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## OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE CONCEPT OF ELDER ABUSE; AN OVERVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper makes an effort to review studies on the elder abuse that were carried out in India. In order to better understand the current state of elder abuse. An endeavor has been made in this paper to review the literature on the subject and studies that have been conducted in the field. Specific topics covered include definitional matters, the present study also makes an attempt to highlight the vulnerable and the abusers and also highlights the effect of elder abuse on the elderly and their families.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Elder Abuse, Vulnerability, Neglect, Victimization.*

### INTRODUCTION

There doesn't seem to be a common definition that all parties can agree on elder abuse. Arguments exist on what should be included and excluded. There are issues around the classification of self-neglect, crimes against the elderly, and other behaviours as elder abuse. There are various literary definitions of elder abuse. It has been broadly described as doing injury to an older adult on a physical, emotional, or psychological level. Many people would also like to include mistreatment, self-neglect, sexual abuse, and financial abuse. In contrast, self-neglect is less frequently mentioned in definitions of elder abuse than harm done by others. In any connection where there is an expectation of trust, elder abuse is defined by the volunteer organisation Action on Elder Abuse in the United Kingdom as a single or recurrent act that harms or distresses an elderly person. Any mistreatment of an elderly person is typically considered to be elder abuse (usually over 65 years). Such abuse can take place, at the elder

person's home, a relative's home, sheltered housing, or institutions, such as old age homes, residential care facilities, nursing homes, or hospitals. It speaks about actions that imply trust in a relationship (Tinker and McCreadie, 1998). It has only lately become a scientifically organised discipline to investigate elder abuse. Researchers from a variety of disciplines, including sociology, social work, anthropology, biology, physiology, and psychology, are becoming more and more interested in the topic of elder abuse. The field of gerontology has expanded to include geriatrics, social gerontology, and biology of ageing.

Devi Prasad (1996) asserts that elder abuse in India is a distinct subset of abuse that requires specific attention for three key factors:

1. The elderly is a vulnerable population because of their diminished social position and growing reliance on family as they become older. People over 75 years old are more susceptible to maltreatment and neglect.
2. Preliminary research shows that elder abuse does exist, despite not being commonly accepted in the West or India. An estimated 5 lakh to 25 lakh senior people every year in the USA alone experience physical abuse, according to estimates (US Congress, 1980). A few Indian research also provided compelling evidence that old people are mistreated in families (Vlassoff, and Vlassoff, 1980; Usha rani, 1989; Vijaykumar, 1991; Rao, 1995 and Srinivas, 1996).
3. Elder abuse seriously reduces older people's quality of life and may have a big negative impact on society's moral character.

Many of our current benefits for older persons are insensitive to this feature because elder abuse has only recently been recognised as an instance based on family violence (Shah et al., 1995). Due to their predominance in rural areas, India's elderly face additional challenges due to poverty, hardship, and dependency.

## **DEFINITION OF ELDER ABUSE**

The meaning of elder abuse is essential to build a foundation of knowledge in this field. The definition of the term used by researchers has undergone significant variation which is mentioned below:

Elder neglect and abuse are described as "neglect or physical, psychological, or financial victimisation of the elderly people" by Giglio and Blackmore (1983). The majority of definitions of elder abuse and neglect have placed a strong emphasis on abuse that takes place in non-institutional settings, such as the abuser's or victim's home where they are the caregiver.

Poor living conditions, sexual abuse, and financial abuse are all included in Block and Sinnott's (1979) definition of elder abuse. Lau and Kosberg (1979) defined elder abuse as the "withdrawal of personal care" and violation of an elder person's legal or civil rights" (e.g., being ejected from one's home or compelled to move into another setting against one's will), we will use the term "failure to pay of personal care" herein. The definition of elder abuse is not universally accepted. Many academics include neglect, starvation, social isolation, and theft or misuse

of elderly people's assets or money in their interpretations of elder abuse in together with physical attacks and psychological abuse. Although there is disagreement over the best way to define elder abuse, the majority of experts agree that a behaviour must be purposeful and cause physical harm or distress in order to qualify as abusive (Block and Sinnott, 1979; Gelles, 1987; Pillemer and Finkelhor, 1988). Additionally, neglect, both passive and active, insufficient personal or medical care, emotional trauma, and financial abuse can all be considered forms of abuse against the elderly. The examples that follow are representative of the several types of elder abuse: physical abuse, verbal abuse, medical abuse, environmental neglect, violation of rights, sexual abuse, and financial abuse. Therefore, any act of omission or action that could risk the safety of an elderly family member qualifies as elder abuse. Such cruel treatment can take place both at home and in sheltered housing or institutions, as well as at old-age homes facilities, residential care facilities, nursing homes, or hospitals. It has to do with actions taken in a partnership that carriers trust.

National Centre on Elder Abuse (2003) explains elder abuse in different forms i.e., Physical abuse: it is when an elder who is already vulnerable is subjected to physical discomfort, injury, or deprivation of a basic need. Emotional abuse is the verbal or nonverbal treatment of an elderly person that causes them mental suffering, distress, or discomfort. Neglect is the inability or unwillingness of caregivers to provide the elders a decent meal, clothing, medical attention, and safety.

Wolf et.al. (1986) explains elder abuse in different terms such as: Physical abuse is the imposition of physical harm or agony, such as when someone is hit, burned, or detained forcibly. The imposition of mental suffering, such as being verbally attacked, insulted, harassed, or alienated is known as psychological abuse.

