



SENIOR CITIZENS: LIFE AND CHALLENGES



WEBINAR

15th DECEMBER, 2021

It is estimated that the global old-age population will double by 2050, and as people age, their ability to cope with the rapidly changing socio-economic environment and the subsequent societal support required to maintain a healthy life diminishes. Pakistan is home to 9.4 million senior citizens, and much of the social infrastructure present in its modern cities does not facilitate senior citizens. They continue to struggle with the fast-paced urban life and the challenges it presents on a day-to-day basis. There is a need to make cities inclusive for people of all ages and capabilities. It is important to reintegrate senior citizens in modern urban settings to create a healthy, more inclusive, and sustainable society.

SESSION OBJECTIVES

1. What do senior citizens expect from the state and society?
2. Legislation for facilitating the lives of senior citizens
3. To be a senior citizen - my experiences and lessons
4. Comforting senior citizens living with dementia
5. Staying fit after retirement

Views of the Panellists



Mr. Muhammad Shafqat

Topic: Staying fit after retirement

Senior citizens need a productive social life with their friends and family to deal with the issue of staying fit after retirement. Old people feel unproductive and inefficient due to the behaviour of their own families. Their side-lining from family matters and friend circles lead to increasing loneliness for the senior citizens which contributes to several mental problems. In Pakistan, the social life of senior citizens is not taken seriously. Loneliness is the number one cause of depression and reduced health amongst old people. The family has the major responsibility of providing company to the elderly and take care of their mental and physical health. Senior citizens and old age fellows should pursue physical activities to keep themselves physically healthy. However, mental health should be a priority compared to physical health as the former becomes critical in old age.



Ms. Shahida Jameel

Topic: Legislation for facilitating the lives of senior citizens

Although the government has embarked upon several legal efforts to provide quality care to senior citizens, the efforts have largely remained on paper. It is important to understand how society perceives old age. Today, senior citizens face abandonment because society tends to declare them as non-productive and an economic burden on families and society. Modern urban societies have been designed and operationalized in a way that it systematically excludes or discourages old people from actively participating in public life. Several social changes, like the migration of workers, increasing women participation in the workforce, and childless marriages are factors that contribute towards a challenging old age.

The social demographic composition of Pakistan is becoming increasingly complex as there is a growing youth bulge on one hand and an increasingly ageing population on the other hand. Moreover, the retirement ages have been fixed at 55 and 65, which marginalizes old people from being employed in the workforce. As a result, retirement has created an ageist culture and a reduction in the quality of life of old people.

The current legislation today does not extend meaningful support to old people. Government officials, committees, and state institutions are not dedicated to the cause of uplifting the quality of life for senior citizens. The government needs to establish a special ministry dedicated to the affairs of senior citizens in a society. After the 18th amendment, the responsibility of looking after senior citizens was to be shifted to the provincial government and ultimately closer to the people it aims to serve.

There is a lack of financial sustainability in the administrative system established for senior citizens. As a result, the government persistently relies on financial assistance from foreign lending agencies which makes the funding unsustainable.



Prof. Dr. Asghar Zaidi

Topic: Comforting senior citizens living with dementia

The ageist attitude of our society needs to be highlighted as well as the policy challenges that hamper the wellbeing of senior citizens. In Pakistan, there is a lack of research and diagnosis of old age issues like dementia. In a study conducted on old people with dementia in Pakistan, the findings largely point out that quality of life matters more than its length. Poor provision of health services and a general lack of care and support to old people deeply affects their health more than other age groups.

Healthcare diagnosis of old people is met with carelessness by doctors and healthcare providers. There is a stigma attached to dementia and other diseases which reduces access

to quality healthcare amongst old people. There is a need for rigorous campaigning by civil society and community scholars to spread awareness regarding old-age diseases like dementia and Parkinson's. Lastly, there is a need for indigenous research on age-related issues for a better diagnosis and treatment.



Mr. Nazir Ahmad Wattoo

Topic: To be a senior citizen - my experiences and lessons

How we treat old people reflects the general attitude of our society. Nazeer Wattoo shared his broader and more personal experiences that led him to realize the value of taking care of senior citizens. Senior citizens are an important source of traditional wisdom. However, the ageist society of today has side-lined old people as slow and inefficient. The youth and children of today need to realize that old people are a vital source of wisdom and they possess solutions to the most pressing issues of personal and professional nature. The government, businesses, and the community as a whole need to create opportunities for old people to integrate this demographic into mainstream society.



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Dr. Shujat Ali

Topic: What do senior citizens expect from the state and society?

The rapid modernization and liberalization of the modern economy and increasing market pressure for better results are factors that contribute to the marginalization of old age people. A market-driven society encourages an advertisement-based lifestyle that prioritizes only the youth segment of society. Old people are a natural part of the human population, and they need to be organically linked with societal functions.

Even the terminology Senior Citizen does not do a favour to old people as it showcases them as a burden on the state. The global generational discourse shows that societies do not view old people as independent individuals with intellectual integrity or capable of social integration. The local culture should develop indigenous terminologies and trends for organic integration of old people in mainstream society.

In Pakistan, the state of old-age pensions and the financial status of old people is unsatisfactory. Despite having the lowest old-age pension coverage in the world, the issue is met with no serious consideration or action from the administration or bureaucracies. Even in developing countries like Bangladesh, there is an extensive old-age pension provision network. Although the pension is a small amount, the coverage has been continuous and consistent.

The recent Senior Citizen's Act for the city of Islamabad legalized payment free entry for old people in parks and museums. However, it is actually the health and quality food which the old people truly need for a better life. To achieve this, the government needs to structurally integrate the demands of old people into the budget of the country.