

I. Introduction and Significance of Support Services

The family is the basic unit of society, responsible for meeting the needs of its members, including parents, children, and grandparents.

However, as a family moves through different stages of its life cycle, it may not always be able to provide all the **specialised services** necessary for optimal growth, such as formal education or complex health care.

Consequently, communities create structures like schools, hospitals, and recreation centres to provide these support services.

In India, many families are unable to meet basic needs or access these structures due to a **lack of financial resources**.

Furthermore, many children, youth, and elderly individuals are separated from their families and must cope on their own.

It is the responsibility of the government and society to ensure all citizens have a decent life and that vulnerable groups have opportunities for **holistic development** in a healthy environment.

The state responds by setting up institutions and programmes, often in partnership with the private sector and NGOs.

These programmes may focus on specific needs or adopt a holistic perspective where all of an individual's needs are addressed together for optimal impact.

II. Understanding Vulnerability

The focus on children, youth, and the elderly is due to their status as **vulnerable groups**.

Vulnerability refers to individuals or groups who are more likely to be affected by **adverse circumstances** and on whom these circumstances have a more harmful impact.

A person becomes vulnerable if their basic needs are not met during the course of daily life.

III. Support Services and Programmes for Children

1. Why Children are Vulnerable Childhood is a period of **rapid development** in all domains (physical, cognitive, social, and emotional), where progress in one area influences all others.

To grow optimally, a child's needs for food, shelter, love, and stimulation must be met holistically. Adverse experiences during this time can have a lasting negative impact.

Key indicators of child vulnerability in India:

- Nearly two-thirds of children under five suffer from **malnutrition**.
- Approximately 3 million children live on the streets without shelter.
- Only one in three pre-school children has access to early learning programmes.
- Less than half of children aged 6–14 attend school, and many drop out before reaching Standard VIII.
- Official estimates suggest **17 million children** are engaged in child labour, though the World Bank estimates this may be as high as 44 million.

2. Legal Framework: The Juvenile Justice Act, 2000 This is the primary legal framework for juvenile justice in India, focusing on two categories:

- **Children in Conflict with Law:** Juveniles under 18 who are accused of or have committed a crime.

- **Children in Need of Care and Protection:** This includes children without a home or means of sustenance (abandoned, street, or runaway children); children living with unfit guardians; those who are ill or challenged with no support; and victims of abuse, trafficking, or natural calamities.

The Act emphasises a **child-friendly approach** for the protection, treatment, and ultimate rehabilitation of these children.

3. Key Institutions and Initiatives for Children

- **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS):** The world's largest early childhood programme. It provides health, nutrition, and non-formal pre-school education to children below six years, and nutrition/hygiene education to mothers. These services are delivered through centres called **anganwadis**.

- **SOS Children's Villages:** A non-governmental organisation providing long-term, family-based care for orphaned and abandoned children. Each SOS home has a 'mother' looking after 10–15 children, creating a stable family environment within a supportive 'village'.

- **Children's Homes:** Government-run facilities for those in state custody:
 - **Observation Homes:** Temporary stay during investigations to find parents.
 - **Special Homes:** Custodial care for juveniles found guilty of violating the law.
 - **Children's Homes:** For those whose families are untraceable, unwilling, or unfit.

- **Adoption and CARA:** Adoption has been institutionalised and legalised in India. The **Central Adoption Resource Authority**

(**CARA**) is the central agency that sets guidelines to safeguard child welfare and rights during the process.



IV. Support Services and Programmes for Youth

1. Defining and Understanding Youth The National Youth Policy (2014) defines youth as persons aged **15–29 years**, while those between 13 and 19 are adolescents. Youth is a vulnerable period because individuals are managing major biological changes while preparing for adult roles like marriage and earning a livelihood.

Priority groups among youth include:

- Rural, tribal, and out-of-school youth.
- Female adolescents and youth with disabilities.
- Youth under difficult circumstances, such as victims of trafficking.

