



Female Elderly Abuse & Discrimination With Regard To Old Age Homes

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Abstract

Ageing is the final phase of life's journey a- natural phenomenon in the long -drawn cycle of growth and decay . With the rising level of life expectancy caused by the advancement of scientific and medical method old age has been a matter of critical concern in every country. This twilight phase of life is characterized by the struggles women have to undertake .

Gender discrimination against femininity often stems from age-old societal and cultural traditions or practices and legal , political and economic conditions . Women represent an integral part of society and have a significant impact on men's lives as well. . Owing to gender discrimination the female elderly are far more likely than males to feel depressed , endure financial constraints and suffer from various types of abuse . The plight of the feminine gender is really pathetic . They especially the widows become victims , of abuse. Many of the divorcee women are subjected to torture and driven out of their home by their kin . So, socially , financially and emotionally they become completely devastated. Rai et al., (2018) show that usually most of the female elderly (particularly widows) experience abuse of various types – emotional , financial , physical and sexual besides neglect. Family members and society consider such elderly persons liabilities or even parasites . Sometimes , the female elderly are forced to leave their own homes and stay at old age home for their sheer survival. The present study has been conducted in Kolkata City West Bengal keeping three major objectives in mind – (1)To probe the various factors compelling the female elderly to reside at OAHs , (2) to explore the various abusive acts inflicted on the female elderly and (3) To draw some specific policy & programme implications to ameliorate the OAH female elderly residents' plight . The present study is qualitative by nature for which case study method is used . It has been found that most of the victims among the elderly are either widows or uneducated women , women from rural areas etc. who have been grappling with the hazards and worries associated with femininity. .

Keywords: Female elderly, Abuse, Discrimination , Old Age Home

Introduction

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights “ Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of the personality is possible”. In societies like India , women have to grapple with challenges posed by patriarchal norms , including limited agency , economic participation , political participation and potential violence . At the same time Indian women have a history of significant contribution and are increasingly discarding traditional roles.

The term ‘Women’s empowerment in favor of new , non- traditional ones in contemporary feminist discourse . The question of women’s role in politics is woven into the concept of women’s empowerment as the traditional patriarchal discourse tends to straitjacket women placing them strictly within the confines of domesticity through the typical private\public divide and societal stratification . Thus, family that is the ‘private sphere’ has emerged as ‘women’s sphere’ and the public sphere has remained typically as ‘the male preserve \domain into which women must not intrude or foray. . However, though women’s struggle for gaining space in the public or political sphere has helped to break the existing glass ceiling still the concept of an ‘old boy’s club’ has not yet become obsolete . Since , patriarchy generates a gender ideology which promotes the masculinity -femininity divide within family , state and society . On the other hands , it is gender – based socialization that helps to sustain this private \ public divide for generations . It is interesting to note that marginalization women as unwitting agents of patriarchy rather unconsciously nurture this divide and thus maintain the existing power relations , seeking to place themselves in perpetual subordination and marginalization . However, this patriarchal discourse seeks to pigeon hole a baby girl as a ‘women’ and more specifically as a good wife and an ideal mother while it stamps a boy as a man who would ultimately dominate both the private and the public sphere. Femininity can be understood as a social construct , and there is also some evidence that some behavior’s considered feminine are influenced by both cultural and biological factors . Thus, mothering , caring , nurturing , house -keeping , cooking , stitching etc. are regarded as women’s work , while , some psychological and behavioral trends such as softness , love , care , affection , emotion , tolerance , submissiveness , compassion are typically identified categorized as feminine . On the contrary Masculinity , is traditionally associated with the qualities like toughness , courage , competition , assertiveness , arrogance , domination etc. which symbolize ‘power’ vis-a vis the powerlessness (supposedly) characteristic of femininity .

The elderly population is continuously increasing . With the raising level of life expectancy due to the advancement of scientific and medical method old age has been a matter of rather critical concern in every country. In India the elderly population has grown simultaneously . So, the problem has assumed global proportions . India , one of the most populous countries of the World , is experiencing unprecedented demographic changes . Increasing longevity , coupled with declining fertility , has led to a dramatic rise in the population of adults aged 60 years and above . The 2011 census put the number of older Indian adults at 103,844,040. This figure makes up 8.6 percent of Indian’s total population in 2011. According to the United

Nations population Fund and Help Age India , by 2030 , close to 12.5 percent of India's population will be over 60 . In 2011 census elderly male 52.8 percent and female 51.1 percent , and the projection (2021) male elderly 66.8 percent and female elderly 71.1 percent..

