

Accommodation Status of Independently Living Elderly

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Abstract: Every Individual aspires to achieve a satisfying life within a comforting home environment and good housing is imperative for it which should be designed to accommodate all despite individual differences. Giving due consideration while designing safe and accessible life spaces for seniors is a vital aspect in supporting their desire to 'Age-in Place'. Related studies strongly point out that a typical design criterion will not always apply when it comes to housing the elderly but a special design treatment that could be associated with the physical and psychological deterioration which is likely to pop up with advancing age is the need of the hour. Staying independently with dignity requires a conducive home environment which was dealt with in this study, 'Accommodation Status of Independently Living Elderly'. Relevant data is collected from one hundred elderly from Ernakulam, Kottayam and Thrissur through personal interviews and observations. The analysis revealed that very few Elder friendly features were incorporated in their house designs. Familiar surroundings helped many in managing even without elder friendly features yet stated that it will be an added advantage if integrated.

Index Terms: Accommodation Status, Age in Place, Elder friendly, Housing satisfaction, Independently living, Life Space.

I. INTRODUCTION

"We can't avoid age. However, we can avoid some ageing. Continue to do things. Be active. Life is fantastic in the way it adjusts to demands, if you use your muscles and mind, they stay there much longer." -Charles H. Townes.

Ageing is an uncontrollable sequence in everyone's life. It is a process of physiological deterioration that gradually impairs the capacity of people to function socially, constituting a continuum that requires multiple development responses. Ageing in place usually provides older adults the flexibility to continue enjoying what they value on their own terms, which can enhance

independence and happiness. These aspects could be a major factor which motivates elderly to opt for staying independently though there are situations which are beyond their control; such as no kids, empty nest, loss of spouse etc. which forces them to stay independently. One of the major requirements for the elderly is a decent and supportive home front especially if one is leading an independent life out of choice or by compulsion. Warm, safe, well designed housing, effective delivery of home adaptations, the provision of supportive assistance, equipment and assistive technologies all have quantifiable effects with regard to improved health, well-being and independent living, particularly for older people with chronic physical and related health conditions.

The Study is relevant in that it analyses houses which are the key factors imbued with several meanings such as independence, autonomy, comfort, security, control, protection, etc. especially to older adults and relates their social and physical conditions with subjective appraisals and goals. This is with regard to the awareness that consideration in planning, designing and building environments that are safe and accessible to seniors is vital in supporting their desire to live in their own homes and local communities.

A) Aim: To analyze the Accommodation Status of Independently Living Elderly through the mode of stay, the extent of independent living possible in the present house, the suitability of houses for Independent living and the preference of house and community by the elderly for independent living.

B) Operational definition of the major terminology used in the study

- **Accommodation Status:** The prevailing conditions of the Housing and the surrounding Environment

- **Age in Place:** It is term where the person gets to choose the way they live or the place they live for as long as they are capable of being independent of others, satisfying their personal needs and until they become dependent on others, such as situations allowing the elderly to continue their life in the homes of their youthful days.
- **Elder friendly features:** Features of a house or surrounding which are conducive for the safe and convenient use of elderly such as user friendly and ergonomic designs in work places, pathways, furniture and storage meant for elderly persons
- **Housing satisfaction:** Satisfaction derived from the use of current accommodation based on the user related criterion
- **Life Space:** The space meant for personal use where the fullest development and expression of an individual is possible. It's a part of the total internal environment that provides peace, security and allows easy movement for the individual.
- **Independent living:** It is a lifestyle where the person is living unaccompanied by their offspring or relatives by choice or by chance, completely unassisted or partially assisted.

