

ELDER ABUSE; ITS EVOLUTION AND FORMS

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ABSTRACT

The deteriorating joint family system, growing urbanization and industrialization, and shifting social ideals have all combined to seriously harm the elderly. Due to the altered conditions in urban regions, the elderly who used to be the primary decision-maker in almost every household are now considered as a burden. The present research seeks to comprehend the idea of elder abuse, its historical roots, and its various forms. The purpose of the study is to comprehend how and why elders, formerly valued as a source of knowledge about ceremonies and survival techniques in the prehistoric hunting and gathering society, have now come to be seen as an unwanted burden for some families.

Keywords: *Elder abuse, Historical origin, Forms of elder abuse.*

INTRODUCTION

Although elder abuse has been documented since the 19th century, it wasn't brought to light until 1980. Approximately 4% of persons 65 and older who are mistreated each year endure moderate to severe abuse. Older abuse, often known as "elder abuse," was originally discussed in the British Scientific Journal in 1975 under the title "granny beating." The word "elder abuse" has a negative connotation and is frequently used to refer to physical abuse¹. The term "elder abuse" refers to any knowing, purposeful, or negligent action by a caregiver or other individual that seriously endangers a vulnerable adult. The inability of elderly people to

¹ K.S. Latha, "Elder Abuse and Neglect: A Review", In: Lynn McDonald & K.L. Sharma (eds.), Ageism and Elder Abuse, Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 2011, p.335.

care for themselves as a result of despair brought on by the death of a spouse, loneliness, chronic pain, financial stress, and loss of independence leads to self-abuse or self-neglect².

Elderly abuse is any intentional, careless behavior that puts an elderly person in danger or poses a substantial risk of injury from a family member, caregiver, or other person (Deswal, 2011). Elder mistreatment, senior abuse, abuse in later life, and abuse of older individuals are some of the different terms and expressions that are frequently used to describe elder abuse. Abuse can happen anywhere, but it typically happens inside the four walls of a person's home in India, where no one can hear the elderly victim's screams or see them. The victim is alone, afraid, and ashamed if anybody finds out about their situation at home. Wherever they live or travel, older people are susceptible to abuse, which can affect both men and women of that age.

According to Shankardass (2008) In spite of the rural-urban split, elder abuse and neglect are observed to be widespread among the various socioeconomic groups, religious affiliations, and geographic regions. It happens at every level of education and in every stage of development. It appears to have a gender component, with elderly women perceived as more susceptible to it than older males, while older men have reported it more frequently.

In our society, elder abuse has long been a hidden issue that is just now beginning to come to light as a result of legal and healthcare concerns. While other forms of elder abuse, such as physical, sexual, and financial exploitation, leave measurable or traceable signs, such as marks or tangible proof, psychological abuse is more difficult to identify. One must possess the necessary training to identify psychological issues. The goal of the present study is to comprehend the concept of elder abuse, its historical origin and forms. The study also makes an attempt to understand how and why elders, formerly valued as a source of knowledge about ceremonies and survival techniques in the prehistoric hunting and gathering society, have now come to be seen as an unwanted burden for some families.

Historical origin

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, the eldest member was regarded as a source of information about rites and survival skills in the primitive hunting and gathering society when manufacturing was carried out by domestic groups. Based on an analysis of seventy-one prehistoric civilizations, authority was correlated with age, and seniors maintained prominent positions in the social, political, and religious realms of life. Tradition and traditions specific to each culture dictated the status and care of the elderly³. They had to be honored and treated as the sun in families and society, according to ancient Indian tradition. The young, the aged, the employed, the unemployed, and kith and kin all coexisted in harmony and contentment in the united family. In the classic joint family, the elderly played a dominant role. They were playing significant roles in the operation

² Rashmi Gupta and Anoshua Chaudhari, "Elder Abuse in a Cross-Cultural Context: Assessment, Policy and Practice", In Lynn McDonald and K.L. Sharma, *Ageism and Elder Abuse*, Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 252-253.

³ Amarjit Mahajan, Madhuria, *Family Violence and Abuse in India*, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1995, p. 99

of cast panchayats and traditional villages, resolving the majority of disputes among the community. They would be exempted from normal duties but still have a say in significant events like weddings, funerals, festivals, and feasts. The majority of elderly women were a wealth of knowledge, treating common maladies like cough, cold, fever, and upset tummies with granny's home medicines.

Mahajan, Amarjit (1995) stated that age-related problems for the elderly worsen with time as society changes in all spheres. There are numerous examples from history that show elders being mistreated. According to place and time, the status of the elderly may have changed between and within communities. For example, in few cases, the elderly was forced to commit suicide or were killed by family members because they were seen as a burden on society. Some were fortunate enough to be given the responsibility of being the moral leaders of young boys from privileged households. The young boys were accompanied to school, stayed with throughout school hours, and were safely carried home by these respected elderly servants, who were regarded in great regard.

