

## **INTERGENERATIONAL CARE: NEED OF THE HOUR**

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### **Abstract:**

Shakespeare through his famous play 'As you Like It' divides a man's life into seven stages - First being infancy and last being old age. Developing nations which often have a rich cultural heritage are rapidly changing their character to meet with the fast moving life. The technological advancement has led to increment in age expectancy. The change in lifestyle and the compulsion of modern working conditions led to a breakdown of the traditional family systems in urban areas making them more nuclear in nature with every passing phase. On the other hand thousands of homeless children in the urban areas are growing up under dreadful conditions. Preserving them is a big challenge. These children are most vulnerable to crime, slavery and sexual exploitations. Intergenerational care is the practice of bringing the young and elderly together by introducing nurseries and care homes to one another. This new style of care is revolutionizing care homes worldwide and participants swear by the practice. In the Indian context, these can be spoken in terms of old age homes and orphanages. Old Age Home and Orphanage are the two different public spaces serving the same purpose of guiding and developing the lives of two extreme age groups with same psychological needs. Both the buildings have traditionally played a significant role in shaping the life of both elderly and orphans in their own independent ways. This paper elaborates the need of developing a Home for the elders along with a child care institute as a solution for the elderly and orphans so that they can fight their crisis in midst of a comfortable and conducive environment depending on each other.

**Key Words:** Intergenerational, Old age home, Orphanage, Well- being, inter generational contact programmes.

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**Introduction:**

“VasudhaivaKutumbakam” is a Sanskrit phrase found in Hindu texts such as the Maha Upanishad, which means "the world is one family", which is indeed true and we ought to take care of each other. The United States is of course not the only country with an aging population. Many countries in Europe, as well as Japan, are facing a shift in demographics. Japan's population, in particular, has a very high proportion of elderly citizens. More than a quarter of its population is over 65. It hasn't reached “children of men” status there yet, but increased life expectancy and low birth rates can make it difficult for a society to function.

As our population gets older we are going to have to come up with ways to take care of our oldest citizens. Not all families are equipped to handle the level of care that the elderly require, particularly those in the 85 and older age range. For this reason, nursing homes and assisted living facilities have become increasingly common. And while the care and medical attention are positive aspects of this change, there are drawbacks such as less time spent with family and less interaction between older Americans and their communities. This can leave the elderly feeling disengaged from life, depressing them and causing a negative impact on their health.

Intergenerational care is thought to have officially started in 1976, when Shimada Masaharu merged a nursery school and care home in Tokyo with great success. This started a wave and soon more intergenerational care facilities opened in Japan and the US, with everyone in the know applauding the positive effects of the practice. Today there are intergenerational care facilities in countries across the globe, although it's fair to say it has yet to become a mainstream practice.

When both old age homes and orphanages are clubbed in a single building - the Architecture of the space needs to develop the interconnectedness between the elderly and the orphans. The environment will help the elders to use their time taking care of the orphans where the orphans will no longer feel abundant. Simply pushing the elders in an old age home or just providing with a shelter to orphans is not the best way to solve the problem considering the psychological aspects attached with these age groups. The best way is to give them back what they have lost by providing a homely environment where both the groups will support each other and may

discover the undiscovered dynamics of the new built space, environment and relationship, and factually, this unison has proved highly successful abroad.

Family support is a significant component in the lives for every human being. It becomes the responsibility of architects and designers to create a model which fits the needs of Elderly as well as Orphans. Neither aging can stop nor orphans be eradicated from the society. But through appropriate architecture the environment could be shaped in order to make a 'HOME' for elderly and orphans, both. This would help them to mutually resolve their needs and associated problems since the physical environment plays key role for healthy living and make a living and to mark their Identity. Old age home is the aged people's unfortunate and unexpected destination despite delivering all fortunes and expectation of their beloved son or daughter. Old age Home is a successful formula of today's nuclear family believer and killer results of old aged sentiments. The young generation frankly decides for exclusion of old aged methodology of joint family and advocates of old age home. Young generation feels old age people are a burden. It is because the traditional values and sociability have been changed drastically in today's time. The old age group is now feeling this embarrassing blow. The aged people are spending their twilight years in isolation, pain and misery. All these collectively are responsible for the old age home concept.

#### **Factors responsible for the separation of elderly:**

- Many young couples are relocating themselves for better employment from villages to cities in order to have a better future.
- Many elders are also reluctant to provide the duty of household, which they are controlling for an elongated time, to children.
- Youngsters are sometimes indignant in behavioral attitude to their parents.
- Youngsters have migrated to different places distant from their inhabitant places and also to numerous countries abroad. So, they are unable to provide accommodation to their parents in their own houses even if they desire.
- Elders sometimes are too debilitated or ill to take care of themselves or get medicinal help in any urgent situation. For all these reasons the homes for elders increasingly seem more appropriate in Indian circumstances.