II. LITERATURE SURVEY OF RELATED STUDIES

Housing performs a variety of functions in society as well as providing shelter. It is a capital investment for individuals and families, an important sector of economy, and it contributes to both psychological and financial security. Our home will have a serious impact on our physical and mental health; this can be significantly true for older people who might pay longer time at home. Older people in social (i.e., Public) housing is particularly vulnerable. Housing choices for older folks in social housing embody customary style dwellings or specially designed “sheltered housing.” ([https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5406190/Exploring the Housing Needs of Older People in Standard and Sheltered Social Housing \(nih.gov\)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5406190/Exploring%20the%20Housing%20Needs%20of%20Older%20People%20in%20Standard%20and%20Sheltered%20Social%20Housing%20(nih.gov)))

According to M. H. Dalal, founder and chairman, Association of Senior Living in India (ASLI), “nearly 99 per cent of the housing for senior citizens is old age homes”. “These old age homes though provide for the old, do not promote a lifestyle. There is a demand for such housing where retired people want to live in a community of like-minded people, with dignity in a home of their own and be provided for facilities. (Piplani, 2017)

Defined as living in one's own home in the community (American Association of Retired Persons [AARP], 2005), Ageing-In-Place involves being able to identify resources to support personal and environmental change (Fänge, Oswald, & Clemson, 2012) and respond to essential needs. (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5342846/>).

There are many advantages to Aging-In-Place. Economically, providing help with home maintenance or home care is dramatically less expensive than institutional care (Canadian institute for health information, 2008). Moreover, the social and health advantages of ageing at home have been extensively documented (Cutchin, 2003; Joosten, 2007; Wagnild, 2001) and include attachment to place, familiarity with the neighbourhood, and the ability to maintain functional health. The idea of “being at home” is enhanced by familiar things and places familiarity left. Relocation requires that forging in part of a new identity. Repetition of particular qualities in the house that trigger familiar feelings may ease the older person's transition to a new location.

According to the study conducted by Mimiyaamol K.G. (2016) on ‘*Awareness and Integration of Elder-Friendly Housing Practices by Young Adults*’, accommodation options for elderly include Institutional care, day care centre, retirement communities, living alone, living with other family members, Home nursing (hiring-in-caregivers), independent living, assisted living and respite care are all living options a few major options. She continues that the older people see ‘home’ as a place of security and refuge, a place where they can express their individuality, retain control over their lives and remain independent. All these aspects of housing need to be considered when examining housing for ageing population.

The study by Umaira Banu (2017) on the *Analysis of Old Age Homes on the Basis of Geriatric Friendly Facilities* found out that when age increases, social contact and mobility decreases and this, in turn, compels the old to stay at home. It is necessary to provide good and hygienic housing for maintaining better health status. In rural areas children often allow their elderly parent's preservations of personal autonomy and rights which can uphold the dignity of the elderly.

Sarinnapha Vasunilashom, Bernard.A.Steinman, Phoebe S. Leibig and Jon Pynoos (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22175020>) studied the increasing attention given to ageing in place in the gerontological research community over the past 30 years. Their findings indicate the growing variety of topics pertaining to aging in place, ranging from housing and environment to health and technology. The relevance of their topic has increased over time, in part due to the acknowledged preference of older persons to maintain independence, and to the greater availability of non-institutional care. In addition, concerns about the increasing costs of long-term institutional care of elderly and its effect on family made policy makers consider avoiding relocation and promoting Ageing in place with family assistance.

The study conducted by Pay-Shin Lin, et al. (Association between Physical Fitness and Successful Aging in Taiwanese

Older Adults (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26963614>, 2016) where Community-dwelling elderly aged more than 65 years were studied on comprehensive geriatric assessment, which includes socio-demographic data, health conditions and behaviours and quality of life. As people age, housing modifications become important to assist in the adaptation of elderly in their deteriorating health conditions, and maintain a sense of well-being and independent life.

Housing in later life acquires new meanings for elderly individuals as a result of the long duration of living in the same home, familiarity, and processes of attachment (Evans, Kantowitz & Eshelman, 2002; Rowles, Oswald, & Hunter, 2004; Rubinstein & De Medeiros, 2004; Sixsmith & Sixsmith, 1991). The sense of “being at home” is enhanced by familiar things and places. Relocation requires that forging in part of a new identity.

