

IMPACT OF COMMUNITY POLICING IN TREMENDOUSLY REDUCING SENIOR CITIZEN'S GRIEVANCES: A CASE STUDY OF RAYAGADA DISTRICT

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Abstract

Community policing exemplifies a collaborative approach where citizens and police work together to prevent crime, maintain order, and improve safety. In India, the increasing number of senior citizens projected to reach 173 million by 2026 presents new challenges in ensuring their security and well-being. This paper examines the role of community policing in addressing the concerns of elderly citizens through a case study of Rayagada District, Odisha. It shows how the involvement of "Police Mitras," beat officers, and Community Liaison Groups (CLGs) promotes a participatory policing model that builds trust, responsiveness, and protection for older adults. The study also reviews existing frameworks such as the "Ama Police Samiti" and "Senior Citizen Cells," highlighting their contributions to crime prevention, emotional support, and empowerment of the elderly. Findings indicate that community policing, when institutionalized and supported by state mechanisms, greatly reduces senior citizens' vulnerability to crime, enhances police-community relations, and fosters dignity and independence among older people.

Keywords: Community policing, Senior Citizens, Police Mitras, Vulnerability

Introduction

Community policing offers a proactive framework to bridge the gap between the police and the community. It encourages collective ownership of safety issues and promotes mutual trust and cooperation. The model adopted in Rayagada District focuses on empowering the elderly through regular interaction with beat officers, registration drives, awareness programmes, and the involvement of "Police Station Staff". These mechanisms not only reduce the grievances of senior citizens but also create a culture of shared responsibility and compassion. This paper examines how the Rayagada model of community policing provides an innovative approach to elderly protection, grievance redressal, and social inclusion. It underscores the significance of participatory governance, local partnerships, and trust-building measures in creating a sustainable safety net for senior citizens. The study also draws attention to the broader implications of such models for public administration and welfare-oriented policing across India.

Demographic Overview of Senior Citizens in India

The idea of community policing envisions citizens taking the lead in identifying crime or order issues in their area, with the police acting as facilitators to help citizens address those issues. According to the 2011 census, there are 10.4 crore (104 million) Indians over the age of sixty, constituting 8.6% of the total population. The population of senior citizens is increasing rapidly, and it is expected to reach 173 million by 2026. According to the United Nations Population Fund, by 2050 India will be home to one in every six of the world's older persons. Only China will have a larger elderly population. In China, the proportion of elderly will rise to 23.9% by 2050. Japan is currently the only country with more than 30% of its population aged 60 or above. By 2050, there will be 64 countries where older people make up more than 30% of the population. In the USA, the share of seniors is expected to grow from 13.1% in 2010 to 21.4% in 2050. Japan, where the proportion is already high, is projected to increase to 36.5% by 2050.

Concept and Philosophy of Community Policing

Protection and care for such a large population, especially many who lack proper care, will be a significant challenge for Indian state governments and police forces in the coming years. Although the Government of India has enacted the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act 2007 to protect senior citizens, this legislation alone may not resolve most of the problems they face. Therefore, it is essential to support government and judicial efforts with community policing programmes aimed at safeguarding and promoting the welfare of senior citizens. Some regions in India and abroad have already implemented programmes focusing on crime prevention and support for senior citizens through community policing. Additionally, Muniguda Police Station has initiated a small project to foster an effective partnership between police and senior citizens across India.

To bridge the gap between senior citizens and the police, and to enhance their safety and security while making their lives easier, it is proposed to develop a community policing model based on beat policing. This community policing model for senior citizens complements the pan-India 'Overarching Model of Community Policing'. It includes interactions between the police and senior citizens at both the beat and police station levels. When establishing Community Liaison Groups at police stations and beat levels to implement the Overarching Model, care should be taken to include representatives of senior citizens. Similarly, when inviting applications for enrolment as 'Police Mitras', assistance to senior citizens can be suggested as one of the areas where volunteers are needed. Physically fit and mentally alert senior citizens can also be considered for enrolment as 'Police Mitras' for this purpose.