**Facts and figures:**

There are approximately 728 Old Age Homes in India (as per dadadadi.org report). Kerala has 124 old age homes which is the maximum in any state. India ranks 4th in terms of size of elderly population (Kamal Raj-2011 report).

Facts about elderly in India:

- \*24 million in 1961 increased to 77 million in 2001.
- \*Projected to rise to 179 million in 2031 and 301 million in 2051.
- \*70 and above projected to increase from 29 million in 2001 to 132 million in 2051.
- \*80+ would be fastest to grow – 8 million in 2001 to 32 million in 2051.
- \*Second largest elderly (60+) population in the world (2001).
- \*80% are in rural areas.
- \*40% are below poverty line.
- \*Over 73 per cent are illiterate.
- \*About 90 % of the old people have no official social security (i.e., without PF, Gratuity and Pension etc.).
- \*Life expectancy 31.7 years in 1941 increased to 60.5 years in 2000.
- \*55% of the women of 60 years and above are widows.
- \*Older women are most vulnerable.
- \*Elderly poverty is a major risk of ageing in developing countries like India.
- \*Family structure is changing to nuclear/small unit families.
- \*Without the safe, secure and dignified status in the family, the elderly ARE finding themselves vulnerable.
- \*Welfare of the elderly has been a low priority with the state.

The main noticeable point is that, is it right and justified in today's context. If it is discussed, then many will raise hand in favor of this system. It is because the old age homes are increasing around the world. That means more and more people are getting detached from their parents. The trends are shifting from joint family to nuclear family concept at larger scale. The new generation is assimilating their parents as a barrier in this competitive world. The today's system is arguing that the two age bands cannot grow together. But still many people are attached to the old values and sociability and are also against the old age home and disqualifying the separation

from their parents. Elderlies have started walking out of their own home in search of a journey that promises peace, joy and celebration of life with a group of people who share the same boat of life.

### **Research Evidence**

There are numerous studies that show social interaction cannot only decrease loneliness, a prevalent issue in our older generations, but can also delay mental decline, lower blood pressure and even reduce the risk of disease and death in elders. The social interactions between the older generation and the youngsters in these experiments, as well as the further interaction between care home residents could be a simple solution to a lot of these issues (Steptoe et. al, 2013).

In 2013 a study by BMC Geriatrics in Japan found that elderly people who were part of an intergenerational care scheme were not only engaging with the toddlers, but they were engaging with each other and smiling more as a result of the children's visits. The scheme made the residents more comfortable with conversation, and also gave them something new to talk about.

### **Research evidence on emotional well-being of the elderly**

Concerning emotional well-being, there was moderate evidence on positive outcomes from intergenerational interventions. In an observational study from Canada older people expressed their enjoyment of intergenerational contacts with school children who visited them in their apartments. They stated that “they were brightened up by their vibrant energy and smiles.”

In an American study exploring the effects of the Elderly-Youth Exchange (EYE) programme older volunteers working with teenagers found this to be an enjoyable and rewarding experience. Another qualitative study from Brazil investigated the impact of a school based intergenerational reminiscence programme. It found that older people reported positive effects on their mental health in terms of being valued and respected, with a sense of self-worth and overcoming shyness. In a controlled study in the US, older adults taking part in musical activities with children also perceived an increased sense of self-worth.

Regarding social well-being, there is strong evidence that intergenerational activities enhance social networks and relationships with neighbors, as well as family members, while there is

mixed evidence on impacts on the frequency of communication with friends and local neighborhood children and mixed effects on trust. A Japanese trial looked at the effects of an intergenerational health promotion programme involving adults aged over 60 who volunteered to read picture books with young children in kindergartens. They began reading with children after completing a weekly training course that lasted 3 months. The study found a significant increase in the social networks of older people in terms of the frequency of their contacts with children in the programme, as well as in support from friends and neighbors. Another randomised controlled trial in Brazil, assessing the effects of a reminiscence programme to encourage interactive activities between generations, showed that older adults in the programme were twice as likely to consider their neighbours to be helpful (OR=2.27, P=0.07), or honest (OR=2.5, P=0.008) compared to non-volunteer controls, as well as having better quality of family relationships. There was also a significant improvement the levels of social support received from friends or neighbors (p=0.028). However, there were no significant differences in the frequency of communication with friends and neighborhood children.

In a Japanese observational study which assessed an interactive programme between preschool children aged 5-6 and older adults in community, the intervention groups showed significantly greater improvement in conversation levels between generations, more constructive behaviors (p<0.01), as well as more smiles being observed using a weighted smile rate (p<0.05). However, there is mixed evidence on trust. In the Japanese study older people felt that it would take a long time to trust others, while improved mutual trust was seen in the Brazilian study.

