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Opinion



Seniority Club. SG powered by Wisdom

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Abstract

This paper explores the growing challenges and evolving landscape of eldercare in Singapore, amid a global context that includes comparable nations such as Japan, Norway, Sweden, South Korea, the UK and Finland. The discussion navigates through several key dimensions, beginning with an analysis of the escalating demographic shift towards an ageing population within Singapore. Subsequently, it delves into healthcare systems and practices in the aforementioned countries, providing insights into diverse approaches to eldercare.

The discourse extends beyond a mere description to encompass multifaceted concerns including sustainability, ethical considerations, and the imperative for advocacy in eldercare. Furthermore, the paper scrutinizes the array of constraints—natural, human, and societal—that exert pressures on both individuals and nations in their provision of eldercare services.

Amidst these challenges, the paper identifies catalysts that offer potential pathways towards addressing eldercare needs effectively. These catalysts encompass policy interventions, technological advancements, the pursuit of operational efficiencies, economic measures, and the imperative for global collaboration and effectiveness.

Ultimately, the synthesis of these discussions offers a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding eldercare, incorporating experience design to illuminate avenues for strategic action and policy formulation to ensure the well-being and dignity of elderly citizens in Singapore and beyond.

Context

Singapore’s population is ageing fast.

Citizens aged 65 and above constitute nearly one-fifth of the population, an increase of 11.7% over the past decade, according to the government’s 2023 population report.

This proportion is also rising at a faster pace than in the last decade — and by 2030, one in four citizens will be aged 65 and above, according to the government.

This demographic shift presents both challenges and opportunities for Singapore. With an increasing number of elderly citizens, there will be a greater demand for healthcare services, retirement options, and age-friendly infrastructure. The government will need to invest in initiatives that support the well-being and quality of life of the elderly citizens.

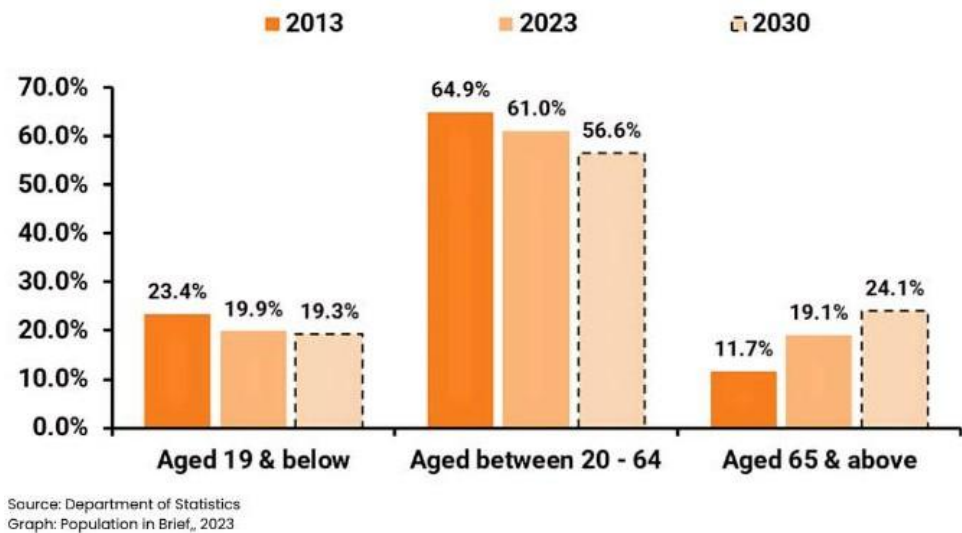
In parallel, other nations like Japan, Sweden, Finland, South Korea, UK and Norway grapple with their own eldercare challenges.

Japan, South Korea, and Norway all face challenges related to healthcare professional shortages, long-term care needs, mental health stigma, and rising healthcare costs among their elderly citizens. These countries are focusing on technology integration, diversified services, workforce development, sustainable funding mechanisms, and ethical considerations to enhance the quality, accessibility, and personalization of eldercare.

