infrastructure for the transportation of persons and goods, and a reduction in traffic hazards and opportunities for criminal behaviour.
- Promote of adequate housing and shelter arrangements from independent living to multigenerational dwellings and various degrees of assisted living for the physically and mentally vulnerable of all ages.
- Support age-integrated environments and living arrangements through the use of universal design principles, the removal of physical constraints to the independent living of persons with disabilities, the provision of community services, and support for families wishing to reside in multigenerational settings.

3.7 EDUCATION

Education is crucial basis for an active and fulfilling life. A large number of persons reaching old age with minimal literacy. This limits capacity to earn a livelihood and is an impediment to health and well-being.

Technological change without education can alienate older persons, but with measures which enable people to prepare and adjust, it can also contribute to reducing marginalization, loneliness and segregation between the ages, to promoting the enjoyment of rights and to improving access to services.

There is also a need to educate the general public with regard to the aging process. Such education must start at an early age in order that aging should be fully understood as a natural process.

- Provide affordable access to basic education, literacy training, vocational training, adult education and other lifelong learning opportunities for all groups in society regardless of arbitrary characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, disability, or religion.
- Promote educational processes that reflect the continuity of life, such as teaching about the aging process at an early age and the specific concerns of each generation, including ways in which life choices in early years influence the quality of life experienced in later years.
- Adapt teaching and training methods and curriculum content to changing individual capabilities and needs over the lifespan.

3.8 ABUSE

Elderly persons have become soft targets for criminal elements. They also become victims of fraudulent dealings and of physical and emotional abuse within the household by family members to force them to part with their ownership rights. Widow's rights of inheritance, occupancy and disposal are at times violated by their own children and relatives. It is important that protection is available to older persons. You have already read about this in the previous Block Unit 2.

Elder abuse can be defined as "a single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person". It is usually categorised as:

- **Physical abuse:** The infliction of pain or injury, physical coercion, physical/ chemical restraint.
- **Psychological/emotional abuse:** The infliction of mental anguish.
- **Financial/material abuse:** The illegal or improper exploitation and/or use of funds or resources.
- **Sexual abuse:** Non-consensual contact of any kind with an older person.
- **Neglect:** The refusal or failure to fulfil a care-taking obligation including/ excluding a conscious and intentional attempt to inflict physical or emotional distress on the older person.

Prevention of Abuse

Above can be prevented by the following measures:

- To increase public awareness and knowledge of the issue.
- To promote education and training of professionals and paraprofessionals in identification, treatment and prevention.
- To further advocacy on behalf of abused and neglected elders.
- To study into the causes, consequences, prevalence, treatment and prevention of elder abuse and neglect.

Check Your Progress 2

State True or False

- 1) Suitable housing is not very important for elderly. (T/F)
- 2) One must educate the general public about aging process. (T/F)
- 3) Neglect is a kind of abuse. (T/F)
- 4) Abuse can be prevented by promoting education and training of professionals and paraprofessionals in identification, treatment and prevention. (T/F)

3.9 LET US SUM UP

Until recently life was short, people faced and feared the prospect of death while still performing significant social roles. But today, due to the prolongation of life-span, more and more men and women live beyond the age of retirement, more and more women confront a decade or more of widowhood and the fear of early death is replaced by the fear of aging and its consequences.

It is not possible to prevent people from aging but it is possible to devise new social strategies and produce supportive structures based upon accurate assessment of needs that will enable the aged to lead a happy and dignified life.

3.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The factors responsible for the rehabilitation of the aged are sound economic status, satisfactory health, good inter-generational relations, favourable environment and housing and an active role in the life of the group.
2. The policy matters are:
 - i) Promote economic activities to raise the standard of living
 - ii) Give full and equal access to economic resources to both men and women.
 - iii) establish or adapt social security
 - iv) ensure protection of labour laws
 - v) create an environment to encourage good financial planning.
- 3) The factors are: cultural patterns, level of socio-economic status, environmental factors, social attitudes of the community and food and nutrition of the individual.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) F
- 2) T
- 3) T
- 4) T