Housing satisfaction of elderly is the index of perceived quality of the home in terms of objective based evaluation of elderly (Aragonés, Francescano, & Gärling, 2002; Weideman & Anderson, 1985).

III. PROPOSED RESEARCH APPROACH

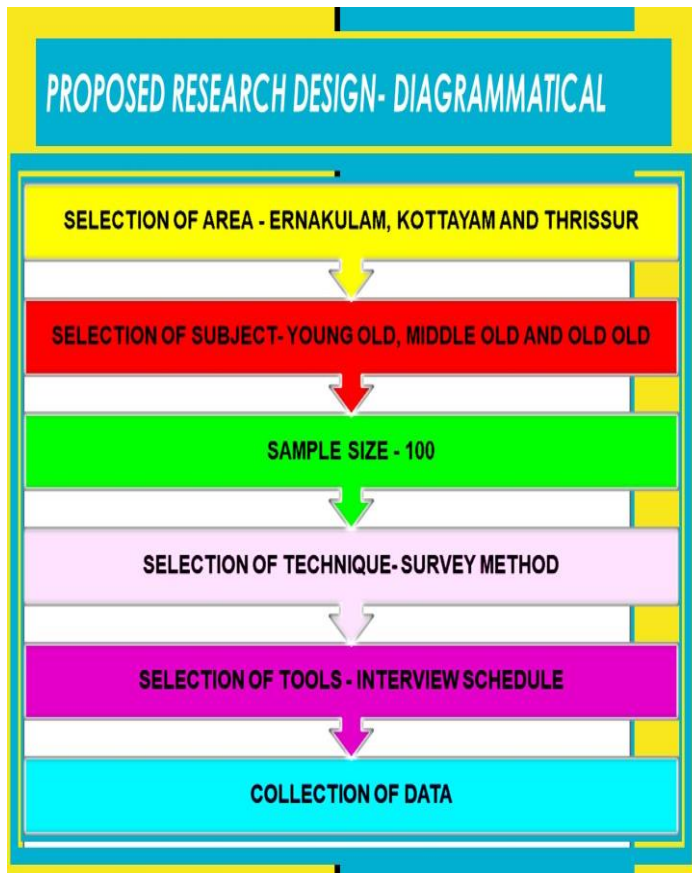


Fig.1. Research Design

IV. MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

A. GENERAL INFORMATION OF THE INDEPENDENTLY LIVING ELDERLY

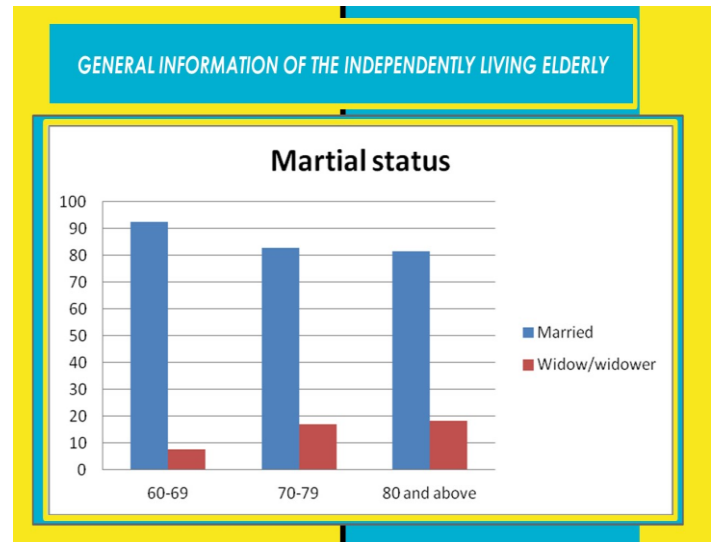


Fig.2: General Information on the selected elderly

The total number of subjects was 100 out of which almost half of the respondents belonged to the age group of 60-69 years and many (35%) belonged to 70-79 years and a few (19%) belonged to 81 and above age groups. Slightly more than half (56%) of the respondents were females and the rest were males (44%). All the selected elderly were married; out of which a few from all the categories had lost their spouse.