The British introduced a formal school system, and a new court system, which fundamentally altered the old social structure. Formal institutions where knowledge might be learned were created with the emergence of industrialization and education. The traditional family structure and network of connections were severely shaken by the continued large-scale migration of the surplus population from rural areas to industrial units in search of new job prospects. The small nuclear family, which places a greater emphasis on young family member's needs and relevance, has negated the broad family structure and diminished the worth of the elderly⁴. The majority of people want to wait for old age to arrive in the hope that they will relax after having worked for countless years and will not have to fulfil their obligations towards their family members and will no longer be stressed out by having to adhere to a strict time schedule for their work or family responsibilities and can enjoy themselves freely and leisurely⁵.

Bhattacharya, Swaha & Dr Moni Mala Mokhrjee (2008) in the book "Perception of the Elderly" states that "the rapid urbanization and industrialization that has caused migration from rural to urban areas, the spread of education among women, and the resulting problem of adjustment among women and the first generation have all contributed to the increasing number and deteriorating conditions of the elderly in the developing world. The breakdown of social institutions like the joint family has a significant role in the development of elderly people's adjustment issues."

Thus, it can be said that although older people were once respected and accorded a higher status inside the family, as time went on and the nuclear family structure replaced the joint family, their situation deteriorated

⁴ Amarjit Mahajan, Madhuria, 1995, p. 103

⁵ Protection of the Aged, Encyclopedia of Social Welfare, Vol. 2, SBS Publishers & Distributors Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2006, p. 273.

and they began to fall victim to crimes against elderly. All the things needed for a healthy life are taken away from them. They are now at the mercy of their kids.

Definition of Elder abuse

⁶Elder abuse is defined by the World Health Organization and the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse as “An older person is harmed or distressed by "a single or repeated conduct or lack of appropriate action occurring inside any connection where there is an expectation of trust.”

⁷According to Lau and Kosberg, their definition of elder abuse encompassed "violations of rights," which covered instances in which old people are expelled from their homes or placed in another environment, such as a nursing facility.

Forms of Elder abuse

(Sebastian & Sekher, 2011) stated Physical, verbal or psychological, financial or material exploitation, and neglect were the only four categories of abuse that were examined. He conducted a study with 300 participants, of which 61.3 percent were women and the remaining participants were men. Data were collected from all three age groups—young, old, and old-old—as well as from every economic class. Devi and Murugesan (2006) have investigated how nursing homes and institutionalized seniors operate. The results show that although the basic needs of elderly people living in institutions are covered, their psychological and economical needs are not sufficiently met. There is a definite need to arrange for social and income-generating activities for them, as well as to offer emotional support. As with child and spouse abuse, elder abuse can take extreme forms that involve physical aggression and physical injury. Similarly, there are some forms of elder abuse experienced by the elderly which are explained below:

1. Physical Abuse

⁸A senior is being physically harmed by it. It may involve violent beatings and chaining the elderly person in addition to pushing, slapping, and detaining them. This includes activities like hitting, beating, pushing, shoving, kicking, pinching, burning, or biting. Abuse also includes the misuse of pharmaceuticals, physical restraints, and physical punishment of any type that restricts an elderly person’s freedom of movement.

⁹Elderly people who are physically weak can also be abused, which includes having unwanted sexual contact. In comparison to small towns and villages, India's megacities have a higher prevalence of this form of abuse.

⁶ Carey Wexler Sherman, et al., “Elder Abuse and Mistreatment: A Life Span and Cultural Context”, In Lynn McDonald & K.L. Sharma (eds.), Ageism and Elder Abuse, Rawat publications, New Delhi, 2011, p. 202.

⁷ Carey Wexler Sherman et al, 2011, p. 202.

⁸ ‘What are the Types of Elder Abuse’, Helpage India: A Manual for Professionals and Volunteers, November 2013, p. 7.

⁹ Dr. P.K.B. Nayar, ‘Elder abuse and Violence: A Background Paper’, First National Seminar on Abuse Neglect and Violence of the Elderly, Centre for Gerontological Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, 2004, pp. 2-3.

2. Medical abuse

Medical abuse refers to the mistreatment of an elderly person's prescription drugs and medications, including medication withholding, overmedication, and failure to follow prescription instructions. Sometimes elderly people with illnesses who might otherwise provide drugs for the children's convenience are not treated. It is a symptom of medication abuse.¹⁰ Overuse occurs when a dose is increased above the recommended level because people mistakenly believe that a higher or more dose will improve their health. In an effort to treat the sickness, one can overdose and have a side effect. According to Misra, Pramod. and Kapoor, A.K. (2004) elderly people have a propensity to use medications when they are no longer necessary. Elderly people use prescription drugs around three times more frequently than the general population, and even more of these groups use over-the-counter drugs. The majority of older people's hospital admissions are caused by improper prescription drug use.