### **Benefits of Intergenerational Relationships**

According to Erik Erikson, one of the first psychologists to describe social development across the lifespan, the final stage of emotional development is experienced around the age of 60 and older. Developing connections with a younger generation can help older adults feel a greater sense of fulfillment. In fact, linking older adults with youth can provide advantages for both groups. For example, such relationships can:

- \*Provide an opportunity for both to learn new skills.
- \*Give the child and the older adult a sense of purpose.
- \*Help to alleviate fears children may have of the elderly.

- \*Help children to understand and later accept their own aging.
- \*Invigorate and energize older adults.
- \*Help reduce the likelihood of depression in the elderly.
- \*Reduce the isolation of older adults.
- \*Fill a void for children who do not have grandparents available to them.
- \*Help keep family stories and history alive.
- \*Aide in cognitive stimulation as well as broaden social circles should a youth introduce technology into the life a senior.

According to researchers at the University of Florida, relating to older adults can be particularly challenging for adolescents. Adolescents tend to be focused on the present and think mainly about themselves, so they may be less interested in learning about older adults. Teens may display negative behavior that is hard for older adults to understand and adolescents will need guidance and encouragement to help them relate to older adults and understand the implications of aging.

### **Activities that Initiate, Build and Strengthen Intergenerational Relationships**

- \*Storytelling: Swapping stories is a great activity and can help build a connection.
- \*Learning skills: Many older adults have skills or talents that would be interesting for children. Perhaps your child could learn to weave, crochet, fish, bake, or even take care of animals.
- \*Reading to each other.
- \*Planning/preparing a meal.
- \*Scrapbooking: Establishing phone pals. This activity can connect older community members with children who are alone after school.
- \*Talking about ethnic heritage: Share ethnic customs, discuss the meaning of a name in native language, or relate special stories passed down about culture.
- \*Planting seeds or gardening: This illustrates the stages of the life cycle. A container garden can be created if bending or space are issues.
- \*Weather watching.
- \*Telling jokes.
- \*Discussing hobbies and sharing examples.
- \*Having the child teach the senior a new technology.

## **DRAWBACKS TO INTERGENERATIONAL DAYCARE**

The most obvious drawback is the likelihood that residents will die and the children will be forced to deal with the question of death and mortality. There really isn't an easy way around that problem, but it may not actually be a bad thing. At some point, children learn about death and get the sense of their own mortality. No method of discovering that is completely free from trauma. The key to dealing with this isn't to delay learning about death as long as possible but rather to handle the topic in a compassionate and age-appropriate way.

Another concern is that some elderly residents may not actually want to spend time with children. Not everyone likes little kids or wants to feel responsible for interacting with them. In an effort to provide a way to feel useful we might be providing some people with a chore instead. That is why the amount of time they spend with children or if they spend any time with them at all should be completely voluntary for the elderly participants. Some may be interested in spending the majority of their free time with the children and some may not. Both age groups need to have their own space as well as the ability to opt in and out as they choose. The caretakers for the children and for the elderly should be the staff and the structure of the facility needs to reflect that.

There is a danger of infantilizing the elderly by having the two groups together that care providers should be aware of. Although they may have the need for some physical assistance the way small children do, the elderly are not like small children and may find that being in a facility with children obscures that fact. Providers should be aware that what might be an appropriate treatment for a small child, such as using "baby talk," can be demeaning when directed at an elderly person. While these facilities serve both age groups they should do so knowing that they are two very different groups with different needs.

### **Inter generational contact programs:**

Intergenerational contact programmes involve bringing children or young people and older adults together with the aim of improving intergenerational relationships. Often, the focus of programmes is to change young people's attitudes towards older adults, although some projects consider the attitudes of, and implications for, older adults themselves. The problem addressed in



this review is that intergenerational contact programmes are often designed by practitioners without reference to research evidence that could inform practice and policy (Statham, 2009).

A theory that could underpin many intergenerational contact programmes is “intergroup contact theory” (Allport, 1954), which predicts that under the right conditions, positive contact between people from different social groups reduces prejudice. Not only does contact improve attitudes about the contact partner, but also the contact partner’s entire social group. Therefore, it can reduce prejudice towards a wide range of people. Intergroup contact theory can be applied to relations between people from different age groups, thus becoming intergenerational contact.

## CONCLUSION

As our population gets older we need to start thinking about how we are going to care for our aging citizens. And we already are faced with a childcare crisis that requires us to come up with a new solution. It need not be one solution; In fact, a combination of encouraging employers to provide daycare, subsidies, or income percentage caps, and even government facilities could all play a role. Intergenerational daycare could be a feature that allows us to take care of both of these populations while at the same time promoting cultural values of respect for the elderly and investment in children. By bringing these two generations together, we shall be able to make this world a much better to live in for both of these most important groups of our society.

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