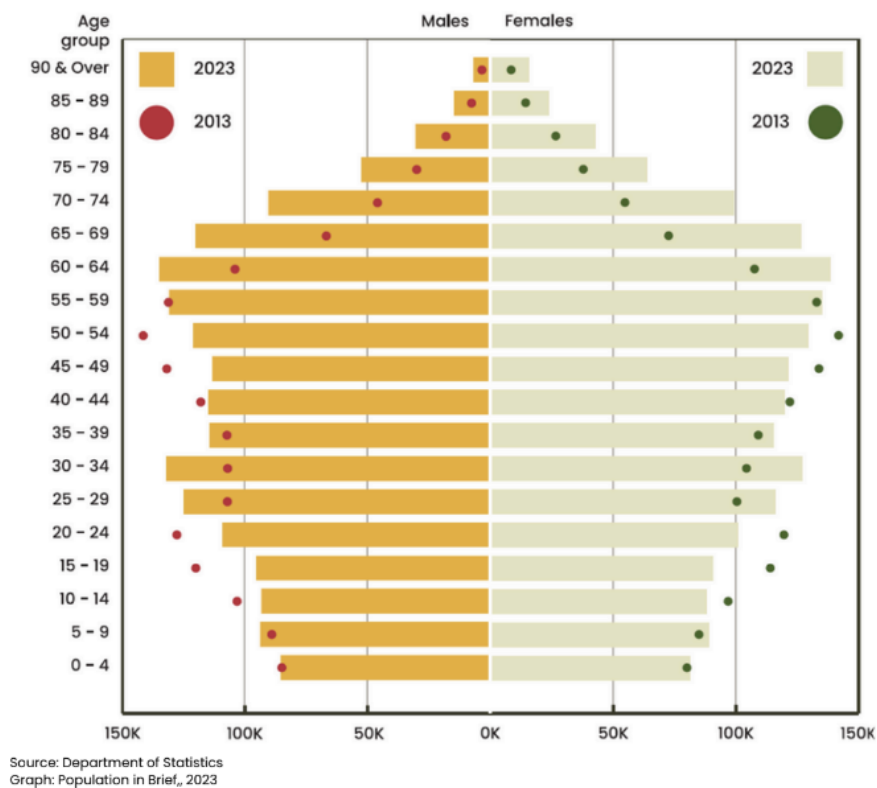
Sweden and Finland share challenges in responding to growing healthcare demands, budgetary pressures, environmental concerns, and accessible housing needs for elderly citizens. They are both embracing digital transformation, community integration, preventive measures, research & innovation, financial sustainability, accessible housing and advocacy to improve the well-being and quality of life of their elderly citizens.

The ageing population in the UK faces significant challenges including increased healthcare needs, social isolation, financial concerns, housing difficulties, elder abuse risks, digital exclusion, transportation limitations, and age discrimination, impacting their overall well-being and quality of life. The UK's elder healthcare sector offers opportunities for in-home care services, assisted living facilities, technology solutions, dementia care, care coordination, geriatric nursing, end-of-life care, community programs, caregiver support, and health education to meet the diverse needs of elderly citizens.

Amidst these challenges, there are opportunities for intergenerational collaboration and learning. Programs that promote interaction between older and younger generations can foster understanding, respect, and empathy. Additionally, elderly citizens can contribute their wisdom, skills, and experience to society in meaningful ways. As Singapore adapts to this demographic change, policymakers, communities, and individuals must work together to create a more inclusive and age-friendly society where people of all ages can thrive. By embracing the strengths and diversity of its population, Singapore can build a more vibrant and resilient future for all its citizens.