3. Psychological Abuse

It can be defined as actions taken with the goal to harm another person emotionally. These include verbal acts such as humiliating, insulting, emotional blackmailing, name-calling, swearing, scolding, shouting, intimidating or threatening may cause as much harm to the victims functioning as the actual act itself. They also include nonverbal acts such as treating an elder like a child or non-entity or ignoring them. Siva, Raju, S. (2002) highlighted that the psychological needs of the elderly are largely disregarded, and their conditions are deteriorating rapidly, not because of physical impairments but rather due to socioeconomic, psychological, and health-related problems. According to Nayar, P.K.B. (2004) Abuse includes even "silent treatment," which includes refusing to answer a person's repeated questions or talk to them. Abuse can occur when a family member, caretaker, or another individual acts in a way that instills fear, mental anguish, or emotional suffering or misery. Any forceful or threatening behavior that creates a power imbalance between the older adult and their family member or caregiver qualifies as psychological abuse.

4. Financial Abuse

Financial abuse involving the theft of an elderly person's assets is highly widespread in India, particularly in upper- and middle-class households. This type of abuse entails the unauthorized or unlawful use of an elder's fund property or assets, such as coercing the senior into selling personal property or transferring assets into the perpetrator's name, or usurping or stealing the elder's many belongings before immediately discarding him or her. Additionally, he or she can be subjected to unreasonable financial demands or mistreated through fraud or forgeries. In India, it is widespread practice to subject elderly people to psychological harm by declaring

¹⁰ Akbar Husain and Arshi Raza Waqsi, "Drug Misuse of Physicalistic Medicine Among older Males and Females", In: A.K. Kapoor and Satwanti Kapoor (eds.), *India's Elderly : A Multidisciplinary Dimension*, A Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2004, p. 137.

them mad in order to seize control of their assets¹¹. Elderly individuals frequently rely on caregivers. Sometimes they have the mental or physical capacity to handle their financial affairs. Others might take advantage of this circumstance. It includes the inappropriate use of legal conservatorship, powers of attorney, or guardianship arrangements. Abuse also includes denying an elderly person access to their own assets or residence.

5. Neglect

Neglect occurs when an elder is not receiving the necessary care, either actively or passively. It might not be satisfying the person's emotional, social, or physical requirements. Not offering the necessities of life, such as food, clothing, medication, and support. It could be because you neglected to take care of the elder's needs. Neglect can also involve failing to manage the older person's financial obligations if the caregiver is in charge of paying the elder's bills. Typically, neglect refers to the denial or failure to provide an aged person with requirements such as food, water, clothes, housing, personal cleanliness, medicine, comfort, and personal safety that are part of an implied or mutually agreed-upon duty of care. Shankardass (2002) proved that elderly people are a vulnerable group because they often have physical or mental impairments, are socially isolated, and are dependent on a caretaker, who may use this dependence as a pretext to threaten the victim. The way society views the elderly is a factor in elder abuse. There is evidence from all across the world that the biggest challenges to older people's well-being are still poverty and exclusion.

6. Abandonment

When a responsible adult fails to care for a dependent elderly person, he or she may leave the person in a dangerous or lonely location, abandon them in a hospital with a false address so that their family members cannot be located, or, if the elderly person is terminally ill, "put them away" against their will in an old age home where they will never be visited again. It is the refusal to carry out even a small portion of one's responsibility to the victim¹².

7. Self -Neglect

¹³The elderly exhibits signal of helplessness. Claims of verbal or emotional abuse, confusion or disorientation, emotional upset or agitation, unexplained fear or anger, or unusual behaviors like sucking, biting, or rocking; sudden changes in behavior; hesitation to speak honestly; signs of extreme withdrawal; and a lack of response and communication. Elders who are depressed also begin to ignore their nutritional and medical needs. Elders

¹¹ Dr. P.K.B. Nayar, 'Elder Abuse and Violence: A Background Paper', First National Seminar on Abuse Neglect and Violence of the Elderly, Centre for Gerontological Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, 2004, p. 3.

¹² Dr. P.K.B. Nayar, 'Elder abuse and Violence: A Background Paper', First National Seminar on Abuse Neglect and Violence of the Elderly, Centre for Gerontological studies, Thiruvananthapuram, 2004, p. 3.

¹³ 'What are The Types of Elder Abuse?', Helpage India: A Manual for Professionals and Volunteers, November 2013, p.8.

who are lonely or grieving can lose interest in routine activities. Dementia symptoms in older persons might lead to abusive behavior as the condition progresses¹⁴.

CONCLUSION

It could be summarized that due to societal norms, many older family members are embarrassed to admit that they have raised a child capable of such behavior, and the majority of them blame themselves for the abuser's actions even after the occurrence of abuse has been recorded and proven. Their desire to end the abusive relationship usually prevails over their love for the abuser. Many older people also fear punishment in the form of isolation, which keeps them from abandoning their offspring.

The aforementioned information can be used to draw the conclusion that elderly people require greater care as they age since they are vulnerable and dependent, but children's behavior is unkind toward them while those who care for the elderly must deal with the abusive behavior. Elder abuse arises when children's responsibilities conflict with elderly people's rights. Elder abuse involves depriving the elderly of necessities, and caregivers are the ones who commit this crime.

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¹⁴ Rashmi Gupta and Anoshua Chaudhuri, "Elder Abuse in a Cross-Cultural: Assessment Policy and Practice", In: Lynn McDonald and K.L. Sharma, Ageism and Elder Abuse, Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 260-262.

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