1) Mode of Independent Living by the selected elderly

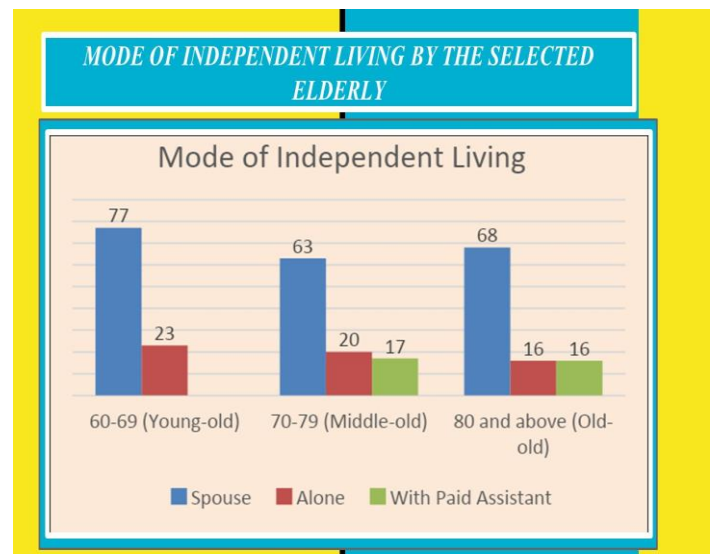


Fig.3: Mode of Independent living by elderly

The data showed that there is a proportional decrease in the percentage of elderly staying alone with advancing age.

2) Health issues faced by the selected elderly

These are identified as these could be the constraints in the independent living of the elderly

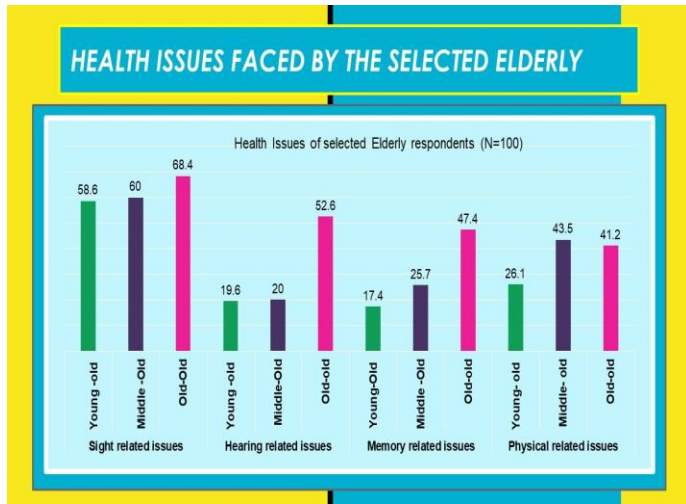


Fig.4: Analysis of primary and secondary health issues faced by Elderly based on Independent living

The issue of vision impairment or eyesight is more in the entire category than auditory / hearing issues which affected the Old-Old more than the other two categories. Memory loss was identified and stated more by Old-Old. Physical issues are faced by nearly half among the middle old and Old –Old people.