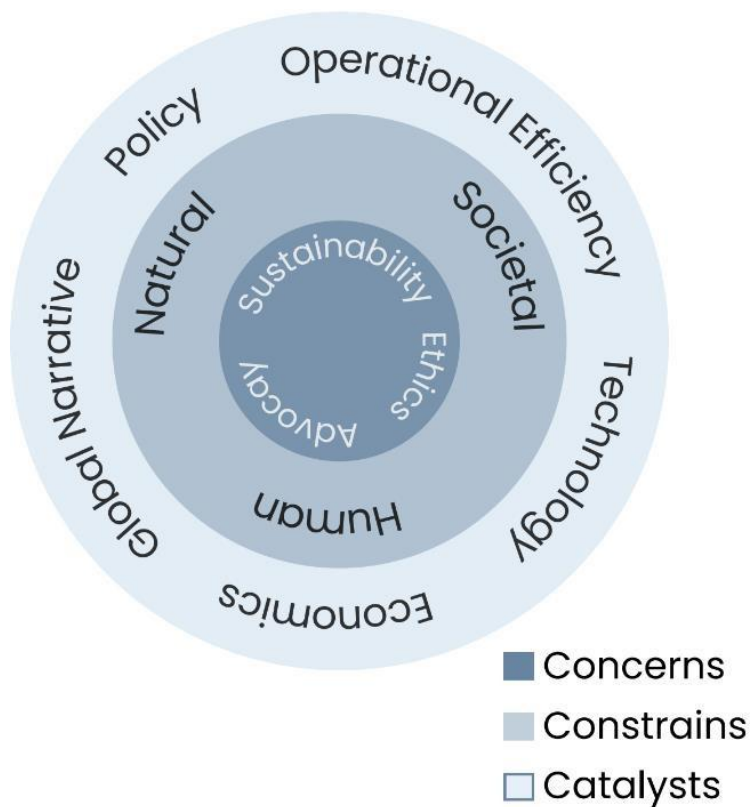


(A)



(B)

Context Analysis



(C)

Concerns

In the realm of eldercare, various concerns loom large, shaping the discourse and actions surrounding the well-being of elderly citizens. From sustainability challenges to ethical considerations and the imperative for advocacy, these concerns underscore the complexities inherent in navigating the ageing demographic. This paper delves into these concerns, exploring their nuances and implications for eldercare provision in nations like Singapore and beyond.

Sustainability

Sustainability emerges as a central concern, as the ageing demographic places strain on resources and infrastructure. Addressing sustainability entails ensuring the long-term viability of eldercare systems, balancing present needs with future demands, and mitigating environmental impacts.

Ethics

Ethical considerations permeate eldercare provision, influencing decision-making processes and care practices. Upholding principles of autonomy, dignity, and justice is paramount, as caregivers navigate complex moral dilemmas and strive to promote the well-being of elder citizens while respecting their rights and preferences.

Advocacy

Advocacy emerges as a critical component in addressing systemic inequalities and promoting the rights of elderly



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citizens. Advocates play a vital role in amplifying the voices of elderly citizens, challenging ageism and discrimination, and championing policies and initiatives that enhance access to quality care and support services.

Constraints

As the demographic landscape continues to evolve, nations like Singapore, Japan, Sweden grapple with the intricate challenges of eldercare provision. This paper delves into the manifold constraints—ranging from age limitations and mental fatigue to life expectancy and societal perceptions—that shape the dynamics of eldercare. By exploring these constraints, we aim to illuminate the complexities of navigating an ageing population while paving the way for inclusive and responsive eldercare solutions.

- **Age-related physiological changes:** With ageing comes physiological changes such as decreased muscle mass, diminished sensory capabilities (vision, hearing), and decreased cognitive function. These changes may limit their ability to perform certain tasks.
- **Mental Fatigue:** Elderly citizens may experience cognitive decline, leading to difficulties in concentration, memory loss, and slower information processing. This can affect their ability to learn new skills or adapt to new technologies.
- **Mobility Limitations:** Many elderly citizens may face mobility issues due to age-related conditions such as arthritis, osteoporosis, or stroke. Limited mobility can impact their independence, access to services, and overall quality of life.



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Natural Constraints

- a. **Life Expectancy:** While life expectancy is increasing globally, including in Singapore, not all elderly individuals are enjoying longer years in good health. With longer life spans, the likelihood of experiencing chronic illnesses, disabilities, and age-related health complications increases.

