



Understanding Elderly Perceptions of Elder Abuse: Reasons, Challenges, Coping Strategies, and it's Awareness

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Abstract : According to a United Nations research on population ageing, the share of the global population over 60 years old would rise from 9.9% to 21.5% between 2000 and 2050. By the middle of the century, the number of Indians aged 60 and above was predicted to have tripled from 92 to 316 million during the course of the following four decades, making up around 20% of the country's total population. (Ramalingam, A. et al., 2019). Elder abuse not only worsens the damaging situations that older people already face, but it also increases their dependence, vulnerability, and marginalization (Patel, A. & Mishra, A., 2018). The objective of the study was to explore the perceptions of elder abuse among older adults, examining its reasons, challenges, coping strategies and develops a comprehensive guideline. The study used an exploratory research design with snowball and purposive/judgmental sampling to study the perceptions of abuse among older adults aged 60 and above in Mumbai and nearby districts. In total, 200 older adults comprising 40 males aged 60-70, 71-80, and 20 males aged 80 and above, as well as 40 females aged 60-70, 71-80, and 20 females aged 80 and above age group. The questionnaire was conducted in English, and the study excluded older adults with memory loss, dementia, or psychological disorders due to potential inconsistent responses. A self-constructed, semi-structured questionnaire was used to understand their awareness and perception of elder abuse and coping strategies. The combination of open and closed-ended questions helped the researcher develop a brochure and guidelines for the elderly, enhancing their understanding of the topic. The reasons for elders being abused, majority of older males (62%) and more of the older females (54%) stated that the need of help older people with daily things and have to spend a lot on their medical expenses. When inquired about the challenges experienced in older adults due to abuse, little more than half of the older males (54%) and majority of the older female (61%) stated that older adults dealing with poor physical health, like an injury, often find it challenging to safeguard themselves from mistreatment due to limited movement. Understanding their perspective about elder abuse helps government and policymakers to make better laws and knowing their learning. Another objective of the study was to contribute by providing guidelines to prevent elder abuse and creating awareness about it. Through this awareness, people will be able to notice any such act happening near them and provide guidance to protect themselves.

Key Terms : Elder Abuse, Elderly Perception, Reasons of elder abuse, Elder abuse awareness, coping strategies, challenges of elder abuse

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most remarkable aspects of old age is the wealth of wisdom and experience that the elderly brings to society. Through decades of life's trials and triumphs, they accumulate a reservoir of knowledge that is invaluable. Their perspectives and life lessons can guide younger generations in making better decisions and navigating the complexities of life. Elders serve as caretakers of culture, passing down traditions, stories, and customs, thereby preserving the rich tapestry of human heritage.

In today's world, the presence and lives of older members of their own family have been impacted by the widening generational gap, differences in expectations and expectations-related thinking and attitudes, and living situations or lifestyles of children. According to a study conducted by Choo W.Y. et al. (2016), because they depend more on caregivers, elderly people with dementia, cognitive and functional impairment, disabilities, and other chronic health issues are more at risk of abuse.

According to a study by Maurya, P. et al. (2022), the idea of elder abuse is very uncommon in the Indian setting due to cultural conditioning and the tradition of multigenerational family systems, which value older people highly. Nevertheless, a variety of

elements, such as urbanization, technological advancement, and migration from rural to urban areas strains families' capacity for stress management and opens the door for elder abuse.

According to Patel, A. B. (2021), there seems to be a correlation between elder abuse and a variety of distinct socio-psychological disorders that affect the senior population. In addition to these concerns, the anomic social environment brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic is also linked to issues such as alienation, loneliness, and despair, all of which lower one's sense of wellbeing. According to Estebani.F. et al. (2018), systematic, quick training courses on risk factors, how to avoid elder abuse, and how to stop it for people of all ages can help stop incidents like this one. It is recommended that programs aimed at preventing elder abuse start before an individual becomes elderly. In addition, it's a good idea to think about health system-focused treatments that help staff members at health centers and organizations prevent elder abuse. Healthcare practitioners may assist in developing and implementing management recommendations tailored to older persons, as well as raise their awareness of the health services system and urge them to do routine examinations.