Analysis

1. Legal and Institutional Framework for Senior Citizens' Protection

To foster an environment in the community where senior citizens can live peacefully and with dignity, supported by the community and police. To improve the relationship between the police and senior citizens and involve them in a problem-solving partnership through community policing initiatives. To offer meaningful and effective protection to senior citizens and ensure their safety and security. To build confidence among senior citizens by alleviating their sense of insecurity. To guide senior citizens in accessing emergency services, including medical assistance. To empower senior citizens to live independently and utilise their extensive experience for the benefit of society. To enlist the cooperation of NGOs and civil society members in ensuring decent living conditions for senior citizens and providing aid in emergencies. To increase awareness among senior citizens about available services and facilities, including crime prevention and victim support programmes. To establish and maintain contact with senior citizens, faith groups, retirement homes, and other community organisations. To encourage and facilitate the organisation of seminars on issues related to senior citizens.

The safety and security of senior citizens, especially those living alone, is a concern for the police. Increased life expectancy due to advancements in medical and social welfare fields has led to a significant rise in the population of people over 60 years. Many senior citizens live alone in large houses due to various social and cultural factors. Living alone can heighten feelings of vulnerability and anxiety about personal and home security.

Therefore, drawing inspiration from promoting good practices and standards is essential for raising awareness among families, communities, and senior citizens about existing problems, available solutions, and possible precautions to ensure safety. Senior citizens represent the fastest-growing segment of the population and are increasingly vulnerable to various crimes. They are among the most at risk, with thefts and scams being common methods of targeting them. Additionally, they may fall victim to threats or maltreatment from relatives, domestic help, landlords, tenants, strangers, thieves, intruders, and others. They are also susceptible to accidents and mishaps even within their own homes. As we age, our bodily functions decline, reducing our ability to defend ourselves or project confidence. Senior citizens may also experience mental impairments or dementia. They are sometimes victims of elder abuse, which can include physical, sexual, psychological, and financial harm or neglect by family members or acquaintances. Abuse or neglect can occur while they are in the care of nursing homes. Because they often possess significant financial resources, senior citizens are frequently targeted by fraud. Loneliness can make them vulnerable to manipulative individuals, and they may have difficulty communicating effectively. Older adults might also have impaired driving skills, posing a risk to traffic safety.

From the above discussion, it is clear that senior citizens belong to a highly vulnerable class of citizens and are quite likely to become victims of crime/fraud/abuse etc. in the absence of adequate measures undertaken for their protection.

The negative police image and the distrust it fosters among ordinary citizens make police work difficult, as people are hesitant to cooperate. In the current security scenario, it is crucial to develop channels of trust, goodwill, and cooperation. Moreover, given the multifaceted tasks the police undertake, a lack of staff will remain a persistent problem, and they will be able to perform their duties more effectively with active involvement from local citizens. Senior citizens form a significant part of society and possess valuable experience. Their energy, knowledge, and enthusiasm remain underutilized in community policing and nation-building. Focused community policing programmes for senior citizens are still in their early stages both in India and globally. Attitudinal barriers and mindset issues, such as the reluctance of police personnel to engage with senior citizens and take on additional responsibilities, also pose challenges.

2. Functions and Responsibilities under the Community Policing Model

For the effective implementation of the scheme and to institutionalize the programme, the State/UT Government will have to play an active role through incorporation of community policing for senior citizens as an integral part of community policing in their areas. They should ensure independent monitoring of the implementation of the programme. The state government shall provide recurring expenses and matching grants towards state's share for the implementation of the program.