- b. **Health Conditions:** As individuals age, they become more susceptible to chronic illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular diseases. Managing these conditions becomes a significant aspect of their daily lives and can impose constraints on their activities and social interactions.



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Societal Constraints

- a. **Self-Worth and Social Stigma:** Societal attitudes towards ageing can influence the self-worth and self-perception of elderly citizens. Ageism, discrimination, and stereotypes may lead to feelings of social exclusion, loneliness, and decreased self-esteem.
- b. **Access to Resources:** Elderly citizens may face challenges in accessing essential resources such as healthcare, social services, transportation, and affordable housing. This can exacerbate their vulnerabilities and limit their ability to participate fully in society.
- c. **Employment and Retirement:** In Singapore, as in many countries, societal expectations regarding retirement age can impact the financial well-being and social status of elderly citizens. Those who wish to continue working may face barriers due to age discrimination in the workforce, as well as challenges in finding flexible work arrangements, employment terms such as retainer services, part-time, or seasonal employment options.
- d. **Family Dynamics:** Traditional family structures in Singapore often involve strong intergenerational ties, with expectations for caregiving and support within families. However, changing demographics, urbanization, and societal trends of smaller nuclear families may strain these dynamics, affecting the care and support available to elderly family members.



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Catalysts

In the quest for improved eldercare outcomes, catalysts play a pivotal role in driving systemic change and fostering innovation. From policy initiatives that prioritize elder-friendly environments to technological advancements that enhance healthcare delivery, these catalysts empower nations to navigate complexities and unlock opportunities for transformative progress. By harnessing operational efficiencies and fostering global collaboration, stakeholders can build sustainable and resilient eldercare ecosystems that prioritize the well-being and dignity of elderly citizens.

Policy Dynamics

In Singapore, long-term elder care has become a critical concern due to the rapid increase in the ageing population. Let's delve into the dynamics of Singapore's eldercare policies

Population Ageing in Singapore:

Singapore has transitioned from an ageing society to an aged society within a mere 19 years. The percentage of individuals aged 65 and over has more than doubled, reaching 15.2% in 2020. By 2030, one in four Singapore citizens will be aged 65 and above, and by 2050, it is projected to be 33.6%, making Singapore one of the fastest-ageing nations. Factors contributing to this trend include declining birth rates and extended life expectancy.

Challenges and Responses:

Ageing-in-Place Approach: Similar to many Asian societies, Singapore promotes long-term eldercare practices within homes and communities. The ageing-in-place policy encourages care for elderly citizens in familiar environments.

Growing Care Deficit: Families face challenges in providing adequate care due to the care deficit. As the ageing population grows, the demand for long-term care services intensifies.

Policy and Services: Singapore's response includes policies related to services and financing for long-term care. These policies aim to address the needs of elderly citizens.

Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs): Many families hire lived-in foreign domestic workers to support eldercare.

Technology Adoption: Singapore is also exploring technology-based solutions to enhance eldercare.

Labor Market and Family Support: Singapore emphasizes the family as the "first line of support" for eldercare. Simultaneously, maximal labour participation is encouraged, recognising citizens as a key resource, therein lies the tension of caregiving for the elderly given the shrinking number of working adult children and the extreme cases of caregiver burnout.

In summary, Singapore's experience in tackling extreme demographic ageing provides valuable insights for other Asian societies facing similar challenges in near future.

Operational Efficiency

Growing Elderly Consumer Market:

As Singapore's population ages, and businesses are increasingly targeting older consumers. Citizens aged 65 and above exhibit the fastest rate of spending growth among various age groups in advanced economies like Singapore. This trend presents opportunities for companies catering to the well-being of elderly citizens.

The eldercare market has been steadily expanding, with companies offering a wider range of products and developing expertise in speciality areas. For instance, e-commerce stores curate eldercare products to meet the diverse needs of elderly citizens.

