



A Study of Elderly Abuse : Special Reference to Women Widows

KEYWORDS

Family, Women, Wife, Elderly, Widows and Abuse

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ABSTRACT *A widow is a woman whose spouse has died and has not remarried while widowhood occurs when either a husband or a wife experiences the loss of a spouse. 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 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. In our Indian society, old age is a celebration in itself. Nationwide programmes should be organized in schools and colleges to sensitize children towards ageing and aged. NGO's has been working towards this through its Student Action for Value Education (SAVE) Programme which aims to inculcate values of care and respect for the elderly in school going children to create an age friendly society. Secondly, a robust social security system should come into being that not only ensures income security for the elderly, but also gives them opportunities for income generation. Thirdly, involvement of society at large in prevention of elder abuse is indispensable.*

INTRODUCTION

A widow is a woman whose spouse has died and has not remarried while widowhood occurs when either a husband or a wife experiences the loss of a spouse. 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 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. In our Indian society, old age is a celebration in itself. We always get blessings from our loved ones "to live for more than 100 years"; "May God adds my years to your life" etc. But what if this really happens? In such a fast moving society where people don't even have time to give proper care to their children, then the question of looking after the parents is not even in the picture. It is a very disturbing fact that almost 47.3% cases of elderly abuse are reported to have children as perpetrators. The earlier Indian society had a joint family system. Therefore, as there were more members in the family, elderly abuse was not that prevalent. However as time passed by joint family system was replaced by nuclear family system. Resultantly, patience and contentment in younger people became very less. Younger generations find it very hard to adjust with their ageing parents.

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 and has always been thought of as a western problem. However, the coping capacities of the younger and older family members are now being challenged and more often than not there is unwanted behaviour by the younger family members, which is experienced as abnormal by the older family member but cannot however be labelled. There is a greater need for awareness at this stage. Older persons need awareness as to how not to depend on anything and everything at their children and also the young need to understand the age old problems and issues. However, I am of the view that such awareness programmes, even if given, are of no help. Therefore, I recommend that the government should take initiatives in implementing better schemes for the benefit of old people.

Often, we find that old women widows are subject to more torture and cruelty from children. This is because more than

50% of them are uneducated and live at the expense of their children. Recently a newspaper reported that in Kerala, a bed ridden mother who was around 80 was put in dogs cage as the daughter in law refused to look after her. How should we react to such incidents? Most often what we do is feel pity for the old women and then later forget about it.

THE CHANGING SCENARIO

As the twenty first century arrives, the growing security of older persons in India is very visible. With older people living longer, the households are getting smaller and congested, causing stress in joint and extended families. Even where they are co residing marginalization, isolation and insecurity is felt among the older persons due to the generation gap and change in lifestyles. Increase in lifespan also results in chronic functional disabilities creating a need for assistance required by the older person to manage chores as simple as the activities of daily living. With the traditional system of the lady of the house looking after the older family members at home is slowly getting changed as the women at home are also participating in activities outside home and have their own career ambitions. There is growing realization among older persons that they are more often than not being perceived by their children as a burden.

HIGH RANKS IN ELDERLY ABUSE

A nationwide survey by the NGO Help Age India revealed that Bhopal ranks first in elder abuse, followed by Guwahati, Lucknow and Ahmadabad. Bangalore ranked seventh on the list while Jaipur ranked the lowest. The survey was conducted in 20 cities, namely Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Guwahati, Patna, Chandigarh, Panaji, Ahmedabad, Shimla, Jammu, Kochi, Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Puducherry, Jaipur, Chennai, Dehradun and Lucknow. The study covered the elderly in the age group of 60 plus. The report revealed that at least 31 percent of elderly faces abuse and 24 percent face abuses almost daily. Most of the abuses (56 percent) are committed by sons and 26 percent by daughters-in-law. In most of the cases, elderly people remain silent without reporting the incidents to anyone.

In a majority of cases, elders subjected to abuse do not even know that there is a police helpline available to them, and those who are aware of the services rarely use them, in order to protect 'family honor'. As per the survey elderly women were subjected to more abuse when compared to the men

and those above 80 when compared to the younger.

TYPES OF ELDERLY ABUSE

Abuse of elder's takes many different forms, some involving intimidation or threats against the elderly, some involving neglect, and others involving financial chicanery. The most common are defined below.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Use of physical force that may result in bodily injury, physical pain, or impairment. Physical elder abuse is non-accidental use of force against an elderly person that results in physical pain, injury, or impairment. Such abuse includes not only physical assaults such as hitting or shoving but the inappropriate use of drugs, restraints, or confinement.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Infliction of anguish, pain, or distress through verbal or non-verbal acts. In emotional or psychological senior abuse, people speak to or treat elderly persons in ways that cause emotional pain or distress. *Verbal forms of emotional elder abuse include*. Intimidation through yelling or threats. Humiliation and ridicule. Habitual blaming. *Nonverbal psychological elder abuse can take the form of*, Ignoring the elderly person, Isolating an elder from friends or activities, Terrorizing or menacing the elderly person

SEXUAL ABUSE

Non-consensual sexual contact of any kind with an elderly person. Sexual elder abuse is contact with an elderly person without the elder's consent. Such contact can involve physical sex acts, but activities such as showing an elderly person pornographic material, forcing the person to watch sex acts, or forcing the elder to undress are also considered sexual elder abuse.

NEGLECT OR ABANDONMENT BY CAREGIVERS

Illegal or improper use of an elder's funds, property, or assets. Elder neglect, failure to fulfill a caretaking obligation, constitutes more than half of all reported cases of elder abuse. It can be active (intentional) or passive (unintentional, based on factors such as ignorance or denial that an elderly charge needs as much care as he or she does).

FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION

Refusal, or failure, to fulfill any part of a person's obligations

or duties to an elderly person. This involves unauthorized use of an elderly person's funds or property, either by a caregiver or an outside scam artist. *An unscrupulous caregiver might*, Misuse an elder's personal checks, credit cards, or accounts, Steal cash, income checks, or household goods, Forge the elder's signature, Engage in identity theft, *Typical rackets that target elders include*, Announcements of a "prize" that the elderly person has won but must pay money to claim, Phony charities, Investment fraud

HEALTH CARE FRAUD AND ABUSE

Carried out by unethical doctors, nurses, hospital personnel, and other professional care providers, examples of health-care fraud and abuse regarding elders include, Not providing healthcare, but charging for it, Overcharging or double-billing for medical care or services, Getting kickbacks for referrals to other providers or for prescribing certain drugs, Overmedicating or under medicating, Recommending fraudulent remedies for illnesses or other medical conditions Medicaid fraud.

LEGISLATION TO ENSURE AGE OLD SECURITY

To ensure old age security the *Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act* was passed. The bill proposed to provide for; Appropriate mechanism to be set up to provide need based maintenance to the parents and senior citizens, Providing better medical facilities to senior citizens, For institutionalization of a suitable mechanism for protection of life and property of older persons, Setting up of old age homes in every district.

CONCLUSION

Nationwide programmes should be organized in schools and colleges to sensitize children towards ageing and aged. NGO's has been working towards this through its Student Action for Value Education (SAVE) Programme which aims to inculcate values of care and respect for the elderly in school going children to create an age friendly society. Secondly, a robust social security system should come into being that not only ensures income security for the elderly, but also gives them opportunities for income generation. Thirdly, involvement of society at large in prevention of elder abuse is indispensable.

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