II. NEED OF THE STUDY.

In India, the elderly feel a strong sense of duty to their offspring and anticipate receiving support from them or other family members as they age. On the other hand, emotions of rejection or loneliness might have a negative impact on their mental health when they endure elder abuse or neglect. Elder vulnerability is increased by high healthcare costs and a reliance on others to provide basic daily necessities (Sathya, T. et al. 2022). Elder abuse is a human rights issue and preventing it necessary to improve the overall wellbeing of the growing elderly population in India (Sathya, T., & Premkumar, R., 2020).

As there is increase in elderly population, there is a need of study on issues related to older adults. Understanding elders' perception will provide us with the different strategies for elder abuse and make us aware about barriers for them which may potentially lead to elder abuse. Also, these strategies may help the society to formulate better laws, policies and helplines. Many elderly are unaware of the fact that they are being abused. They may feel that it's their fault and prefer to stay silent. Through this research, many elders will get aware of it and will discuss about such topic and take appropriate actions, when needed.

To improve the status of elderly persons in Indian society, programs must be developed and implemented. The Indian government must devise and implement novel social welfare initiatives, such as senior citizen hotlines and age-friendly neighborhoods. These kinds of interventions will offer more suitable ways to start lowering the number of elder abuse cases (Patel, A. & Mishra, A., 2018) Through this research, a comprehensive brochure for the prevention of elder abuse creating awareness and preventing elder abuse, to ensure the safety and well-being of the elderly individuals.

The objective of the study are:

1. To ascertain the perception regarding elder abuse among older adults aged 60 years and above regarding the reasons for being abused, challenges experienced by older adults due to abuse, and their coping strategies.
2. To develop a comprehensive brochure for the prevention of elder abuse creating awareness and preventing elder abuse, to ensure the safety and well-being of the elderly individuals.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design: Exploratory research- The research design applicable to the current study was an exploratory research design.

Sampling Technique, Sample Size and Sample Characteristics: Snowball and purposive/judgmental sampling was implemented. In total, 200 older adults comprising 40 males aged 60-70, 71-80, and 20 males aged 80 and above, as well as 40 females aged 60-70, 71-80, and 20 females aged 80 and above age group. Half of male participants (50%) and little more than half of female participants (54%) were practicing Hinduism. Little more than one third of the male participants (41%) had completed bachelor's degree and little more than quarter of the female participants (32%) had selected diploma as their highest educational qualification. Large majority of the male participants (81%) and substantial majority of the female participants (88%) were married. Non working was selected as working status by substantial majority of male participants (87%) and almost all the female participants (97%).

Inclusion Criteria:

1. Older adults aged 60 years and above.

Rationale: This was because senior citizen is defined as "any person who is an Indian citizen and has reached the age of 60 years or above." (Sharma A. & Mittal, J., 2023)

2. Older adults who can comprehend the English language.

Rationale: This was because the medium of language used in the questionnaire is English.

3. Older adults residing in Mumbai and nearby districts only.

Rationale: Mumbai and nearby districts only was chosen by the researcher due to feasibility purpose.

4. Older adults staying with their family members, or independently living alone.

Rationale: This was because the study focuses on general perception where elders can share their perspective, and might have not experienced the abuse.

Exclusion criteria:

1. Older adults with memory loss, dementia or psychological disorders.

Rationale: As they may find it hard to answer questionnaires because of their difficulties with thinking and emotions. This can result in their answers being inconsistent.

2. Older adults who are bedridden due to any health issues.

Rationale: As they may find hard to answer questionnaires because of their restricted mobility and potential physical discomfort.

3. Older adults who live in old age home.

Rationale: Because they might have experienced the abuse.

Research process and development of tool: The researcher identified their areas of interest from previous publications and articles, then identified areas of human development that were particularly interesting. The researcher selected a wide study area based on the data gathered, and with the help of a research guide, they constructed a more focused area for further research.