Technology Adoption for Elderly Patients: Leveraging technology to assist older patients is crucial. Innovations such as telemedicine, wearable health devices, and digital health platforms enhance eldercare services. Companies that invest in tech solutions tailored for elderly citizens can tap into this growing market.

Financial Burdens and Well-Being: Enhancing the well-being of elderly citizens involves addressing financial burdens and mental health challenges which can be achieved through certain financial assistance schemes that

support low-socioeconomic status households and by offering mental health support to elderly individuals who live alone and may experience social isolation.

Opportunities in Senior Housing: With an ageing population, there's a rising demand for senior housing options. Developers and real estate companies are exploring building retirement communities, assisted living facilities, and nursing homes.

Providing comfortable and accessible housing for elderly citizens contributes to their well-being and quality of life.

Technology Adoption

Smart Homes for the Elderly: Singapore has set up smart homes equipped with unobtrusive technology to support elderly citizens. These homes use a system of sensors to monitor various aspects, including temperature, noise, and daily living patterns. For instance, the SHINE Seniors project collaborates with Singapore Management University and Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) to create such smart homes. These sensors help track well-being, detect changes in mobility, and ensure safety without compromising privacy.

Innovations in Wearable Devices: Wearable devices play a crucial role in eldercare. Examples include Smartwatches, which can monitor vital signs, track physical activity, and provide emergency alerts.

Fall Detection Devices: Wearable devices with fall sensors can automatically alert caregivers or emergency services if a fall occurs.

Medication Reminders & GPS Trackers: Smart devices remind elderly citizens to take their medications on time, whereas GPS Trackers help locate elderly citizens if they wander or get lost.

Telemedicine and Virtual Consultations: Singapore promotes telemedicine to provide medical consultations remotely. Elderly patients can connect with healthcare professionals through video calls, reducing the need for physical visits. Virtual consultations improve accessibility, especially for elderly citizens with mobility challenges.

Dialysis-Monitoring Smartphone Apps: Singapore has developed smartphone apps that allow individuals suffering from kidney disease to measure and submit health data to clinicians and caregivers. These apps enhance the monitoring and management of chronic conditions.

Smart Home Automation: Voice-controlled systems can adjust lighting, temperature, and security features, making daily tasks easier for elderly citizens.

Interactive Games and Digital Entertainment: The Ministry of Health (MOH) aims to expand services offered at eldercare facilities by introducing interactive games and improved digital entertainment. These initiatives enhance mental well-being and social engagement among elderly citizens.

Economic Measures

Singapore's government promotes an age-friendly work environment and financial stability for elderly citizens through various initiatives.

The government encourages the re-employment of older workers, has established a Committee on Ageing Issues, and introduced schemes like Multi-Generation Flats and Granny Flats. The government also introduced the Workfare Income Supplement (WIS) Scheme, improved healthcare services, and promoted active ageing to ensure self-sufficiency for citizens after retirement. The Council for Third Age (C3A) supports these efforts.

Social Narratives

Singapore faces a rapidly ageing population due to increasing longevity and declining birth rates. The impact of an ageing population extends beyond regular healthcare costs, necessitating comprehensive eldercare initiatives.

The government has implemented initiatives such as Active Ageing Hubs, Nursing Home Beds, and a holistic approach towards eldercare.

Technological advancements include Smart Homes, Wearable Devices, Telemedicine, and Assistive Technologies.

The UN projects Singapore's ageing rate to be second only to Japan and Korea by 2050, highlighting the need for proactive elder care strategies.

Case Studies

This section highlights organisations from Singapore dedicated to supporting the elderly population.

The case studies showcase diverse approaches, including engaging seniors in purpose-driven volunteerism and promoting active ageing through various initiatives and platforms.

The Council for Third Age, C3A, set up in May 2007, is an agency which promotes active ageing in Singapore through public education, outreach and partnerships.

Through various initiatives and platforms, third agers can self-discover and enhance their different dimensions of

wellness in their journey of positive ageing. C3A aims to create a vibrant pro-age Singapore where seniors can participate as integral members of society.

