

Elder orphans a growing social issue

By Carina Storrs, CNN

Recently a 76-year-old man known as HB, whose health had been deteriorating, tried to take his own life and was admitted to North Shore University Hospital on Long Island.

Doctors decided that HB would not be able to go back to living by himself because of his condition and complications while in the hospital. With his only family across the country and no social support in the area, the man was placed, possibly permanently, in a nursing home.

The experience of HB is not unusual. His story is a case study of the problem of "elder orphans." These seniors are single or widowed; they have no children, at least in the area, and no support system. And they find themselves alone with no one to help care for them when they need it.

Although the problem of elder orphans has been known for a while, new research suggests just how bad it is. About 22 percent of Americans 65 years and older are in danger of becoming, or already are, in this situation. As of 2012, there were 43 million people over 65 in the U.S., up from 35 million in 2002.

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