| **"Technology Interventions for Elderly" Programme**<br>Department of Science & Technology<br>(Ministry of Science & Technology, Govt. of India) |
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**A Status Paper on Technology-integration in Elder Helplines in India (2008-09)**
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## Executive Summary

The methodology of the study involved use of an interview schedules with the managers and operators of these HelpLines in the five cities, an interview schedule with a sample of the callers to the Helplines, and a Focus Group Discussion with the Helpline Managers and Technology Providers.

Elder Helplines in some of the metropolitan cities – Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, and Pune (and now even in second-tier cities) - have provided the elderly a technology-based forum to

- seek information concerning services and entitlements,
- voice their grievances with a view to triggering social action in support of as-yet-eluding remedies, and
- be a volunteer in support of the disadvantaged sections of the elderly in India.

The calls made to these Helplines have articulated their desire to access information about the Old Age Homes, Geriatric Care Wards and Clinics, and, hopes from the Police authorities to come to their rescue when neglect, abuse and violence stalk them at the hands of their own family members and relatives, or, those in the neighbourhood.

Responses from the Social Workers/Counselors/Police personnel at the Helplines indicate that services provided have even touched upon grievances against the

- Utilities (gas, water, telephone, etc.) providers and product-manufacturing private sector enterprises (Television, Cooler/Airconditioner, Washing Machines. Etc/) that fail to fulfil their own guarantees/warranties as part of the condition of sales of such products.
- The Builders and Contractors that subject the old to part with large amounts of money or land against development promises that are not fulfilled.

Earlier, such grievances had to be voiced face-to-face or through letters to the NGOs, Police or other Grievanes Fora working for the rights of the elderly. This technology-integrated new channel has worked towards widening access for the elderly to forums or support systems that have very meaningfully networked other support systems to rush aid to the elderly.

Currently, the Helplines are working either as an initiative of some NGO working for the rights of the elderly, or, as a partnership process between an NGO and the Police authorities in the geography concerned. The Union Home Ministry's directive to the Police Headquarters in each State or in each City to establish a relationship with such NGOs has provided a meaningful base for Public-Private Partnership in this cause upholding the right of the elderly to lead their life with dignity.

The level of technology that has been incorporated into this laudable attempt at broadening the access for the elderly to support mechanisms that make their life a bit less painful (if not a bit more comfortable!) varies from city to city.

It could be seen at its minimum when an organization begins its Helpline from a telephone connection and a desk and goes on to a PABX-aided more than one terminal to a Computer-Telephone Integration status.

While access to technology is clearly linked to the resources (both manpower and technological) available to an NGO or the Police Headquarters, the current trends appear to suggest that a Public-Private Partnership generates several advantages.

Partnership with the Police provides immediate access to the computerized network at the Intra-Police institutions within the city or across the State, brings in security- and crime-related expertise available with the Police authorities, and, assures of the psycho-social pressure that the Police is able to generate in the minds of the violators of law, deviant family members, providers of utilities, and hardcore criminals.

The partner NGO brings in its expertise in psycho-social strengths including social communication skills, counseling capabilities, and networking strengths that facilitate mobilization of other support systems in the interest of providing timely help to the needy elderly. That this partnership has worked well is clearly borne out by the partnership arrangement that exists at Chennai, Bangalore, and Pune. The Mumbai Police have recently entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with HelpAge India to run their Elderline in partnership with the latter's psycho-social services support.

Access to the Helpline services have proved extremely helpful in recognizing diverse forms of neglect, abuse and violence against the elderly in different parts of the country. Helplines in Bangalore and Chennai have brought to notice some hitherto-unknown deviant practices resorted to by the family

members including children and relatives – the practice of abandonment of the elderly. Awareness about Dementia and Alzheimer have drawn attention to the "missing elderly". Social Workers at the Helplines have now begun to match the Missing Persons Complaints with those of the Abandoned/Found/Rescued Elderly; the print and audio-visual media has emerged as a supporting partner with stories and photographs of the missing/abandoned elderly flashed in/on such media with a view to facilitating the process of either restoration of such elderly with their original families or finding them a new peer group community at the Old Age Homes or the Short Stay Homes.

Technology providers (landline, cell phone, software developing companies, etc.) appear to be very enthusiastic about the potential of technology applications in support of this new support medium for the elderly. They believe that it is possible to work towards a Unified Common four-digit Toll Free Number for the entire country with capacity to rout calls to the geography specified in the call made by any distressed elderly or on their behalf. They also believe that it is possible to work towards a Single Common four digit Toll Free Number within a given State and within its local Hubs (District level to begin with) for such calls.

A **Technology-Psycho-social support systems combination** can help achieve a significant breakthrough in developing outreach of quality support services to the elderly-in-distress. The present study has made an attempt to document such services and offer an assessment view of the status of Technology and Services triggered by the Elder Helplines.

It is hoped that the study would be used for developing greater clarity on the establishment and management of Elder Helplines, and, in fact, Helplines in support of other segments of population in distress, through a process of dialogue and debate.

It is also hoped that the package recommended in the study would be considered for State and Civil Society support to the establishment and management of more Elder Helplines in India.