The proforma for the sample were designed keeping in mind the inclusion and exclusion criteria and to obtain information from the older adults mainly about their age, gender, religion, educational qualification, living arrangement, etc.

A self-constructed, semi-structured questionnaire was used to understand their awareness and perception of elder abuse and coping strategies. The researcher provided several strategies for coping, and participants could choose the best one. The combination of open and closed-ended questions helped the researcher develop a brochure and guidelines for the elderly, enhancing their understanding of the topic.

Plan of Analysis: The data was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. For objective 1, theme extraction, computing percentages and frequencies were used and for objective 2, a detailed brochure was created using the collected data and review of literature.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Objective 1: To ascertain the perception regarding elder abuse among older adults aged 60 years and above regarding the reasons for being abused, challenges experienced by older adults due to abuse, and their coping strategies.

4.1 Results of Reasons for being abused

Reasons for Elder being abused	Total		Grand Total	
	Male (n=100)	Female (n=100)	All age groups (n=200)	
	(%)	(%)	f	(%)
They need help with daily things and have to spend a lot on medical expenses.	62	54	116	58
They hope their kids or family will take care of them.	24	25	49	24.5
They do not use technology much.	14	27	41	20.5
Families are changing from big joint families to smaller ones.	14	15	29	14.5
People are living longer.	6	13	19	9.5
People are shifting from villages to cities and urban areas	4	9	13	6.5
Increase in number of people being poor	5	2	7	3.5
Women who earns well and doesn't stay at home	8	1	9	4.5
Many people are uneducated	7	5	12	6
Any other	2	3	5	2.5

* Note: Multiple responses were obtained

Table 4.1 displayed that when the older adults were asked the reasons for elders being abused, majority of older males and more of the older females stated that the need of help older people with daily things and have to spend a lot on their medical expenses [Male (62%); Female (54%)].

4.2 Results of Challenges experienced in Older adults due to abuse

Challenges experienced in Older adults due to abuse	Total		Grand Total	
	Male (n=100)	Female (n=100)	All age groups (n=200)	
	(%)	(%)	f	(%)
Older adults dealing with poor physical health, like an injury, often find it challenging to safeguard themselves from mistreatment due to limited movement.	54	61	115	5
Elders with poor mental health, such as severe memory loss (like dementia), may face the challenge of being unable to recall or understand what's happening to them, making them more at risk of abuse.	31	31	62	31
Loneliness and sadness can make older people more likely to suffer mistreatment because they might feel they have no one else to help them.	28	19	47	23.5
As people get older, they are at higher risk to have disabilities and become easier targets for elder abuse.	13	11	24	12
They do not have any financial security, leading to ask children for even to buy small things.	13	10	23	5
Any other	3	1	4	2

*Note: Multiple responses were obtained

Table 4.2 shows that when inquired about the challenges experienced in older adults due to abuse, little more than half of the older males and majority of the older female stated that older adults dealing with poor physical health, like an injury, often find it challenging to safeguard themselves from mistreatment due to limited movement [Male (54%); Female (61%)].

4.3 Results of Strategies to prevent elder abuse by older adults

Strategies to prevent elder abuse by older adults	Total		Grand Total	
	Male (n=100)	Female (n=100)	All age groups (n=200)	
	(%)	(%)	f	(%)
Planning movie nights and card game sessions at a senior center to make seniors happy and keep them engaged in fun activities.	38	56	94	47
If any older adult is having a tough time with their emotions or feeling really down, they can talk to a counselor or other professionals for support and help.	24	17	41	20.5
Older adults can call a helpline if they suspect someone is trying to take their money or if concerned neighbors believe an older person is not being treated well.	24	21	45	22.5
Encourage older adults to join groups that share their interests, like cultural clubs or spiritual gatherings. This way, they can meet people who enjoy the same things and make new friends.	8	5	13	6.5
The government can give money every month to help older people with things like food and housing.	23	52	75	37.5
People can get to learn about elder abuse creating awareness in the society.	16	14	30	15
Any other	5	4	9	4.5

*Note: Multiple responses were obtained

Table 4.3 shows that multiple responses were obtained from a little more than one third of the older females mentioned that planning movie nights and card game sessions at a senior center to make seniors happy and keep them engaged in fun activities (56%) and The government can give money every month to help older people with things like food and housing (52%) and a little more than one third of the older males indicated that planning movie nights and card game sessions at a senior center to make seniors happy and keep them engaged in fun activities. [Male (38%)].