3) Mode of House Ownership

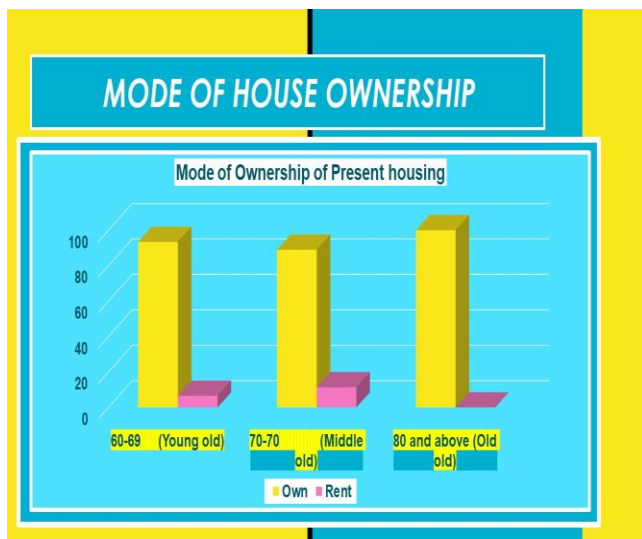
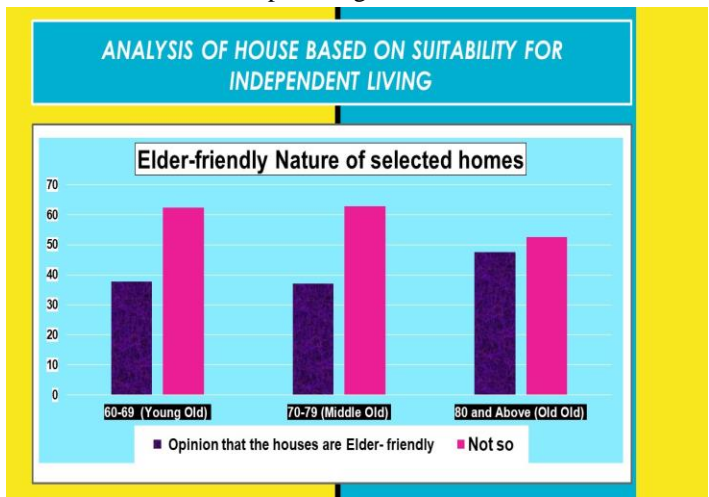


Fig.5: Mode of House Ownership

The figure above indicates that all the Old-Old (80 and above) elders are permanently settled in their own houses. A small percentage of Young Old and Middle Old were noticed to stay in rented houses, there can be two reasons for this: People below 80 years could be working and they have to stay away from their native place and their financial obligations are more which prevented them from owning a house.

B. ANALYSIS OF HOUSE BASED ON SUITABILITY FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

This section under the major heading of housing is pertaining to the supportive or debilitating features existing in the present homes occupied by the selected elderly. All main areas/rooms of the houses were analyzed in different aspects of flooring, doors, windows and lighting and medical responses during an emergency mainly to identify whether the houses are suitable for the elderly to live without much assistance. The final opinion of the elders on these aspects is given below:



A. Fig.6: Opinion of elderly respondents on the Elder friendly nature of their houses

C. ANALYSIS OF COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBOURHOOD BASED ON SUITABILITY FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

This was analysed on the basis of two statements 1) extent of Social participation 2) desire to move out of locality and the factors affecting the decision to moving out of the locality

1) Social Participation: Social participation is a degree of participation in the activities of a community or a society where one lives.

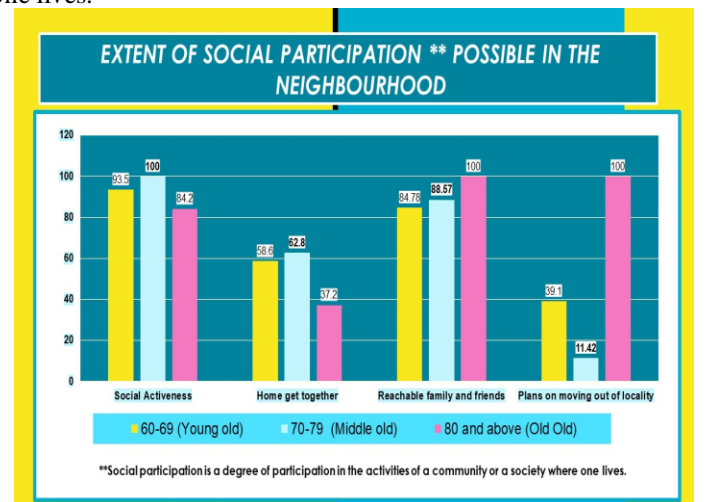


Fig.7: Extent of Social Participation Possible in the neighbourhood

2) Factors affecting desire to move out of locality

In case the elderly planned to move out of the locality what are the factors affecting the decision is depicted in the figure below