Duties of Beat Officers

1. They will contact residents of their beat and educate them on preventing property crimes. To this end, they will visit homes and check the nature of window grills and door locks.
2. They will inform the public about vehicle safety, especially for those parked outside homes at night or in offices/shops during the day, and encourage adding extra locks.
3. They will become familiar with regular visitors, especially individuals such as sadhus, beggars, and hawkers frequenting the beat. Knowledge of employees from telephone departments or the Municipal Corporation coming for repairs is also helpful.
4. They will get to know domestic helpers, chowkidars, and drivers employed by households in their beat and verify their backgrounds.
5. They will stay alert regarding anti-social elements, drug peddlers, and users.
6. If they encounter a locked house, they should contact the neighbours or Police staff dedicatedly meant for that area to help monitor the property.
7. Every day, they will visit at least ten different shops, offices, or industrial units and generally ask if they need any assistance.
8. They will visit five different houses or apartments daily and check on the residents' welfare.
9. If the only or all occupants of a house are over 65 years old, the beat officers or Police Mitras will assist them with matters such as driving licenses, ration cards, gas connections, telephone connections, electricity bills, and pension issues.

3. Training, Monitoring and Capacity Building

This initiative will go a long way in enhancing the image of the police while simultaneously laying a strong foundation on which the edifice of community policing can be built. Until Police Assistance Centres are formally established, the beat officer shall, either through word of mouth or by any other available means, circulate a particular address or point within his beat where he will be available when not on patrol duty. Due care must be taken to ensure that the location selected does not give rise to any unsavoury issues. Preference shall always be given to government-owned premises, and only where such premises are unavailable, and subject to applicable rules, suitable premises may be rented.

Local citizens who are willing to actively assist the police in various policing functions, particularly those related to the safety and welfare of senior citizens, shall be enrolled as Police Mitras by the Commissioner of Police or

the District Superintendent of Police. Beat officers shall endeavour to enrol approximately thirty to forty Police Mitras in each beat. A Community Liaison Group shall be established both at the police station level and at the beat level. The beat-level Community Liaison Group shall consist of around eight to ten members selected by the SHO with the approval of the SDPO, preferably through a process of consultation and consensus, from among the Police Mitras of that beat and other prominent and influential local residents. The beat-level Community Liaison Group shall meet at least once every fortnight. The police station-level Community Liaison Group shall consist of twenty-five to thirty members chosen by the SHO or SDPO with the approval of the Commissioner of Police or Superintendent of Police from among area coordinators of Police Mitras and other prominent and influential members of the locality. The police station-level Community Liaison Group shall meet at least once every month.

The Director General of Police may nominate one of the Additional Directors General of Police as the nodal officer to coordinate the implementation, training, monitoring, and documentation of community policing initiatives for senior citizens. The beat officers and other police station staff shall undergo suitable training programmes aimed at improving their soft skills, communication abilities, and community engagement. A Community Policing Training and Documentation Centre may be established under the overall supervision and guidance of the nodal officer. This Centre shall be responsible for training trainers who, in turn, shall visit districts and police stations to organise joint training programmes for beat officers, Police Mitras, and Community Liaison Group members. The Centre shall also be equipped to conduct all training programmes relating to community policing. The Director General of Police shall prescribe the records to be maintained and the reports and returns to be submitted by various units; however, it must be ensured that field units are not burdened with excessive or unproductive paperwork.

Preventive Measures and Crime Prevention Programmes

Various preventive and crime prevention activities shall be undertaken by beat officers with the assistance of Police Mitras and Community Liaison Group members. Local non-governmental organisations may also be associated with these initiatives to ensure smooth and effective implementation. These activities shall include providing personal safety advice to senior citizens regarding safety at home, safety while travelling in private vehicles, safety while shopping or moving in public places, and safety while using public transportation. Senior citizens shall also be made aware of prevalent and emerging types of frauds and scams.

Telephone reassurance programmes may be introduced under which senior citizens who enrol in the programme shall receive daily telephone calls to check on their well-being. Such calls may be automated or handled by trained personnel, depending on feasibility. The experience and wisdom of senior citizens who are in good physical and mental health may be effectively utilised by the police for mutually beneficial community policing activities. Such senior citizens may be enrolled as Community Liaison Group members or Police Mitras, and their services may be utilised in assisting other senior citizens who require help under this programme. They may play a constructive role in initiatives such as Alternate Dispute Resolution, Neighbourhood Watch programmes, awareness campaigns, and counselling activities. They may also assist in counselling police personnel to improve their soft skills and professional performance and may be appointed as Traffic Wardens, Special Police Officers, or in similar roles.