RSVP Singapore The Organization of Senior Volunteers is an Institution of Public Character and the National Centre of Excellence for Senior Volunteerism under the patronage of President Tharman Shanmugaratnam.

RSVP Singapore has been actively engaging seniors in purpose-driven volunteerism. With 3,000 volunteers, RSVP Singapore serves more than 200,000 beneficiaries each year including persons with special needs, at-risk children and socially isolated seniors through its community service programs.

People's Association (PA) Senior Citizens' Executive Committees (SCECs) is the largest seniors' network in Singapore. The SCECs organize a wide variety of activities to empower seniors to stay active, healthy and socially connected in the community. From gardening, singing, dancing, cooking, arts and crafts to fitness exercises, there is something for everyone. Under the network, there are also many interest groups formed by the seniors for the seniors where they can meet like-minded peers and pursue their interests together.

Experience Shift

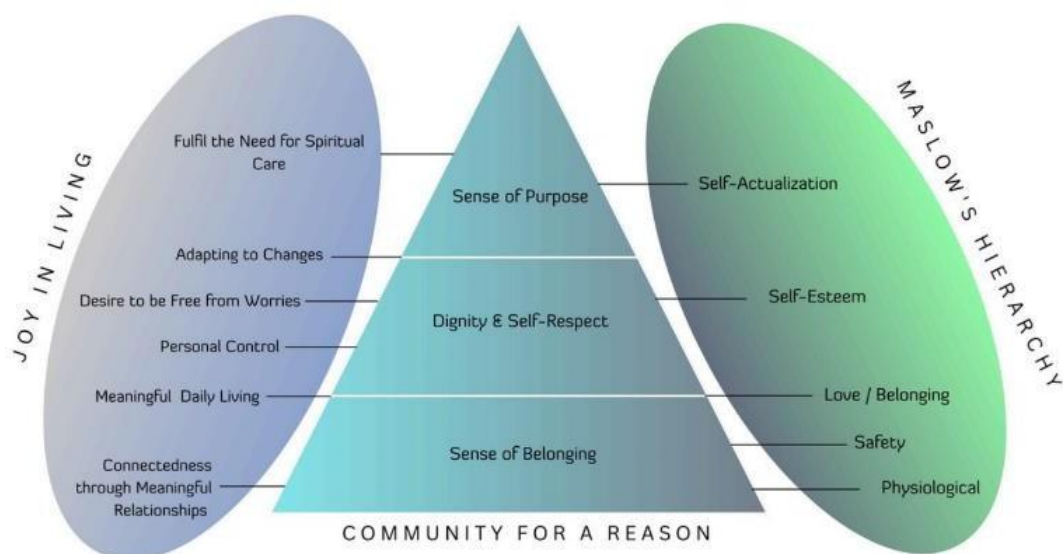
In response to the pressing challenges with eldercare, this paper introduces the innovative model "Community for a Reason." Comprising three integral pillars— Sense of Belonging, Dignity & Self-Respect, and Sense of Purpose— this model aims to cultivate a holistic and empowering environment for elderly citizens. **(D)**

Recognizing the diverse backgrounds and identities of elderly citizens, the 'Sense of Belonging' emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and honoring their safety, physiological needs and meaningful relationships to ensure a fulfilling and connected life.

Ensuring self-esteem, autonomy and personal control among elderly citizens through programs that empower decision-making and continuous learning, while addressing financial concerns and offering supportive services forms the cornerstone of upholding 'Dignity and Self-respect'.

Lastly, the 'Sense of Purpose' focuses on self-actualization. Engaging elderly citizens in activities that promote spiritual care, such as counselling and religious services, helps foster their sense of purpose and fulfilment, enhancing their overall well-being.

Singapore can create social spaces- Seniority clubs that deliver on these three pillars. The club can be supported by any of the government-aided organisations, non-governmental organisations & entrepreneurial spirit of citizens invested in eldercare.