The elderly had traditionally enjoyed family support . However, long -cherished values like kinship or togetherness have been eroded because of the changing socio- economic scenario . The nuclear family is emerging as inevitable reality . Although ageing is an inescapable reality of human life , it is no longer accepted as such , lent viewed as a problem . With meagre or no earnings or means many elderly persons are increasingly depending on their kin for subsistence .

Another major problem is economic insecurity which plagues the elderly (specially older women) when they can no longer sustain themselves financially . For the elderly economic security is as essential and relevant as it is for other age groups . A helping hand should be extended to those of the older women who are unable to generate an adequate income . Those older women who are capable should be encouraged and if necessary supported , to engage themselves in gainful occupations. As regards others who are incapable of supporting themselves financially , partial or full social welfare grants which at least take care of their basic needs should be provided.

The weak and the dependent older women in particular badly need physical , mental and emotional care and support . When this is lacking , they suffer from a sense of neglect which is often linked to isolation . Factor causing the growing neglect of the older women by families and communities include changing lifestyles . The older women are afflicted with myriad medical problems which are aggravated by their financial constraints . They are unable to cope with spiralling prices and mounting medical expenses . Hence, sheer survival becomes a tremendous challenge for them .

Research Methodology

Research Objective

- 1)To probe the various factors compelling the female elderly to reside at OAHs ,
- (2) to explore the various abusive acts inflicted on the female elderly and
- (3) To draw some specific policy & programme implications to ameliorate the OAH female elderly residents' plight .

Database and Method of Research

In order to achieve the objectives, the researcher has used a descriptive research design in addition t to get an in-depth understanding about the elderly (female elderly) who live in old age home in Kolkata, West Bengal. The method and the data of the qualitative approaches were adopted in the study that includes case study and focus group discussions which were conducted along with descriptive ways.

Study Area

The study area, Kolkata city of West Bengal in India has been selected for the study. West Bengal is one of the most populous Indian states. Ranked among the countries in the World with a very high density of population.

Sample and Sampling

The purposive (non-probabilistic) sampling technique had been employed for selecting old age homes in India, Kolkata, West Bengal.

Case study 1- Asha Niketan Old Age Home :

Swati Chowdhury is a Hindu aged 75 residing at Asha Niketan Old Age Home Kolkata. This Home is only for the female elderly . On passing SSC, she married Mr. Prodyut Chowdhury and her married life lasted 41 years ending in divorce. Her husband who is now aged 70, is by profession a (now) retired public officer. Swati, a home maker has two sons aged 39 and 34 respectively and two daughters aged 38 and 36 respectively. All of them are married with children. The conjugal life of Swati was bitter and unhappy as she was also sexually harassed by her husband. After some time her husband married a mother of two sons but still he went on torturing Swati so much and that's why her womb was damaged. The torture also continued and under this circumstances her daughter also decided to send her in a home for aged so that she might live with safety and freedom. She was unwilling to come at first but her daughter assured her that they will remain in touch with her. Her daughter has kept that word. She was uncomfortable at first in the old age home but now she is living there happily with her peers . She has no problem so far in terms of medical , food etc. .She has renewed her life and she hopes that her life continues to be full of peace and content.

Case Study 2 – All Bengal Women Union Old Home (Kolkata Central)

Papiya Dhar (name changed) aged 79 and by religion a Hindu is an illiterate woman who was married many years ago to a small businessman. (Being a homemaker, she was never independent. She somehow managed the family by her husband's meagre income. She had two children-one daughter and one son. The son is currently doing a small job while the daughter is married.

The death of her husband plunged Papiya into a veritable crisis. Her financial condition was very poor and she had no shelter of her own. Nor were her son and daughter financially strong enough to take care of their mother. So having no roof over her head nor any means, she decided in 2013 to come to the old age home run by All Bengal Women's Union. It is completely free of cost and has been her home since 2013.

She never wants to become a burden on her children and always wants a life of honour and self respect.

Conclusion

The increase of elderly population has become an important concern and a serious issue in our country. Due to the changes in family framework and traditional values the elderly are becoming subjected in terms of living arrangement, health care and living with honour and dignity. Gender inequalities can exist in any phase of life

cycle of human beings. It is a very crystal clear gender discrimination in aged is very prevalent in India. Many older women suffer from poverty, wealth, loneliness and in terms of financial crunch. No doubt it is providing them an alternative mode of life though as it is already being point out there is still scope for improvement.

Suggestions

- To improve the economic status of elderly
- Government should extend its health care service
- To reduce health problem of elderly
- Government should implement separate medical insurance for elderly
- Awareness programme for welfare of the elderly

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