Objective 2: To develop a comprehensive brochure for the prevention of elder abuse creating awareness and preventing elder abuse, to ensure the safety and well-being of the elderly individuals.

Let's know about elder abuse...

World Health Organization (2022) defines elder abuse or maltreatment 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 the older person".

Different types of elder abuse

Physical abuse

(such as hitting, restraining, slapping, pinching, pushing)



Emotional abuse

(such as blaming for problems, isolating from social connections, pressuring tasks, controlling life decisions, exploiting resources, and withholding affection)



Verbal abuse

(such as stealing their belongings, pressuring them to sign a document giving away their property, or using their money for personal purposes)



Financial abuse

(such as stealing their belongings, pressuring them to sign a document giving away their property, or using their money for personal purposes, improper use of power of attorney)



Sexual abuse

(such as unwanted touching, sexual harassment, forced sex, and taking inappropriate pictures)



Neglect

(such as insufficient food, safe living spaces, and protection)



Abandonment

(such as lack of assistance with bathing, grooming, cleanliness, companionship, isolation, and unsafe living spaces can lead to feelings of loneliness, potential accidents, and harm)



Why elder abuse happens?


- Financial struggles like limited retirement savings, or dependence on others for financial support.
- Expensive healthcare means difficulties in accessing necessary medical treatments or medications
- Limited technology access like lack of technology familiarity and access can lead to isolation among elderly individuals, hindering their ability to access online resources and increasing their vulnerability to abuse.
- Smaller family units mean fewer potential caregivers, increasing the likelihood of elder neglect
- Increased life expectancy means a higher proportion of elderly individuals in the population leading to inadequate support services.
- Migration of children towards urban area can lead to elder neglect.
- Increased poverty because of limited job opportunities, inadequate retirement benefits, or rising living costs
- Limited literacy skills can make it difficult for elderly individuals to understand their rights, access information about available support services

How to identify elder abuse?




RESPECT WRINKLES, NOT WOES: STOP ELDER ABUSE

designed & created by Manjiri Pimpalgaonkar (MSc II HD)
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What can an elderly do?

- Engage in gentle exercise or physical activities such as walking, yoga.
- Practice relaxation techniques such as meditation or deep breathing exercises.
- Explore hobbies or activities that bring you joy and fulfillment.
- Engage in brain-stimulating activities like puzzles, games, or learning new skills.
- Communicate your needs and concerns with trusted friends, family members, or healthcare professionals.
- If you need any help, install handrails, ramps, or assistive mobility equipment for better movement.
- Seek advice from financial advisors or counselors to explore options for managing finances effectively and securing a stable financial future.




Policies/ Helplines


- Any elderly who needs help can start by calling the leading senior citizens helpline, Dignity Helpline on 18002678780. This service is available 24*7, free of cost and all across India.
- Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act (MWPSC, 2007)
 - Supports parents and seniors.
 - Establishes senior housing.
 - Upholds aging right.
- With the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens (Amendment) Bill, (2019)

Who can abuse elderly?



- Spouse
- Son
- Daughter-in-law
- Daughter
- Son-in-law
- Relatives
- Neighbors
- Any other like friends or society



While going through elder abuse, an elderly may....



- experiencing poor physical health due to neglect, physical violence, or deprivation of necessities like food and medication.
- lead to poor mental health like anxiety or depression impacting their overall well-being.
- experience social isolation or emotional neglect, which can worsen their mental and physical health.
- experiencing memory loss affecting the individual's ability to function independently.
- often lack support networks or resources to seek help, leaving them vulnerable
- be financially dependent on their abusers, often their own children, making it difficult for them to escape or report the abuse for fear of losing support or shelter.