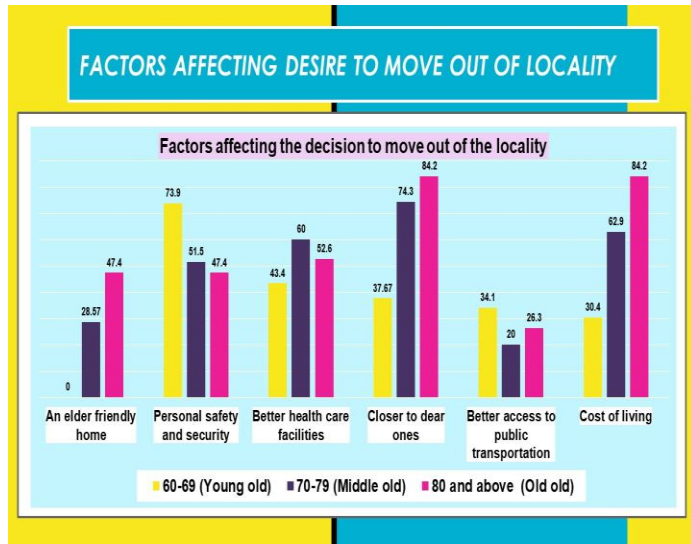


Fig.8: Factors Influencing the desire to move out of the locality

D) RATING OF COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBOURHOOD BASED ON SUITABILITY FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

The subjects were asked to give their opinion about their community in which they live with the help of a 5-point rating scale - Excellent, very good, good, fair and poor.

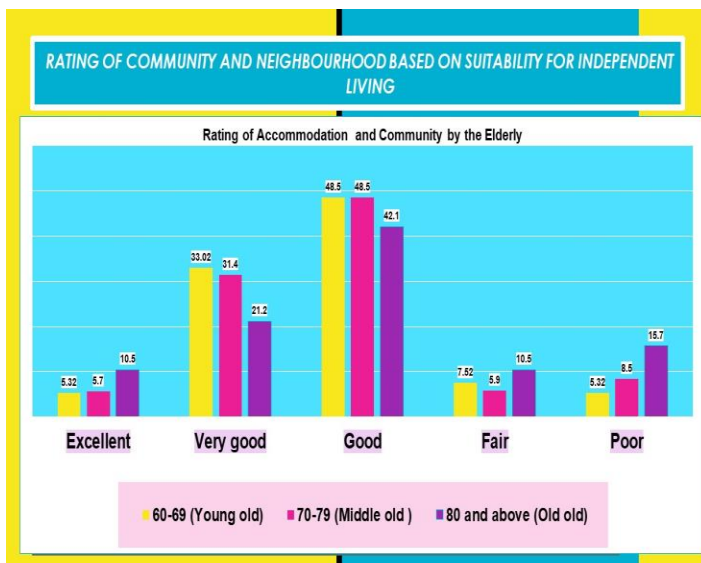


Fig.9: Rating of Community and Neighbourhood Based on Suitability for Independent Living

The analysis of 5-point rating scale by the elderly revealed that all the three categories assessed the neighbourhood and community as good which was an average rating. This could be

discussed as not having much hostility or friendliness towards the elders.

