

SOCIETAL MISTREATMENT TOWARDS THE ELDERLY: CASE STUDIES IN KOLKATA

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Abstract

Old age is the natural culmination of human ageing process and India is beset with a monumental challenge of providing care to the elderly whose numbers are increasing gradually. Unfortunately, this increase is also followed by a surge in the number of severe instances of elderly abuse in the country.

Several cases are often reported of old people being left alone or abused by the caregivers (such as spouse, sons, daughters, relatives, friends, neighbours, voluntary workers, and paid workers). The elderly are thus vulnerable to illness, loneliness, and crime. They are subjected to various forms of abuse - be it in active form or passive form. The active form of abuse includes physical, verbal, financial, psychological/emotional, and sexual abuse. On the other hand, the passive form of abuse includes neglect (deprivation).

To protect the elderly from abuse, the Government of India took various initiatives at different times - 125 Cr.Pc. i.e., Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973, The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007.

To find out the dark side of '*elderly abuse*' and '*neglect*.' The victims shared their narratives, which was helpful for the analysis and interpretation of the situation under study.

Keywords: *elderly, elder abuse, neglect, caregivers*

Introduction

Old age is the natural culmination of human ageing process and happens to be an inevitable, ubiquitous, and universal phenomenon of human life. India is beset with a monumental challenge of providing care to the elderly whose numbers are increasing gradually. Unfortunately, this increase is also followed by a surge in the number of severe instances of elderly abuse in the country.

In India, the elderly population stood at 56 million in 1991, which rose to more than 76 million in 2001 and further spiked to 103 million in 2011. Thus, in India the Census shows an increase in the percentage of population of the elderly from 6.8% in 1991 to 7.4 % in 2001 and further to 8.6 % in 2011 (<http://www.censusindia.gov.in>). Due to this increase in the number of elderly, several cases of old people being left alone or abused by the caregivers (such as spouse, sons, daughters, relatives, friends, neighbours, voluntary workers, and paid workers) are often reported. It is the foremost duty of the children to look after their parents. If a couple is childless, then it is the duty of the caregiver to look after them. The absence of such care causes adjustment problems among the elderly, leading to solitude and depression. They are also vulnerable to illness, loneliness, and crime as they belong to the most vulnerable section of the society.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Elder Abuse is "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 an older person" (<http://www.who.int>). This means it is any act on the part of the caregiver that deviates from the norm of the society to look after the elderly. Elderly abuse occurs in any two locations of our society – at homes (termed as 'Domestic Elder Abuse') or in various institutions like nursing homes, old age

homes, etc. (termed as ‘Institutional Elder Abuse’). However, like other forms of family violence, abuse of the elderly often goes unreported because the victims are reluctant to talk about their plight. This often happens in India as the abusers do not file any complaint against their abusers. There is lack of official complaints. So, the elders are silently suffering abuse every day.

Moreover, the elders are subjected to various forms of abuse - be it in active form or passive form. The active form of abuse includes physical, verbal, financial, psychological/emotional, and sexual abuse. On the other hand, the passive form of abuse includes neglect (deprivation).

The abuse and neglect of the elderly has become an important concern for advocacy for the researchers and the policy makers since mid-1970s. Positive conceptions of ‘healthy ageing’ are rightly displacing negative ageist perceptions of older members of our society. Most elderly citizens, at some point of time, require some form of assistance from other members of society. When the body or mind begins to fail, a legitimate need for intervention and care arises. This is true for elderly all over the world.

Abuse and neglect are culturally defined phenomena that reflect distinction between values, standards, and unacceptable interpersonal behaviours. Older people view abuse under 3 broad categories – neglect (isolation, abandonment, and social exclusion), violation (of human, legal and medical rights) and deprivation (of choices, decisions, status, finances, and respect). As people grow older, they face physical, psychological, financial and health related problems. So, they try to get hold of others and depend on them to a great extent.

Neglect has emerged as one of the key forms of elderly abuse and how the elderly are leading a life of loneliness that causes loss of social identity. Neglect of a person simply means depriving a person from food, heat, clothing, comfort, or essential medication and needed services to force certain kinds of actions, financial and otherwise. The deprivation may be intentional (active neglect), or unintentional (passive neglect). The difference between the two lies in the intent of the caregiver.

In case of active neglect, the caregiver intentionally fails to meet his/her obligations towards the older person as he/she is settled elsewhere for better opportunities. Passive neglect happens when the caregiver unintentionally gets overloaded with lack of information concerning appropriate care-giving strategies. But in both the cases, the caregiver fails to meet the physical, social, and/or emotional needs of the older person, who is left alone to survive.

To protect the elderly from abuse, the Government of India took various initiatives at different times - 125 Cr.Pc. i.e., Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973, The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007. Although there is mention of another law (Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005) introduced by the Government of India for women only, but under it only an elderly woman can lodge a complaint against her perpetrator/s.

125 Cr.Pc. i.e., Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973	The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007
Order for the maintenance of wives, children, and parents; monthly allowance for their maintenance; decision taken by the First-Class Judicial Magistrate or Metropolitan Magistrate	Maintenance of parents and senior citizens by their children, and where there are no children, by their relatives; establishment of old age homes; maintenance includes provision for food, clothing, residence and medical attendance and treatment; Maintenance Officers are designated by the State Government
Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 Protection of the rights of women; Protection Officers are appointed by the State Government	

Source: <https://www.indiacode.nic.in>

Objectives

The objective of the study was to explore the types and the extent of elderly abuse, to identify the perpetrators and the reasons behind abuse, to find out the solutions and how much the initiatives taken by the Government of India has been availed by the victims. Thus, it is necessary to analyse and interpret the dark side of ‘elderly abuse’ and ‘neglect.’

