

ABSTRACT

In an ageing world, eldercare has become a primary concern for many nations. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has suggested measures for improving Long Term and End-of-Life-Care to ensure healthy ageing and dignified death of older adults. Though valued globally, some of the policy frameworks and recommendations cannot be implemented in a few culturally distinctive places like Varanasi/Kashi, in India, which has unique perspectives on ageing and dying. Upholding a strong belief in liberation, the city attracts many elders who find shelter in institutions popularly known as *Vridhashram* (Old Age Home). The present study is based on interviews conducted in six Old Age Homes (OAHs). Respondents consist of both residents (N=103) and carers (N=20). The broad objectives of the study are to explore the residents' structuring of everyday life, their beliefs and values regarding aging and dying in Kashi, and their care needs and preferences. The study also intends to explore the care principles/practices adopted by old age homes and their implications for the residents.

The findings show that the residents' spirituality and religious structuring of everyday life help them in coping and remaining resilient in the face of adversities posed by lack of age-friendly architecture, inadequate healthcare services and minimal assistance in daily living. They interpret Hindu philosophical constructs of ageing and dying in multiple ways. While majority of them did not seek care and assistance on account of their ideal of *Vairagya* (renunciation) and value of autonomy or self-reliance, others were inclined towards material gains and healthy living. This resulted in carers' inability to adopt a uniform care plan or strike a balance between cultural care practices and modern geriatric care. Carers' ethical dilemmas were further heightened due to residents' practice of observing *moun* (meditative silence) as a part of their spiritual journey, making it difficult to identify their care needs. In order to acknowledge and appreciate heterogeneity among residents, the study suggests adoption of person-centred care within the culture-specific care framework. The study concludes that in Kashi there is limited applicability/relevance of policy frameworks and theoretical perspectives addressed in the global discourse of eldercare.

Keywords: *Ageing and dying, Spirituality, Care needs and preferences, Culture-specific care, Eldercare*