Training programmes may be introduced to impart basic self-defence skills to senior citizens. Employees of the Postal Department and courier services may be encouraged to inform the police when mail at the residence of a senior citizen remains uncollected for an unusual period. The police shall conduct regular awareness programmes for senior citizens and provide them with helpline numbers relevant to their safety and welfare. Senior citizens shall also be encouraged to arrange for regular incoming payments such as pensions or social security benefits to be directly credited to their bank accounts. Some State Governments periodically organise group tours for senior citizens, particularly to important pilgrimage centres, and such initiatives may also be supported as part of community policing efforts.

Existing Models and Practices in India

In the recent past, crimes against elderly persons in various parts of the State have highlighted their vulnerability. To provide a safe and secure environment for senior citizens, Senior Citizen Security Cells were established in urban areas of districts across the State. As per Crime Branch Circular No. 1/08, the Senior Citizen Security Cell functions as part of the District Intelligence Branch with objectives that include ensuring the protection and safety of senior citizens with the assistance of local police, advising senior citizens on security measures, and coordinating the verification of domestic help through local police stations.

The Maintenance and Welfare of Senior Citizens Act, 2007, along with the Rules framed by the State Government in 2009, entrusts specific responsibilities to the police for the protection of the life and property of senior citizens. These responsibilities were circulated to all Superintendents of Police vide Police Headquarters Letter No. M-07-08/392/Con dated 18 January 2016. Keeping in view the role of the police in protecting senior citizens and in accordance with the provisions of the said Rules, it has been decided that the Ama Police Samiti constituted in urban police stations, including District Headquarters, Sub-Divisional Headquarters, police stations under the Commissionerate, and other police stations with urban characteristics, shall undertake activities to instil a sense of security among senior citizens residing within their jurisdiction.

As per Home Department Letter No. 12664/D&A dated 26 March 2013, which introduced the community policing project “Ama Police”, assistance to senior citizens has been identified as one of the key activities of the Ama Police Samiti. Accordingly, Superintendents of Police and Deputy Commissioners of Police shall identify the Ama Police Samitis functioning under urban police stations in their districts and ensure that senior citizen-centric activities form an integral part of their charter of duties and responsibilities. These activities shall include the registration of senior citizens through a prescribed registration form and maintenance of a register, issuance of a registration number for future reference, and wide publicity to encourage registration. Registered senior citizens shall be provided with a copy of the dos and don'ts prepared and circulated by the district Superintendent of Police.

A list of non-governmental organisations working on issues related to the welfare of senior citizens shall be maintained, and their services may be utilised as and when required. Officers from the Senior Citizen Security Cell shall pay weekly visits, with prior appointment, to registered senior citizens to assess the physical security of their residences, verify the antecedents of domestic help, and address grievances, if any. Verification of domestic help and tenants shall be carried out by the local police based on forms submitted by senior citizens, and the Cell shall forward such forms to the concerned police stations for antecedent verification.

The senior citizen-centric activities undertaken by the Ama Police Samitis shall be in addition to the guidelines issued vide Crime Branch Circular No. 1/08 and Police Headquarters Letter No. M-07-08/392/Con dated 18 January 2016.

Conclusion

The experience of Rayagada District shows that community policing can be a powerful tool for tackling the complex issues faced by senior citizens. By involving community members, NGOs, and local authorities in policing efforts, the model bridges the traditional gap between citizens and law enforcement. It reduces fear, boosts accountability, and strengthens social bonds. The clear roles of beat officers, Police Mitras, and Community Liaison Groups (CLGs) help ensure grievances are addressed quickly and that elderly individuals feel valued and protected. The success of such initiatives relies on ongoing government support, regular oversight, and training police staff to build empathy and communication skills. Embedding community policing into mainstream law enforcement policy can help spread the Rayagada approach to other areas. Ultimately, community policing not only reduces crime but also promotes dignity, trust, and empowerment among senior citizens—contributing to a safer, more humane, and inclusive society.

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