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Elders Compromise for Sake of Care from Family: Study

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A study, released by Agewell Research and Advocacy Centre for the United Nations has revealed that majority of the elderly have to compromise with their life circumstances for the sake of care and support from their family members, and over 50% face abuse and mistreatment.

Key Findings

- The elderly have to compromise and make adjustments in their lifestyle according to the wishes of the younger members of their families to ensure they are cared for.
- Over 75% of respondents had to **limit their personal social interactions** as their family members direct them to do so, otherwise, their family members can avoid providing their basic needs for food and medicines.
- **Breaking up of the joint family system** is one of the biggest factors for the challenges they face in getting long-term, palliative care.
- Though most of the elderly enjoyed their independence, a majority were **financially dependent on others** in their old age.
- The elderly **need healthcare services** to ensure their independence in old age. Most of them need a social support system and recreational facilities to enable them to lead more enjoyable lives.
- Most of the respondents were **not getting any long-term palliative care**. A majority of this needed traditional family support. While some sought maintenance to meet their old age requirements, others demanded better healthcare facilities and caregiving services in old age. Some of the respondents also spoke of the need for care and support such as housing and counselling as their most important needs.
- The financial health of the elderly usually determined the nature and quality of palliative care they received. Though providing long-term and palliative care to the elderly comes under family responsibilities in India, it is observed that senior citizens who are financially independent and have a high net worth, or who hold property entitlements, are treated comparatively better by their family.
- Many of the elderly were found to be **unaware about the status of the policy framework** and support and services for them.

Challenges

- Older people in India often face problems such as **disability, restricted mobility, loneliness, poverty and lack of awareness on accessing old-term care**. A fast-growing population of older people, the ever-increasing gap between generations and the fast and demanding lifestyle of young people contribute towards the major challenges faced by a majority of older people.
- Managing home care for the elderly is a massive challenge to **multiple service providers, nursing agencies, physiotherapists and medical suppliers, are small scale and unorganized** and, therefore, **provide incomplete care**.
- In India, health insurance coverage is essentially limited to hospitalization. The concept of geriatric care has remained a neglected area of medicine so far in the country.

Way forward

- There is an urgent need to make every elderly financially independent in old age. The provisions for ensuring independence in old age and long-term palliative care be made at all levels: family, community and government.
- Healthcare equipment such as wheelchairs, relief material such as adult diapers and caregiving service should be provided on a regular basis to destitute older people, who are bedridden and suffering from acute mobility issues.