Discussion:

The current research also focused on the reasons for elder abuse being that elders hopeful for their children to take care of them in old age is the second highest indicated statement. As mentioned in the review of literature, a similar research was conducted by Murthy, R. et al. (2021) revealed that the rise in nuclear households, which leaves the elder members of the family alone and unsupported, is the reason why elderly people tend to be more vulnerable to neglect. Also, according to recent study, Sathya, T. et

al. (2022), which indicated that elderly persons in India have a strong sense of parental investment and want their offspring or family members to take care of them as they are older.

On the other hand, emotions of abandonment or isolation may have a negative impact on their mental well-being when they experience elder abuse or neglect. Older people become more vulnerable due to high healthcare costs and their dependence on others to provide for their basic daily needs. Another Indian researcher Jeyaseelan, M. (2013) have conducted an analysis in which it was noted that, Old age has never been an issue in India, a country where mixed families are said to be built on values. Elders are naturally respected and supported in Indian culture. In light of this, elder abuse in India has never been regarded as a concern. The harmonious cohabitation of elderly and younger generations is called into question by a number of circumstances that disrupt so-called joint families and extended families. The grey population have experienced isolation and insecurity as a result of shifting lifestyles and the generation gap.

The current research, there was a mention of overuse of mobile phones and social media in front of parents and not spending quality time with them however surprisingly, this was not available in the previous research.

The current research pointed out that the challenges experienced in older adults due to abuse was that older adults dealing with poor physical health, like an injury, often find it challenging to safeguard themselves from mistreatment due to limited movement by little more than half of the older male adults and majority of the older female adults, however, Sathya, T. et al. (2022) found a significant positive association between hospitalization and elder abuse, with depressive symptoms being strongly linked to elder abuse, highlighting the negative impact of depression on elder abuse in India, where poor mental health conditions are prevalent, and elder abuse or neglect by family members negatively impacts the well-being of older adults, who often expect care from their children or family members.

In the current research, one of the highest indicated strategy to prevent elder abuse in the society was planning movie nights and card game sessions at a senior center to make seniors happy and keep them engaged in fun activities. Similarly it has been seen that programs should concentrate on enhancing older women's mobility and social activities as a plan is one method to enhance their physical and mental health in along with reducing the risk they face. (Gupta.N., 2016).

In the current research, a little more than one third of older male adults and half of older female adults stated that they are not aware of the definition of the term 'elder abuse' however, Johnson (1986) defined elder abuse as a state of self or other inflicted suffering unnecessary to the maintenance of the quality of life of the older person.

Furthermore, few participants did mention elder abuse as verbal harm, physical, emotional, psychological, sexual or financial harm which aligns with the points stated by Sharma.A. & Mittal. J. K. (2023) about the term "abuse" that is, abuse includes a wide range of actions, including environmental negligence, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, physical abuse, psychological abuse, and violations of rights. This implies the need of elder abuse awareness among elderly which was accomplished by creating a detailed brochure and spreading awareness about it.

V. CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

- The study contributes by understanding the need of togetherness in the family as they need to provide elderly with love and care. As indicated in results, one of major type of verbal abuse is highlighted that is, blaming for problems or conflicts within the family and many other statements pointing towards the lack of mindfulness and high ignorance of older adults by the other family members. One of the reasons of elderly being abused revealed in the study was insufficient finance to provide with appropriate medical care. Although, lack of financial management skills of youth and insufficient financial support from government has led to such an act. Poor mental health of both caregiver and older adult can led to elder abuse.
- This study provides us with the quality of life and psychological well being of older adult. This study contributes by providing guidelines to prevent elder abuse and creating awareness about it. Through this awareness, people will be able to notice any such act happening near them and provide guidance to protect themselves.
- Understanding their perspective about elder abuse helps government and policymakers to make better laws and knowing their learning. Another key factor highlighted in this study was the importance of planning different activities and sessions with elderly helps them to look forward in life and enjoy it.

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