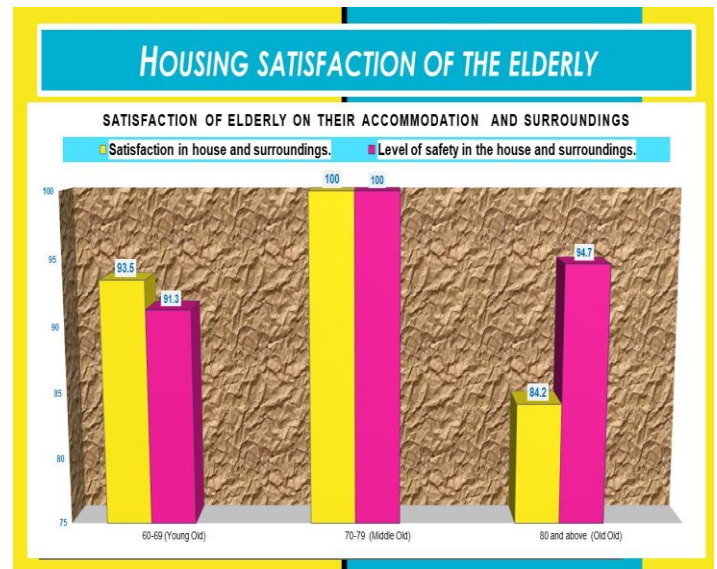


Fig10: Satisfaction of Independently Living Elderly on their Neighbourhood and surroundings

Almost all the elderly are satisfied with their surroundings and feel safe in their neighbourhood and are happy to live in their present environment.

CONCLUSION

All main areas/rooms of the houses occupied by the selected elderly were analysed on the basis of a few important features supporting the Independent living in order to identify whether the houses are suitable for the elderly to live without much assistance. Nearly half the houses had rooms large enough for the people to move around freely even on a wheelchair. Adequate space is required in the kitchen for easy movement, which helps to do activities in a more convenient way, slightly more than half of the kitchens are large.

Majority of the houses used non-slippery flooring for safety and protection in all the major areas. Most of the selected houses' doors were easy to open and close. Most of the subjects did not face any issues as the door handles used were levers in most of the houses. Most of the house has adequate number of windows which have better access to natural light during day time. And adequate lighting through artificial lights was provided for night time use. Ventilation is also a factor which improves indoor air quality by preventing staling of air which in turn causes a lot of diseases. Adequate provision of windows passively improved ventilation.

More than half the Old - Old has done bathroom modifications as their age required safer bathrooms. The modifications were mostly regarding the areas of flooring, grab bars, raised toilet seats, adequate lighting etc.

Nearly half of the houses of the Old-Old category were fitted with medical emergency response systems out of necessity whereas almost 1/3rd of the Young old also installed medical emergency response systems at their homes. The subjects were made aware of the features which makes the house elderly friendly and they were asked to assess.

Only half of the Old- Old considered their houses as elder-friendly as their requirements were more compared to the other age groups.

It is found out that Cent percent of the Old-Old senior citizens preferred to move out of their locality which could be due to their safety and security concerns or to stay with their children.

All the elderly subjects wanted safe and secure housing irrespective of their age ranges, followed by affordable homes. Well maintained homes and properties were the next requirement of majority.

The analysis of 5-point rating scale by the elderly revealed that all the three categories assessed the neighbourhood and community as good which was an average rating. Almost all the elderly are satisfied with their surroundings and feel safe in their neighbourhood and are happy to live in their present environment.

The study revealed that very few elderly features were incorporated in the design of the assessed houses. There is a decrease in the percentage of elderly staying alone as age advances. 'Young Old' are more independent while the other 2 groups are slightly dependent. Since the elderly subjects have been living in their surroundings for the long 30 years, they have become used to their surroundings and hence they don't find a need for elder-friendly features but it will be an added advantage if incorporated.

Limitations: It was felt that quite a good number of elderly subjects were either reluctant to part with relevant information or were providing only positive information due to issues related to privacy, status etc. This might have influenced the findings to some extent. The accuracy of health-related data could be increased by the verification of Medical documents.

Suggestions for future study: A comparison between Male and female subjects will throw a clear picture on the difference between their mode of housing management, preferences and requirements for elder friendly homes etc. Inclusion of elder friendly features based on Time Saver Standards will make the data easily quantifiable.

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