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Elder Abuse: A Sociological Analysis of Old Age Homes of Chennai

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ABSTRACT *Population ageing is a global issue. The ever growing number of elders becomes a grave problem to both developing and developed countries. There are so many issues of ageing. Of which, elder abuse is the serious issue since it has the human right implications. The common abusers of elders are the family members as well as the care givers of institutions like old age homes, clinics etc. this study gives a spot light on the issue of elder abuse in the old age home of Chennai.*

KEYWORDS : Elder abuse, Old Age Home

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of elder abuse is a universal social concern which affects the health and human rights of millions of older persons around the world, and an issue which deserves the attention of the international community. The June 15th is being observed as World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD). It indicates that the elders are vulnerable and subjected to various forms of abuses in day-to-day life one or another way. India is growing old. The stark reality of the ageing scenario in India is that there are 77 million older persons in India today, and the number is growing to grow to 177 million in another 25 years. With life expectancy having increased from 40 years in 1951 to 64 years today, a person today has 20 years more to live than he would have 50 years back(WHO). Old Age has never been a problem for India where a value based, joint family system is supposed to prevail. Indian culture is automatically respectful and supportive of elders. With that background, elder abuse has never been considered as a problem in India. The so called joint families and extended families are disturbed due to various factors which questions the peaceful coexistence of elders with young generation. The changing life styles and generation gap leads to isolation and insecurity among the grey population. The phenomenon elder abuse is emerging in this context. The study of Help Age India revealed that More than one-fifth of the elderly across India (23%) experienced abuse. Elder abuse would be defined as "a single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person". Elder abuse can take various forms such as physical, psychological or emotional, sexual and financial abuse. It can also be the result of intentional or unintentional neglect (UNO). Elder abuse is a violation of human rights and a significant cause of illness, injury, loss of productivity, isolation and despair (WHO). Elder abuse, also called mistreatment or maltreatment, is harmful behaviour directed towards older persons by informal or formal caregivers who the older person loves, or trusts or on whom they depend for assistance. The destructive behaviour can cause physical, psychological and material injury to the older person resulting in unnecessary distress, suffering and sometimes death.

FORMS OF ELDER ABUSE

Elder abuse can be broadly categorized into self abuse, domestic elder abuse, and institutional elder abuse. Self abuse or self neglect is happened due to unwillingness of elders to look after themselves owing to stress and depression from lose of spouse, loneliness, chronic pain and physical disabilities, financial agony and loss of independence and self respect. On the other hand, Domestic and institutional abuse can be broken down into different categories. According to national centre for elder abuses, the forms of abuses are as follows.

Physical Abuse: It comprises inflicting, or threatening to inflict physical pain or injury on a vulnerable elder, or depriving them of a basic need.

Emotional Abuse: Creating mental pain, anguish, or distress on an elder person through verbal or nonverbal deeds.

Sexual Abuse: Non-consensual sexual contact of any kind.

Exploitation or Financial abuse: Misappropriate the funds, property or assets of elders. Neglect: Deliberate denial to provide food, shelter, health care or protection for a vulnerable elder by the care takers

Abandonment: The discarding of a vulnerable elder by anyone who has assumed the responsibility for care or custody of that person.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted at Chennai city with the objectives; to find out the sparking incidents which forced them towards old from family; to know the incidence of elder abuse in the pre and post admission into old age homes; to find out the types of elder abuses at old age homes. For the purpose of study 20 old age homes, ten free and ten paid homes, were selected randomly. From each of the home not less than fifteen percentages of inmates were randomly selected. The totals of selected respondents were 400. This constitutes 35.81 per cent to the total number of inmates of the 20 old age homes. Interview schedule supplemented by Observations, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Case Studies are adopted as tools for primary data collection. In addition secondary data from the records, published data and officials of the home will be collected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sparking incidents to leave the family setup:

The table 1 highlights the sparking incident / turning point to leave immediately from the family setup and seek admission into the home. The observation indicated that the most of the respondents experienced some form of elder abuses in their life. Out of 400 inmates, just below the one third (34.25 per cent) of the inmates replied that the acts and deeds of their care givers tarnished their self respect. The inmates felt that they were neglected and considered as waste not wealth. There was a saturation point. They decided to leave when it gone beyond this point. The UNO report stated that around 4 to 6% of elderly people have experienced some form of maltreatment at home also support the above fact. The relationship between in-laws is always bone of contention. The emerging kind of abuse is the daughter-in-law abusing elderly in-law (Promilla kapur, 1997). 17.75 per cent said that the indiscriminate verbal abuses of daughters-in-law create unbearable pain. It was the form of emotional abuse of the elders. With glooming heart, they left their house. On the other hand, in order to help the family from the clutches of economic hardship, 16.5 per cent come voluntarily to join old age homes. It was found that poverty was the one of the prime factors which forced the elders to seek asylum in old age homes. The verbal abuse of son constitutes 9.75 per cent. 8 per cent reports that ill health is the causative factor which had driven the inmates towards the home. The care givers, as per inmates' view, were not able to bear the cost as well as other inconvenience such bad odour and disturbance to grand children. It is also observed that the miniscule of (6.5 per cent) intimates that they were irked by offering food with verbal abuse by the care givers. On account of the migration of their caregivers to other states and aboard, another miniscule section (5.5 per cent) of the inmates attributes the lack of security to live in the separate house force towards the old age home. It is understood that the most of the respondents (34.25 per cent) attributes tarnishing self respect turn them to old age homes.

Table 1

S.No	Category	Free Home		Paid Home		Total
		Men	Women	Men	Women	
1	Tarnishing self respect	16 (28.07)	56 (39.16)	34 (53.97)	31 (22.63)	137 (34.25)
2	Verbal abuse of son	9 (15.79)	16 (11.19)	4 (06.35)	10 (07.29)	39 (09.75)
3	Verbal abuse of daughters-in-law	10 (17.54)	33 (23.08)	9 (14.28)	19 (13.87)	71 (17.75)
4	Physical abuse of in-laws	3 (05.26)	--	--	4 (02.92)	7 (01.75)
5	Offering food with verbal abuse	11 (19.30)	15 (10.49)	-	--	26 (06.50)
6	To help the family	8 (14.04)	19 (13.29)	--	39 (28.47)	66 (16.50)
7	Health conditions	--	4 (02.79)	7 (11.11)	21 (15.33)	32 (8)
8	No Security	--	--	9 (14.29)	13 (9.49)	22 (5.5)
	TOTAL	57 (100)	143 (100)	63 (100)	137 (100)	400 (100)

Nature of elder abuse at old age homes :

The table 2 describes the nature of elder abuses at home. Elder abuse is taken place directly or indirectly at family, old age homes and community. The observation says that the majority of the (78.25 per cent) inmates are not experiencing any abuses followed by verbal abuse (16 per cent), financial abuse (05 per cent) and physical abuse (0.75 per cent). Anitha Rani M, Palani G, BWC Sathiyasekaran (2009) found that institutionalized elders were abused and were facing hardships. They reiterate that the prevalence of physical abuse of elders in the old age home was 1.5% (95% CI of 0.2 to 3.2), psychological abuse was 11.4% (95% CI of 7.0 to 15.8) and financial abuse was 0.5% (95% CI of 0.5 to 1.5). In free homes, it was observed that the elders who received old age pensions were asked to render the money to old age homes in order to support the administration financially. It was interesting to note that there was a voluntary contribution of old age pension by elders to the home administration. They maintained that when family failed to looked after, the old age homes were the lost resort for them. So there was no problem to contribute the old age pensions, the respondents reiterated.

S.No	Nature of abuses	Free Home		Paid Home		Total
		Men	Women	Men	Women	
1	Physical abuse	2 (3.51)	1 (00.70)	-	-	3 (0.75)
2	Financial abuse	5 (8.77)	8 (5.59)	4 (6.35)	3 (2.19)	20 (05.00)
3.	Verbal abuse	20 (35.09)	25 (17.48)	6 (9.52)	13 (9.49)	64 (16.00)
4	Not experiencing any abuses	30 (52.63)	109 (76.22)	53 (84.13)	121 (88.32)	313 (78.25)
	TOTAL	57 (100)	143 (100)	63 (100)	137 (100)	400 (100)

CONCLUSION

The Indian culture is automatically render great reverence to the elders. But our society is in transition period in which the cherished values are being eroded. The materialistic attitude of an individual made the ageing as social issues. The incidence of elder abuses is being observed in the family setup as well as at old age homes of paid and free kinds. The study revealed that the elders were subjected to various forms of elder abuses during pre and post admission at old age homes of Chennai. It was observed that most of the elders at old age homes said that they were not undergoing any abuses because when family waned in it responsibility to take care them but institutionalized old age home gave a warm welcome. They reiterated that conscience was the god. The inculcation of values alone solution to the social issues.

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