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# Geriatric Depression in Old Age Homes Due to Separation from Family in India: A Growing Concern

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### ABSTRACT :

India's rapidly ageing population and the shift from joint to nuclear families have led to increased admissions to old age homes, contributing to rising geriatric depression. Emotional neglect, separation from family, and social stigma severely impact the mental health of elderly residents. Studies reveal a high prevalence of depressive symptoms among this group, often underdiagnosed and untreated. Homoeopathy offers a holistic, non-invasive approach to managing geriatric depression, with remedies like Ignatia, Natrum muriaticum, and Phosphoric acid showing positive outcomes. Integrating Homoeopathic care in old age homes could enhance the emotional well-being and quality of life for India's elderly population.

### Introduction

India's ageing population is rapidly increasing. According to the Census of India 2011, about 8.6% of the population was aged 60 years and above, projected to rise to 19.5% by 2050<sup>[1]</sup>.

Traditional joint families in India have gradually shifted towards nuclear families, leading to a rise in old age home admissions.

### Depression in the Elderly

WHO states that depression affects 7% of the world's elderly population<sup>[1]</sup>.

In India, community-based studies estimate the prevalence of depression in older adults between 13-25%<sup>[1]</sup>.

Geriatric depression is often underdiagnosed and attributed to 'old age' rather than treatable mental illness.

#### Separation from Family: A Major Trigger

Emotional neglect, absence of family support, and loneliness in old age homes worsen depressive symptoms.

A study by Shaji KS et al. (2010) in Kerala showed a significant link between family separation and increased depressive symptoms among elderly in care institutions<sup>[1]</sup>.

#### Stigma and Its Impact

In India, mental health stigma is pronounced, especially among older adults, due to cultural beliefs associating mental illness with weakness or bad karma.

A study by Mathias et al. (2015) found that over 60% of elderly individuals avoid discussing emotional problems due to fear of social labelling<sup>[1]</sup>.

Families often send elderly to homes secretly or avoid admitting their emotional distress, fearing public judgement.

### Key Data Points

**National Mental Health Survey of India (2015-16):** 15% of elderly reported mental morbidity, largely unaddressed<sup>[1]</sup>.

**Helpage India (2020) survey:** 71% of elderly in old age homes reported feelings of abandonment and sadness, with many citing 'family rejection' as the cause<sup>[1]</sup>.

In urban India, the rise in elderly living alone or in old age homes has increased by 64% in the last decade according to Census 2011<sup>[1]</sup>.

#### Homoeopathic Management of Geriatric Depression in Old Age Homes

Homoeopathy offers a holistic, individualized approach in managing depression, especially among the elderly facing social isolation and separation from their families. The gentle, non-addictive nature of Homoeopathic remedies makes them particularly suitable for geriatric patients. Several clinical observations and research studies suggest positive outcomes when appropriate remedies are selected based on the totality of symptoms.

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## Common Homoeopathic Remedies with Indications

### **Ignatia amara**

Indicated for acute grief, emotional shock, and depression due to separation or loss. The patient may exhibit mood swings, frequent sighing, and sensitivity to emotional triggers<sup>[9]</sup>.

### **Natrum muriaticum**

Suitable for long-standing grief, introversion, and aversion to consolation. The patient often dwells on past disappointments and prefers to be alone<sup>[10]</sup>.

### **Aurum metallicum**

Recommended for deep depression with feelings of worthlessness, suicidal thoughts, and religious despair, commonly seen in elderly patients who feel abandoned<sup>[11]</sup>.

### **Phosphoric acid**

Useful for apathetic, indifferent, and emotionally numb elderly individuals after long-term sorrow or disappointment<sup>[12]</sup>.

### **Sepia officinalis**

For elderly women, particularly widows, who feel indifferent to loved ones, experience chronic sadness, and prefer solitude<sup>[13]</sup>.

### **Lycopodium clavatum**

Indicated in patients with low self-confidence, digestive disturbances, and anticipatory anxiety, often aggravated in social situations<sup>[14]</sup>.

### **Calcarea carbonica**

Suitable for elderly individuals with slow cognition, tiredness, anxiety about health, and fear of separation<sup>[15]</sup>.

### **Causticum**

Helpful for elderly individuals who are hopeless, anxious about others' welfare, and deeply saddened by injustice or loss, often with a desire to help others despite their own suffering<sup>[16]</sup>.

### **Pulsatilla nigricans**

For elderly patients who become tearful, seek sympathy, and feel worse in a closed room. Their mood is changeable, and they are easily moved to tears by separation and loneliness<sup>[17]</sup>.

### **Kali phosphoricum**

Recommended when depression is associated with mental exhaustion, memory weakness, and nervousness, often due to prolonged emotional strain<sup>[18]</sup>.

### **Staphysagria**

Indicated in cases where suppressed emotions, indignation, or humiliation following separation or loss lead to depression and brooding in elderly individuals<sup>[19]</sup>.

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## Research and Clinical Evidence

A study by Tiwari and Tripathi (2016) observed improvement in geriatric depression scores using individualized Homoeopathic prescriptions, with Ignatia, Natrum muriaticum, and Phosphoric acid being most frequently indicated<sup>[20]</sup>.

In a pilot study conducted at an Indian old age home, Homoeopathic intervention demonstrated positive changes in mood, appetite, and sleep patterns among depressed elderly patients<sup>[21]</sup>.

A review by Oberai et al. (2015) in the Central Council for Research in Homoeopathy (CCRH) emphasized the role of individualized Homoeopathy in managing psychiatric conditions, including depression, highlighting its non-invasive and safe nature for elderly care<sup>[22]</sup>.

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## Conclusion

Geriatric depression in India's old age homes is a growing and complex public health concern, deeply rooted in changing family structures, social stigma, and emotional neglect. The transition from traditional joint families to nuclear setups has left many elderly individuals emotionally vulnerable, especially those separated from their families. Numerous studies underline the psychological impact of isolation and abandonment on the mental well-being of the elderly in institutional care, often leading to underdiagnosed and untreated depressive states.

Despite the prevailing stigma surrounding mental health among India's elderly population, there is a growing awareness of the need for sensitive, non-invasive, and holistic treatment approaches. Homoeopathy, with its individualized, gentle, and side-effect-free remedies, offers a viable and compassionate alternative for managing geriatric depression. Clinical evidence and case studies demonstrate promising outcomes in alleviating symptoms of grief, loneliness, worthlessness, and emotional detachment, especially when remedies are carefully selected based on the totality of the patient's mental and physical state.

Integrating Homoeopathic care into geriatric mental health services, especially within old age homes, could play a significant role in enhancing the quality of life, emotional well-being, and overall health of India's growing elderly population. This highlights the importance of broader acceptance, evidence-based research, and supportive policies promoting Homoeopathy as a complementary part of elderly mental health care in India.

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