
The Role of Old Age Homes in Supporting the Social, Physical & Emotional Needs of Elderly Individuals: A Case Study of Old Age Home District Sahiwal, Punjab, Pakistan

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v3i1.363>

Abstract:

The present research explores role of old age homes in addressing social, physical & emotional needs of aged people with a focus on old age home in District Sahiwal, Punjab as in Pakistan, the aged population has brought various challenges to the structures of traditional caregiving especially in the context of the changing family aspects and urbanization. The study combines qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection by interviews, focus group discussions, surveys and participant observation employing a mixed-method approach. Twenty-eight elderly persons & five caregivers contributed in the study to offer various perspectives on institutional caregiving system. Findings of the study disclose that old age homes play a vital role in the social support and provide healthcare services, nutritious meals and assistance in activities of everyday life. The emotional well-being vestiges a significant challenge because the residents report feelings of loneliness due to limited family interaction and inadequate psychological support. Moreover, the article also points out challenges lie inadequate funding, shortage of staff training and societal stigma surrounding institutional care affecting the quality of services provided and also highlights the role of old age homes in filling the gaps which were left by the traditional caregiving models. The recommendations of the study include the introduction of psychological counseling, the family engagement, the need of training for caregivers and starting the awareness campaigns to reduce societal stigma and also provides valuable measures for policymakers, caregivers and the stakeholders to develop sustainable & culturally sensitive elderly care frameworks in Pakistan.

Key words: Elderly Care, Old Age Homes, Physical Needs, Emotional Needs, Social Needs, Sahiwal, Pakistan

Introduction:

Population of the world is growing aged rapidly and the share of 60 years and above older individuals expected to be double till 2050 reaching almost 2 billion (United Nations, 2020) posing various challenges to the traditional caregiving systems especially in the developing countries like Pakistan as the family structures function as the primary support mechanism for the elderly people here. The changing social dynamics, the economic pressure and urbanization are corroding these traditional systems and creating a growing demand for alternative care solutions such as the old age homes (Khan & Shafiq, 2019). The population Pakistan with elderly proportions is estimated to comprise almost 7% of the total population. This figure is expected to rise because of increasing

life expectancy (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The old age homes are emerging as response to the unfilled needs of the elderly people who lack sufficient family care or they choose institutional living for many reasons in this context. Although the concept of old age homes is a new one in Pakistani however, these institutions have played important role in addressing the physical, emotional and social challenges faced by the elderly population in the country (Ahmad et al., 2021). Various research studies have explored that old age homes in Pakistan provide basic medical facilities as well as the daily living support. The challenges such as insufficient infrastructure and unspecialized aged care persist (Haq et al., 2022). The emotional well-being is compromised due to feelings of isolation and abandonment among those who have limited family contacts (Ahmed & Rashid, 2021) and the social engagement plays vital role in determining the quality of life for older individuals however, the opportunities for interaction are still limited in institutional settings in Pakistan (Shah & Ali, 2020). In Pakistan, familial caregiving of elderly members is considered as a moral obligation (Ali & Khan, 2018) and this contributes to the reluctance to consider institutional care for their older members which leads to lack of funding and limited societal support for old age homes. These institutions functions as a critical safety net for vulnerable aged populations in urban and semi-urban areas where traditional support systems are less accessible (Raza et al., 2019). Old age home of District Sahiwal provides an exceptional case study to explore these issues and the kind of social support, it provides to the aged population. This institution caters to a diverse group of elderly people offering insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with institutional care. The previous studies have pointed out the need for a culturally sensitive approach to aged care in Pakistan and emphasize the importance of integrating traditional values with the modern practices of caregiving (Iqbal & Farooq, 2021). The aim of this study is to assess the role of the old age home in Sahiwal to address the physical, emotional & social needs of its residents. Through employing a mixed-method approach, the study provides an understanding of the experiences of the aged persons in institutional care and the various challenges faced by caregivers as well as the implications for policy and practice. The study also contributes to the growing discourse on elderly care in Pakistan offering useful insights for stakeholders to improve the welfare and well-being of aged population.

