

Abstract

India is aging. The growth of India's older population has increased our concerns about their well-being. In this context, the present thesis aims to broaden our understanding of the older Indian population, their needs, and well-being and inform policies and interventions for enhancing their aging experience. Two studies were conducted as part of this thesis, and their findings helped achieve this broad objective.

The first study (Study 1 Phase I and Phase II) provides a general picture of the older years and aging-related issues in contemporary India – by exploring the reality of aging as experienced by older Indians and their views regarding relevant aging issues (insider perspective), and by uncovering the prevailing social media discourse on aging-related issues in India (societal perspective).

More specifically, Study 1 Phase I (n=63) explores the aging experience and general conception of old age of older Indians, their views about old age homes (OAHs) as a model of old age support, their lived experience as an OAH resident, and their perceived need for government schemes and policies for older citizens – using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Study 1 Phase II examines the portrayal of older Indians (65 videos), OAHs (64 videos), and government schemes and policies for older Indians (107 videos) on the social media platform of YouTube – using Inductive Content Analysis.

Study 1 Phase I revealed a multidimensional and multidirectional experience and view of aging and old age. It also showed that community-dwelling older persons viewed family as the proper site of aging. Most of their narratives reflected their negative attitude towards OAH living. However, they perceived OAHs as necessary in contemporary India – be it as a necessary evil or as a basic necessity. Notably, the OAH residents were cognizant of the stigma attached to living in an OAH and stressed that "OAHs are nothing to be ashamed of." Their narratives also revealed the complexity of making a home out of an

institution. Lastly, it was observed that older people had developed an attitude of political cynicism. They felt there was ample scope for improvement in the lives of older citizens by the government. Accordingly, they urgently called for government intervention in healthcare, finance, recreation, and the safety of older citizens. They also urged the government to develop uniform norms and minimum standards of care in the OAHs.

Study 1 Phase II revealed the presence of negative and positive age stereotypes in the images and narratives of older Indians on YouTube. However, compared to the predominantly negative perspective observed in earlier studies on traditional media platforms, this study showed that YouTube paints a somewhat more diverse and mixed image. This is an encouraging finding as social media portrayals of old age and older persons have important consequences for their well-being. The findings also showed that different facets of OAHs have been highlighted on YouTube. These included the factors that create a positive and negative living experience for the residents; evoking nostalgia for a more value-rich past era when caring for elders was viewed as a family affair; and the new 'elderscapes' (e.g., retirement communities and assisted living facilities) that are largely shaped by Western market-based eldercare conceptions. Lastly, the findings also showed a comprehensive coverage on YouTube of the various schemes, policies, and initiatives instituted by the Government of India for its older citizens. Among these, pension and post-retirement planning schemes were most recurrently discussed, with the *Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana* topping the list.

After developing a general understanding and picture of aging in contemporary India, Study 2 moved to a more specific understanding of the aging experience and well-being of older Indians. This study examined two theoretical perspectives – successful aging (Study 2 a) and gerotranscendence (Study 2 b). While the core objective of the successful aging movement has been to find ways to enhance the 'normal' aging experience, gerotranscendence

helps understand the changes in behavior and perspectives in old age. The common theme underlying these two approaches is their emphasis on the possibility of continued psychological growth and well-being in old age.

Firstly, the subjective perceptions of successful aging (N=63) and gerotranscendence (N=39) in the Indian context were explored. After that, we examined the effect of select socio-demographic factors on successful aging and gerotranscendence and the role of select psychosocial variables as correlates and predictors of successful aging and gerotranscendence. These variables were chosen based on the qualitative findings on successful aging and gerotranscendence and a literature review.

Study 2 (a) revealed the participants' conceptualization of successful aging as a multifaceted construct. They viewed successful aging as personal well-being that comprised three related well-being dimensions: physical, psychological, financial, and career well-being. The findings also revealed the underlying tensions between agency and fatalism observed in their view of successful aging as personal well-being. Next, one's children, spouse, and certain socio-environmental factors (e.g., built environment of home and neighborhood) were perceived as influencing one's successful aging trajectory. Apart from these, the qualitative findings also showed that the participants' views of successful aging was most closely aligned with the psychological well-being model of successful aging (Ryff, 1989). Hence, in the quantitative study (N=219), successful aging was operationalized and measured using the psychological well-being scale (PWB).

Briefly, the quantitative results showed that living arrangement, educational level, and income sufficiency had a significant main effect on various facets of PWB. A few significant interaction effects were also observed, such as between gender and marital status, educational level and income sufficiency, educational level, and pension status. Next, attitude to aging, gerotranscendence, resilience, marital happiness, geriatric depression, living type, the

importance of religion in daily life, happiness, perceived health status, and life satisfaction emerged as both significant correlates and predictors of successful aging and/its different dimensions – more specific results are reported in the thesis.

Study 2 (b) provided evidence of gerotranscendental changes among older Indians, with cosmic transcendence being the most prevalent. Further, the quantitative findings showed that educational level, pension status, and income sufficiency had a significant main effect on various dimensions of gerotranscendence. A few two-way interaction effects were also observed, such as between educational level and income sufficiency, educational level and caste, occupational status and income sufficiency, and income sufficiency and caste. Lastly, daily spiritual experiences, psychological well-being, resilience, life crises, and perceived closeness with children emerged as significant correlates as well as predictors of gerotranscendence and/ some of its dimensions - more specific results are reported in the thesis.

Apart from family members, geriatric counselors, caring professionals, healthcare providers, geriatric social workers, media professionals, policymakers, and aging researchers, the findings of the present thesis will be relevant to virtually everyone as everyone ages and wants to add life to the years and not just years to life.