(D)

By embracing the "Community for a Reason" model which is inspired by Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the seven themes for Joy in Living (Dayanandan & Mehta, 2022; Dayanandan & Mehta, 2023), communities can create inclusive and supportive environments that honour the identities, dignity, and aspirations of elderly citizens, enriching their quality of life in their golden years.

Sense of Belonging

Sense of Belonging is foundational for elderly citizens to feel integrated into a community. They often have rich cultural, faith-based, or historical backgrounds that shape their identities and sense of belonging. This can broadly be divided into two core areas: safety and physiological needs.

For elderly citizens, ensuring safety involves creating secure living environments, providing reliable healthcare, and ensuring financial stability.

This security alleviates fears and anxiety, allowing elderly citizens to live with peace of mind. Equally important is maintaining familial and prior relationships, which offer a deep sense of continuity, support, and shared history help combat feelings of loneliness and foster a sense of belonging.

Physiological needs such as nutritious meals, adequate sleep, and comfortable shelter are paramount for their health and well-being. Engaging in daily activities that stimulate the mind and body, such as exercise classes, art workshops, and intellectual discussions, often facilitated by initiatives like the Seniority Club, helps maintain their cognitive and physical health. Additionally, maintaining meaningful

relationships significantly impacts elderly citizens' emotional and psychological health.

Addressing these areas holistically ensures that the elderly citizens not only survive but thrive, experiencing a fulfilling, connected, and enriched life.



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Dignity & Self-Respect:

Dignity and Self-Respect is essential for fostering a positive self-image and emotional well-being.

Self-esteem is a vital aspect of dignity and self-respect. Ensuring personal control, freedom from worries, and adaptability nurture self-esteem. Personal control or autonomy, including the freedom of choices, reinforces independence and self-worth, making elderly citizens feel empowered and capable. Seniority clubs can support autonomy by offering programs that promote decision-making and continuous learning, ensuring elderly citizens

feel valued and respected.

For elderly citizens, concerns about money can significantly impact their mental health and sense of stability. Being relieved from the obligations of caregiving or managing a household allows elderly citizens to focus on their own needs and interests. Seniority clubs can provide resources for financial planning and services that alleviate household management pressures, contributing to their overall peace and security.

Additionally, seniority clubs can offer counselling services, support groups, and activities that help elderly citizens navigate retirement and health changes positively, fostering an environment where they can feel valued and understood.



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Sense of Purpose:

Sense of Purpose is intricately tied to self-actualization. For elderly citizens, achieving self-actualization signifies reaching their fullest potential and finding meaning in their lives. This can be fostered through spiritual care, addressing their need for spiritual fulfillment and support.

Spiritual care involves nurturing religious or spiritual beliefs, supporting spiritual needs, and guiding with values that give life purpose and meaning. It includes encouraging a life of purpose and providing support for forgiveness and reconciliation, which are crucial aspects of spiritual well-being. For many elderly citizens, spirituality plays a significant role in finding peace, purpose, and fulfillment as they reflect on their life's journey and seek deeper connections with others and their surroundings.

Achieving self-actualization through spiritual care in seniority clubs involves offering spiritual counseling, hosting religious services or meditation sessions, and providing opportunities for meaningful discussions about values and life experiences. By addressing these spiritual needs, seniority clubs help elderly citizens find a renewed sense of purpose and fulfillment, enhancing their overall well-being and quality of life.



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Conclusion

In conclusion, it's evident that there's a need to revamp existing social spaces for elderly citizens through the lens of experience design, to better cater to their diverse interests and talents. While current senior centres primarily focus on recreational activities, there's a noticeable gap in providing opportunities for intellectual exchanges and skills development. By reshaping these spaces to facilitate mentorship programs where elderly citizens can share their knowledge and experiences with younger generations, we can foster intergenerational connections, enrich learning experiences and give them a sense of inclusivity.

Additionally, expanding the range of courses offered beyond digital literacy to include economic and industrial skills exchanges will empower older adults to stay relevant and engaged in today's rapidly changing world. Through these initiatives, we can create more inclusive social environments that celebrate the contributions of elderly citizens and harness their potential to strengthen our communities.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

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