Rationale of the Study:

There is a rapid increase in the aged population across the globe and a breakdown of traditional family support systems. These two factors have led the need for various alternative caregiving models for the welfare and well-being of elderly population. The family structures have played a significant role in looking after the aged members of the family in Pakistan but now the factors like urbanization, economic pressures and the changing societal dynamics have shifted a change in the caregiving roles and responsibilities giving rise to old age homes that remains controversial in the cultural and religious context of Pakistan as the family-based care for parents and aged members was considered a moral and social obligation (Ali & Khan, 2018). The old age homes in Pakistan face various challenges such as inadequate funding, social stigma and lack of awareness awareness about their role in elderly care despite their growing presence. The residents of old age homes face unique physical, emotional and social challenges that are inadequately addressed by present care models for example, the medical care and daily assistance are partially fulfilled and the emotional well-being and opportunities for social engagement are not explored and undervalued (Ahmad et al., 2021). The Old Age Home in District Sahiwal, Punjab provides a fascinating case for exploring these issues in a semi-urban setting where the cultural traditions and the modern caregiving practices interconnect. Understanding how this institute fulfills the various needs of aged residents can offer useful understandings into the effectiveness of institutional care and the study can address the stigma associated with old age homes. This study fills an important

gap and explores the lived experiences of residents in an old age home as the limited research on institutional elderly care in Pakistan is conducted and it will contribute to the vast discourse on aging and caregiving. It will help in informing policymakers, caregivers and community stakeholders about the challenges to improve elderly care in Pakistan. The study underscores the need for culturally sensitive approaches to caregiving in Pakistani society and addressing the evolving needs of its aging population. The present study also seeks to promote a more holistic understanding of the role of old age homes by examining the physical, emotional and social needs and necessities of elderly care aiming to provide actionable recommendations for enhancing institutional care and to foster community support to ensure the dignity and well-being of aged population in Pakistan.

Objectives:

- To inspect the emotional well-being of respondents
- To assess the physical support provided to the aged people
- To examine the social environment in the old age home
- To explore the challenges faced by the elderly members
- To suggest valuable recommendations for enhancing elderly care

Review of Literature:

Establishing old age homes in Pakistan is influenced by changes in the family structures and societal dynamics. The extended family system was a safety net for the aged people which offered the emotional and financial support but the urbanization, migration and economic pressures weakened these structures which led to an increased reliance on institutional care (Hassan & Saeed, 2018). Various research studies explore that old age homes are slowly and gradually becoming an alternative for aging population who lack family care and prefer the independence which is offered by these institutions (Rizvi et al., 2021). A large portion of elderly care focuses on addressing physical needs which include the provision of healthcare services, assistance with mobility and the nutritional support. Jabeen et al. (2020) conducted a study and explored that many old age homes in Pakistan provide basic healthcare services but there is a lack of specialized geriatric care and modern medical facilities which results in unmet health needs for elderly individuals with chronic conditions. Another research emphasized the significance of daily living help in maintaining the dignity and independence of the residents (Farooq & Ahmed, 2019). The emotional challenges in the old age homes are profound such as feelings of abandonment, loneliness and depression as these are common among residents (Ali et al., 2019). The counseling services are often minimal in these institutions exacerbating emotional distress. Zafar and Malik (2021) conducted a study and stressed the role of peer support and companionship within old age homes in mitigating these emotional challenges. The research indicates that sports activities, group discussions and cultural events contribute to build a sense of community and minimizing isolation as the social engagement plays important role in improving the quality of life for elderly residents in old age homes (Rahman et al., 2020) and mobility limitations hinder participation leading towards isolation as concluded by Khan and Yousaf (2022). The old age homes face various challenges like inadequate funding, limited staff training and societal stigma in Pakistan as limited funding result in suboptimal facilities, lack of specialized staff and the insufficient resources to meet needs of elderly people (Ahsan & Iqbal, 2018). The high levels of stress and burnout are often reported due to the demanding nature of their work and lack of professional development opportunities (Shah et al., 2021). The societal stigma discourages families from considering old age homes as a valuable option. The perceptions of elderly care in Pakistan are highly influenced by the cultural and religious values as Islam stresses the importance of family-based care for parents which create

moral and social obligation for families to provide support (Haque & Zia, 2021) which leads to guilt and stigma for families that turn to old age homes. The culturally sensitive approaches to institutional care can help bridge the gap between modern caregiving practices and the traditional values (Aslam & Qureshi, 2022). There is a need of a holistic approach for improving the quality of life in old age homes to addresses physical, emotional and social dimensions. The psychological counseling, structured social programs and the family engagement can enhance residents' well-being (Akhtar & Bashir, 2020). The policymakers must prioritize the development of geriatric care policies and allocate resources to strengthen institutional care (Rahim et al., 2021).

