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An empirical study on elderly abuse & neglect: Issues and coping strategies

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Abstract

World elderly population is growing both in developing and developed countries. India is also facing the same situation. Changing family structures from joint to nuclear, urbanization, women employment and various other factors are making the lives of elderly more measurable. In the present scenario there is no guarantee that children will definitely take care of their parents. The longevity increases dependency. Hence this is an attempt to identify the prevalence, types of abuse and coping strategies in an urban area of Guntur. Self structured questionnaire was administered to 35 male and 45 female elderly. The results revealed that emotional abuse is more prevalent than other forms of abuse and majority of elderly were using tolerance as a coping strategy.

Keywords: Elder abuse, coping strategies, ageing, prevention

Introduction

Ageing is a complex, natural, inevitable, multi factorial phenomena which occurs in biological species. The concept of ageing is multi-disciplinary and multi-faceted. It can be viewed from biological, physiological, sociological, demographic and psychological point. Biological research focuses on the reduction of capacities, psychological concentrates on emotional, attitudinal and behavioural characteristics. Sociologists study the gradual unfolding of socialization with regard to change in position, status and role. Over a period of hundred years the annual growth rates of the elderly are alarming, including gender imbalance. Over the decades significant gain in longevity by the elderly is noted (Malaker and Guharoy. 1990) [6]. This is true for both males and females but with a difference.

India is a country where the people of diversifying cultures live together. Being a developing country, it suffers from many financial constraints. The review of Indian researchers focused largely on few areas and moderately on some areas. The areas where the work is to be accentuated are conflict resolutions, frustrations, service needs of disabled, elderly friendly environments, elder abuse and its prevention etc. The present paper focuses on prevalence of elder abuse, various forms of it, how to prevent abuse and create a safe, healthy atmosphere for the elderly.

In the traditional society elderly were treated as repositories of wisdom and experience. They played active role in family decision making and participated in economic and political activities with legitimate authority. When the traditional society is adopting modernism several changes are seen in almost all spheres of society. The changes in social roles of elderly automatically leading to change in the self-image of elderly. The elderly who were treated reverentially in traditional societies and enjoyed a golden era are now much worse off in present society. They are being neglected by their family members, kin and kith and derogated by grandchildren.

Elderly were accorded prestige through four components advisory, contributory, control and residual. They use to give advises with their vast experience of the life. They used to participate actively in familial, economic and cultural activities. They have the sole control of authority over the members, possessed property in their name; distribute it as per their will and wish. The residual component depends on their previous position in the community. Elder abuse is now understood globally as a social and public health problem threatening Elderly (Lachs & Pillemer, 2004) [8]. It is very serious challenge and concern to the younger sections on those elderly depends for support and sustenance.

It is true in case of institutional setting along with the domestic scenario. Abuse means the wilful infliction of injury, negligent, unreasonable confinement or cruel punishment resulting in physical or emotional pain to the individual mostly by the care givers. The problem of elder abuse is more pervasive than recognised. Many older adults experience their pathetic situation as a way of life. Rise of dual-career families, more empty-nest years due to increased life expectancy, dependency are making the elderly more susceptible to abusive treatment than before (Jamuna, 2003) [5]. In India aged are accepted happily only in the politics

where a positive state of self-acceptance can result in happiness and life satisfaction. Rise of dual-career.

Types of Abuse

- 1. Covert Abuse:** Which are hidden and not direct, mostly they may be non-verbal also.
- 2. Overt Abuse:** Are obvious and direct. They may be physical, non-cooperation deprivation of needs.

These can be otherwise classified as:

Table 1: Types of Abuse

S. No	Type of Abuse	Examples	Signs and Symptoms
1.	Physical	Pushing, Hitting, punching, slapping, burning, restraining or giving over medication or wrong medication.	Injuries on two sides of the body, sprains or dislocations unexplained bruises, bone fractures, bite marks, broken eyeglasses, signs of restrained like rope marks.
2.	Emotional	Ignoring or humiliation a person, shouting, swearing, blaming, frightening, threatening and isolation	Agitated, being upset, apathy, withdrawal, depression and non-communication.
3.	Financial	Deprivation of money Illegal or unauthorized use of a person's property, money, pension book or other valuables, changing the person's will, fraudulently obtaining power of attorney, or other property or by eviction from own home.	Large cash withdrawal from the elder's bank account, objects or other money missing from the senior's house hold, abrupt change in will, unpaid bills, forged signatures, elder's sudden reluctance to discuss financial matters, increasing tiredness or depression on the part of the elder.
4.	Elder neglect	Inadequate provision of food or water, inappropriate housing or shelter, clothing, dental of medical care, abandonment, physical restraint and inadequate help with hygiene or bathing	Unhygienic Conditions, unusual weight loss, malnutrition, not meeting minimum basic needs Starving, untreated illness, such as bedsores, unsanitary and unclean living conditions,

Methodology

80 elderly (35 Male & 45 Female) living in Guntur Urban area are selected as sample for the present study by purposive sampling method. The investigator prepared a self-structured questionnaire with Yes/No type questions along with general information to find out the prevalence and types of abuse and neglect in elderly. The results were discussed with percentages.

The above table reveals that 51.43% of males and 57.78% of females are experiencing abuse and neglect in one or the other way. 48.57% of Males and 42.22% of females expressed that they are not experiencing any abuse and neglect in the family.