To be productive, youth require education, gainful employment, health services, and participation in decision-making bodies.

2. Major Youth Programmes in India

- **National Service Scheme (NSS):** Involves college students in social service and national development (e.g., road repair, tree plantation, mass immunisation).
- **Nehru Yuva Kendras (NYKS):** Aims to enable non-student rural youth to contribute to development. They popularise objectives like self-reliance and secularism through non-formal education and leadership training.
- **National Service Volunteer Scheme:** Provides opportunities for degree-holders to work full-time for 1–2 years in national development programmes.
- **Promotion of Adventure:** The government provides financial assistance for activities like mountaineering and trekking to encourage risk-taking, endurance, and team-work.
- **Scouts and Guides:** Aims to develop character, patriotism, and a desire for social service in boys and girls.
- **Commonwealth Youth Programme:** Encourages youth participation in the development processes of Commonwealth countries.
- **Rural Concentration:** 80% live in rural areas, making service delivery difficult.
- **Feminisation:** An increasing number of elderly women.
- **Poverty:** 30% live below the poverty line.
- **Health Concerns:** Decreased physiological reserves make them vulnerable to diseases and age-related disabilities like low vision or loss of mobility.
- **Social Isolation:** In cities, the shift toward **nuclear families** and small living spaces leads to loneliness and a lack of traditional family support.

2. Programmes for the Elderly

- **Basic Needs:** Programmes providing food, shelter, and health care to destitute older persons.
- **Institutional Care: Old Age Homes and Respite Care Homes** (for those requiring continuous nursing care).
- **Multi-Service Centres:** Provide day care, healthcare, companionship, and entertainment.
- **Mobile Medicare Units:** Deliver medical care to those in isolated or backward areas.
- **Specialised Care:** Day care centres for Alzheimer's/Dementia patients and physiotherapy clinics.

V. Support Services and Programmes for the Elderly

1. Demographics and Vulnerability In India, Senior Citizens are those aged **60 years and above**. India has the second-largest number of senior citizens globally, and the population is growing due to increased life expectancy (approx. 66–69 years).

Unique challenges for the Indian elderly:

- **Financial Support:** The **National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS)** provides subsistence for destitute persons above 65 years.
- **Awareness and Training:** Programmes for caregivers and sensitisation programmes for students in schools and colleges.



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VI. Management and Professional Preparation

1. Essential Management Functions Managing institutions for these groups requires skills in **planning, organising, co-ordinating, staffing, directing, controlling, and evaluating** resources. A professional must have a vision of what the organisation should achieve and be deeply committed to the cause.

2. Required Skills for Careers

- **People Skills:** The ability to interact with diverse groups is critical:

- **The Community:** Building linkages and ensuring participatory planning so the community feels ownership of the programme.
- **The Private Sector:** Collaborating with companies discharging their corporate social responsibilities.
- **Government Officials:** Navigating funding and legal requirements.
- **Personnel Management:** Cultivating harmonious relationships within the organisation between staff and beneficiaries.

- **Administrative Skills:** Handling finances, recruitment, record-keeping, and equipment maintenance.

- **Technical Knowledge:** Understanding the specific needs and developmental characteristics of the target group (children, youth, or elderly).

3. Educational Pathway

- **Undergraduate Preparation:** A degree in **Home Science** (also known as Family and Community Sciences), Social Work, or other social sciences is recommended.
- **Open and Distance Learning:** **IGNOU** offers relevant programmes such as a **Certificate in NGO Management** and a **Diploma in Youth Development Work**.

- **Higher Education:** Pursuing post-graduate degrees or a Ph.D. allows for senior professional roles, consulting, or research.

VII. Career Avenues

The field offers a wide variety of professional roles:

- Setting up a private institution/service for a specific target group.
- Serving as a **manager** or in-charge in an established institution.
- Working as a functionary at various levels within government or NGO programmes.
- Acting as a **researcher or consultant** to evaluate existing services and programmes.