According to the extensive study on elder abuse, indirect physical abuse is significantly less common than direct psychological abuse, financial abuse, and neglect in general (Finkelhor, 1983).

Anyone who has been entrusted with the care or custody of a vulnerable elder and departs them is considered to have abandoned them. It is the complete neglect of duty in terms of caring for the elderly. When the old are forced to leave the house because there isn't enough room, the younger generation can't afford them, or sometimes even because they are bothering the family, it is called abandonment (Kapur, 1997). However, in cases of abandonment, no care is given to the elderly and they are left on their own. According to Stannard (1973), an abusive relationship entails a situation in which the elderly person's security or well-being were endangered by behaviours that were either performed or neglected, and whose observation by a third party would result in negative judgments.

### **WHO ARE THE MOST VULNERABLE?**

Studies on elder abuse have repeatedly shown that a female who is extremely old, divorced, jobless, physically disabled, and residing at home with somebody else, usually her adult child, spouse, or other relatives, is the most likely victim of elder abuse (Block and Sinnott, 1979; Lau and Kosberg, 1979; and Wolf, et.al.,1986).

According to a few research that looked at the dynamics between older people and their family and friends, more women than males reported experiencing physical and verbal abuse (Vlassoff and Vlassoff, 1980; Usha Rani, 1989).

In the studies, it is widely accepted that elderly people's dependency is a major contributor to abuse. This idea stems largely from studies on the stress that caring for the elderly causes on families. The burden of giving material, physical, and emotional support to an aged dependent person who has physical or mental limitations is said to put the caregiver in a stressful situation. The risk for neglect and exploitation of the elderly rises as their dependent demands grow as a result of the caregiver's ongoing strain to care for them, unless suitable resources are available (Block and Sinnott, 1979; Lau and Kosberg, 1979; and Pillemer and Finkelhor, 1988).

According to Pillemer and Wolf's (1986) research, victims of elder abuse did not have any life-threatening illnesses and were not overly dependent on others for assistance with everyday chores. Godkin et al. (1989) also found that the elderly's bad health was not a significant factor. These conclusions seem to be supported by the study of Homer and Gilleard (1990), where it is noted that there is no correlation between abuses and the person's degree of cognitive impairment or the diagnosis of dementia. Other research revealed similar results as well (Phillips, 1983).

### **WHO ARE THE ABUSERS?**

Regarding the characteristics of the abuser, early study in the west suggests that the abusers are typically middle-aged and the victim's daughter or son. The abusers are mostly middle-aged women who are the victim's daughters (Gelles, 1987). It has also been argued that the abusers' histories of substance misuse, aggression, or mental illness, as well as their reliance on the elderly for housing or financial support, are further features of the abusers (Mark and Pillemer, 1995). Godkin et. al., (1989) report that a majority of the caretakers in abusive relationships were men, despite some research claiming that the primary caretakers were women.

In the Indian setting, it was stated that the elderly people named the son and daughter-in-law together, as well as the daughter-in-law and spouse, as the family members who were the most difficult to get along with (Vijayakumar, 1991 and Rao, 1995). Although a large percentage of the literature on elder abuse has concentrated on how adult children abuse elders, it has been discovered that a sizable portion of elder abuse also involves spouse abuse (Pillemer and Finkelhor, 1988). Violence is closely tied to the social stress experienced by families, which can be brought on by factors like ageing, mounting debt, unemployment, child care concerns, etc. When these outside circumstances increase caregivers' stress levels, they become more tense and more likely to act violently toward the elderly (Block and Sinnott, 1979 and Douglass, et. al., 1980).

## **EFFECTS OF ELDER ABUSE ON THE ELDERLY AND THEIR FAMILIES**

There are numerous reports on the effects of elder abuse, with the exception of a few empirical investigations (Pillemer and Prescott, 1989). Even the most recent research that provided novel insights into features of elder abuse, such as its prevalence and risk factors, failed to address the effects of elder abuse suffering. However, the empirical evidence that exists regarding elder abuse and the results of studies on child abuse and wife abuse suggest that victimization does, in fact, have a negative impact on the victims. Furthermore, it was stated that depriving elderly people of necessary medications and medical attention can lower their quality of life, speed up the ageing process, and even cause early death (Devi Prasad, 1996). Elderly victims of abuse are more vulnerable to depression than non-victims. The victims' anxiety was thought to be particularly troublesome as it might prevent them from looking for ways to improve their existing circumstances. Additionally, such sentiments of hopelessness and loneliness are likely to reduce efforts to stop the abuse or end relationships with the abuser (Phillips, 1983 and Pillemer and Prescott, 1989).

### **CONCLUSION**

The definitions demonstrate how these authors approached the idea of elder abuse in different ways. However, physical abuse has drawn a lot of attention among the psychological and physical forms of elder abuse that are constantly mentioned in the literature on family violence. The fact that physical abuse of the elderly can be stopped more quickly than other types of abuse may explain why it is receiving increasing attention. Due to the fact that physical abuse also leaves behind observable indications that are difficult for either the abuser or victim to deny. It is clear from research conducted in several domains, including this study, that older persons who have experienced abuse have few options for their course of action in the future and barely have any support systems or grievance redressal procedures to deal with a challenging circumstance. Social work intervention is necessary to support the elderly in coping with various issues.

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