Results and Discussion

Table 2: Sample particulars of elderly by Gender and Income level

Gender	Income Level							
	Low Income		Middle Income		High Income		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	14	43.75	10	43.47	11	44.00	35	43.75
Female	18	56.25	13	56.53	14	56.00	45	56.25
Total	32	100.00	23	100.00	25	100.00	80	100.00

Source: Primary Data

The above table shows that out of 80 elderly 43.75% were males and 56.25% were females. The income level of the elderly for categorized into low, middle- and high-income groups. It shows that 43.75% of males are in low income level, 43.47% belongs to middle income level and 44.00% high income levels. Among the females 56.25% are in low income level, 56.53% are in middle income and 56.00% are in high income levels.

Table 3: Prevalence of Abuse and Neglect

Gender	Abuse and Neglect				Total	
	YES		NO		N	%
	N	%	N	%		
Male	18	51.43	17	48.57	35	43.75
Female	26	57.78	19	42.22	45	56.25
Total	44	55.00	36	45.00	80	100.00

Table 4: Forms of Abuse/Neglect Experiencing by the Elderly

Forms of Abuse/Neglect	Forms of abuse					
	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Physical	5	41.67	7	58.33	12	15.00
Emotional	11	44.00	14	56.00	25	31.30
Verbal	5	35.72	9	64.28	14	17.5
Social	3	62.50	5	37.50	8	10.00
Financial	11	47.62	10	52.38	21	26.30
Total	35	43.75	45	56.25	80	100.00

The above table denotes that 41.67% of males and 58.33% of females were experiencing physical abuse, 44.00% males and 56.00% of females are undergoing emotional abuse, 35.72% of males and 64.28% of females are abused verbally, 62.50% of males and 37.50% of females are facing social avoidance followed by 47.62% of males and 50.38% of females are neglected by not meeting their financial needs.

Table 5: Perpetrators of Abuse and Neglect of elderly

Relationship of Perpetrator	Gender				Total	
	Male		Female		N	%
	N	%	N	%		
Spouse	06	17.14	03	6.70	09	11.25
Son	14	40.00	09	20.00	23	28.75
Daughter in Law	05	14.30	15	33.33	20	25.00
Daughter	02	5.71	06	13.33	08	10.00
Son in Law	01	2.85	02	4.44	03	3.75
Grand Children	05	14.30	07	15.55	12	15.00
Others	02	5.71	03	6.70	05	6.25
Total	35	100	45	100	80	100

The above table indicates that among the male elderly majority (40%) expressed that son is the abuser, 17.14% as spouse, 14.30% by daughter in law and grandchildren. 5.71% by daughter and others. Only 2.85% felt that they are abused by their son in law. In female Elderly majority (33.33%) revealed that Daughter in law is the abuser, 20.00% are abused by Son, 15.55% by grandchildren. 13.33% by daughter and 6.70% by spouse and others. Son in law is the abuser only for (4.44%). However, son is the main abuser for males, and Daughter in law for the female elderly as per the results of the present study.

Table 6: Coping Strategies of abused elderly

Coping Strategy	Gender				Total	
	Male		Female			
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Tolerating	22	62.90	15	33.33	37	46.25
Sharing with others	06	17.14	12	26.70	18	22.5
Spirituality	05	14.28	08	17.77	13	16.25
Crying	00	00	06	13.33	06	7.5
Self-Blaming	02	5.71	04	8.88	06	7.5
Total	35	100	45	100	80	100

The above table analysed the coping strategies adopted by the abused elderly. It was observed that 62.90% of males and 33.33% females are tolerating the abusing behaviour of Perpetrators in silence. This might be they had the opinion that nothing is possible even though they express it loudly. 17.14% of males 26.70% of females are getting console by sharing with others. 14.28% males and 17.77% of females opted spirituality as coping mechanism and getting relief by participating in religious activities, going to temples listening to the religious preachers etc. only 5.71% of males and 8.88% of females are blaming themselves for their present status. In females 13.33% are getting relief whenever they abused.

Causes for elder abuse

- Declining Human and spiritual values in the name of modernization is main factor for showing disrespect and dishonour towards elderly.
- Growing materialistic nature of the adults who are indirectly teaching self-centeredness, selfishness, individualism etc. through their interactive behaviours.
- Wrong role models in the immediate environment for the children
- Silent suffering of elderly due to too much affection of their children
- The irony of pretending and false prestige before others by not sharing about abusive behaviours.

Preventive measures

- Counselling the family members to develop empathetic attitude towards elderly
- Sharing the pressure of the care giver by other family members
- Creating a stress-free environment in the home
- Setting up a comfortable living arrangement within the available infrastructure
- Parents should be conscious in their child rearing practices to develop love, respect, kindness, humility, sympathy, compassion, non-violence, understanding etc.

- Younger generation must allot some times to listen to the elderly in the family
- Elderly should be encouraged to speak about their suffering instead of bearing their silence
- Educating the care givers health workers and other professionals and administrators who are involved in elderly care
- Prosecution and punishment to the abusers by the legal authorities when they find it
- Being socially active and avoiding social isolation which makes elderly more vulnerable to elder abuse
- Creating awareness to the elderly to protect their rights and about constitutional provisions

Conclusion

It is unfortunate to witness the abusive behaviour from the people we trust. It is really a problem, which is ignored or not recognized until it becomes serious. Always legal protection cannot save the elderly from abuse. The right way would be a judicious mixture of family and community involvement and interventions by the Government to protect and take care of the helpless.

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