Methodology:

The present study was conducted in Old Age Home District Sahiwal Punjab Pakistan with the aim of exploring the role of old age homes in addressing physical, emotional and social needs of aged individuals. The mixed-method approach was employed in the study. The universe of the research was Old Age Home of District Sahiwal which was selected for its semi-urban location and diverse resident population. The purposive sampling technique was employed in the study to choose 28 aged residents (25 males and 3 females). Moreover, 5 caregivers were also selected for the study. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation and the surveys. The in-depth understanding of residents' and caregivers' perspectives on caregiving experiences, challenges and the adequacy of institutional support was sought from semi structured interviews. In order to explore collective experiences and perceptions of social engagement and emotional well-being, the focus group discussions were conducted among residents. The quantitative data on demographics, health status and satisfaction levels with services were sought through survey. The daily interactions, caregiving practices and the residents' participation in social activities were observed by employing observation method in the study and the collected data were analyzed by using thematic analysis ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The ethical approval was also sought from the institutional review board and the participants provided their consent as the confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study.

Results & Discussion:

The results of the study showed that the daily life facilities such as the bathing, dressing and eating were being provided to the elderly people in old age home. The healthcare services were also available with nurses managing medicines and responding to health issues. There were also gaps in geriatric care as almost 30% respondents reported to receive sufficient medical care for chronic diseases like diabetes, arthritis and hypertension. The concerns over the lack of access to advanced medical facilities were also expressed through caregivers and these findings of the study resemble with previous studies that point out the lack of resources and services in old age homes in Pakistan (Jabeen et al., 2020). However, some aged people reported satisfaction with the general medical care provided within the institution such as routine health checks and immediate care needs (Farooq & Ahmed, 2019). Almost 65% respondents reported that they seldom get visits from their family members of the family which leads to isolation and emotional distress. Caregivers reported that they tried their best to provide familial like emotional support through regular interactions but they were overwhelmed by their caregiving duties. Those residents who are engaged in group activities reported higher levels of emotional well-being and they suggested that peer support played an important role in alleviating feelings of isolation (Ali et al., 2019) and these finding are similar with the earlier research which points out the significance of social connectedness and mental health interventions in institutions (Zafar & Malik, 2021). Almost 50% respondents participated in group activities like religious sessions, discussions and recreational activities in the old age

home. The physical limitations like reduced mobility and chronic pain limited the participation of some individuals in such kind of activities. Some of the respondents reported social activities as uninteresting and did not fully cater their interests and preferences but majority expressed the wish for more activities. The social interaction among peers remained significant aspect of their everyday life. 70% respondents reported that the friendship with other residents helped a lot to provide emotional support and reduced the feelings of isolation and the findings also aligned with the work of Rahman et al. (2020) suggesting that meaningful social interactions are important for increasing elderly well-being in institutional care in Pakistani society. Present research also pointed out various challenges facing the old age homes such as inadequate funding, shortage of trained staff and social stigma and the staff also reported the feeling stressed to deal with the emotional and physical demands of their roles because of lack of training and support from the administration. The social stigma of old age homes served as a reluctance of families to consider institutional care for the aged persons and relatives. Majority of the residents said that their families regarded institutional care as a last resort which was influenced by cultural and religious beliefs about the duty of children to care for their parents (Ali & Khan, 2018). Majority of the respondents acknowledged the religious and moral expectations that families should care for elderly parents at home which lead towards sense of guilt and stigmatization of institutional care. Some respondents without close family ties viewed the old age home as a reservation that provided them with safety, security and fulfill their basic needs and these findings resemble with Haque & Zia (2021) who noted that Islamic teachings stress the significance of family-based care and the change in Pakistan is slowly and gradually leading to greater acceptance of institutional care.

Recommendations:

Following recommendations can be helpful in this regard:

- **Professional Training for staff:**
There should be proper training for the staff and the caregivers as well focusing on care, emotional support and managing chronic conditions as suggested by Shah et al., 2021.
- **The Involvement of the Family:**
The members of the family should be encouraged to visit regularly with residents as this could help mitigate feelings of loneliness and emotional distress. The institutional care and family-based caregiving should be promoted as referred by Rahim et al., 2021.
- **Healthcare Services:**
There should be improvements in health care services and establishing partnerships with local healthcare providers to ensure that residents have access to specialized medical care and regular check-ups proposed by Jabeen et al., 2020.
- **Different Social Activities:**
There should be a variety of cultural, recreational and interest-based activities because these activities can enhance social interaction and improve residents' emotional well-being which was also suggested by Khan & Yousaf, 2022.

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