Literature Review

Although there are numerous studies on diverse aspects of ageing, the number of literatures on elderly abuse is very few in India. Below is given a review of the various literature on elder abuse according to their area/dimension of study –

Nature, forms, causes and preventive measures of elder abuse –

The studies by Achappa, Rao & Holyachi (2016), Anand (2016), Govil & Gupta (2016), Kaushik (2016), Vardhan (2017), Yatnatti (2017), Mawar, Koul, Das & Gupta (2018), Khan & Taneja (2018), Shankardass & Rajan (2018), and Kumar & Patra (2019), Johnson & Fertel (2023) broadly highlighted the prevalence of elder abuse within the family set up, profile of the victim and the abuser, various forms of elder abuse, its impact, and the strategies to overcome the problem.

Relation between health and elder abuse–

Pillemer, Burnes, Riffin & Lachs (2016), Orfila, et al. (2018), Teaster & Hall (2018) and Maurya, et al. (2022) pointed out the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the elderly, living arrangements, health conditions, need for health care systems, relationship with the various generations and economic dependency of the elderly, and elder abuse and psychological distress.

Care facilities for the elderly –

Paltasingh & Tyagi (2015), Fernandes & Kerkar (2016), Kaur (2017), Chakravarty (2018), Khan & Taneja (2018) Shankardass & Rajan (2018), Teaster & Hall (2018), Goswami, et al. (2019), Johnson & Fertel (2023) emphasized on various aspects of population ageing, social and physiological well-being of the elderly population, and how to deliver care facilities to the elderly living alone.

Methodology

The study was conducted among 40 respondents residing either in North Kolkata or in South Kolkata by using the case study method. The respondents included 24 victims (1 unmarried, 13 widows, 5 couple victims) who have official complaints against their perpetrators, and 16 victims (3 unmarried, 5 widows, 4 couple victims) who did not have any official complaints against their perpetrators. They all shared a narrative, which was helpful for the analysis to find out the answers to the objectives of the research study. All the interviews were conducted with the help of an unstructured interview. It was more like a conversation with them, knowing their stories, rather than a formal interview.

The respondents who reported the cases officially were selected based on their grievances being filed at various courts of Kolkata under 125 CrPc or at the office of the Protection Officers under Protection of Women from Domestic Violence (PWDV) Act, 2005. They were contacted firstly by the Protection Officers or by the lawyers. This was done in order to get the consent of the respondents for participating in the research process. In this way their willingness to participate in the conversation was understood. This is called opt-in consent from the respondents and is required while doing the research through case study method.

Results and Discussions

A tabular representation of the socio-demographic profile of the respondents is analyzed below based on the reported and unreported cases of the elderly victims. The table has shown the percentage of the elderly victims based on their marital status, education, living arrangement, and other relevant factors.

Elderly Victims								
Marital Status	Reported cases				Unreported cases			
Single woman	4.16%				18.75%			
Widow	54.16%				31.25%			
Married woman	20.83%				25%			
Married man	20.83%				25%			
Age	Young old (60-69)	Middle Old (70-79)	Very Old (80+)		Young old (60-69)	Middle Old (70-79)	Very Old (80+)	
Single woman	0%	0%	25%		33.33%	9.09%	50.00%	
Widow	44.44%	54.54%	75%		0%	45.45%	0%	
Married woman	55.55%	0%	0%		66.67%	18.18%	0%	
Married man	0%	45.45%	0%		0%	27.27%	50%	
Total	99.99%	99.99%	100%		100%	99.99%	100%	
Religion	Hinduism	Islam	Christianity		Hinduism	Islam	Christianity	
Single woman	4.16%	0%	0%		0%	0%	0%	
Widow	54.16%	0%	0%		50%	0%	0%	
Married woman	20.83%	0%	0%		25%	0%	0%	
Married man	20.83%	0%	0%		25%	0%	0%	
Total	99.98%	0%	0%		100%	0%	0%	
Caste	General	SC	ST	OBC	General	SC	ST	OBC
Single woman	5.26%	0%	0%	0%	18.75%	0%	0%	0%
Widow	52.63%	50%	0%	100%	31.25%	0%	0%	0%
Married woman	21.05%	25%	0%	0%	25%	0%	0%	0%
Married man	21.05%	25%	0%	0%	25%	0%	0%	0%
Total	99.99%	100%	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Educational Qualification	Uneducated	Upto H.S.	Graduate	Post Graduate	Uneducated	Upto H.S.	Graduate	Post Graduate
Single woman	0%	9.09%	0%	0%	0%	11.11%	100%	100%
Widow	75%	45.45%	50%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Married woman	0%	36.36%	12.5%	0%	0%	44.44%	0%	0%
Married man	25%	9.09%	37.5%	0%	0%	44.44%	0%	0%
Total	100%	99.99%	100%	100%	100%	99.99%	100%	100%
Living arrangement (Pre/Post abuse)	With/without spouse &/married son/s &/ others	With/without spouse &/unmarried son/s	With parents & siblings		With/without spouse &/married son/s &/ others	With/without spouse &/unmarried son/s	With parents & siblings	
Single woman	0%	0%	100%		0%	0%	100%	
Widow	54.54%	100%	0%		38.46%	0%	0%	
Married woman	22.72%	0%	0%		30.77%	0%	0%	
Married man	22.72%	0%	0%		30.77%	0%	0%	
Total	99.98%	100%	100%		100%	0%	100%	

Social class background of the Elderly

The social class background of most elderly people is that of middle-class, some at the upper level and some at the lower level. According to Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, the "middle class" refers to a social stratum intermediate between the upper and lower classes, often characterized by occupations like businesspeople, professionals, and skilled workers, and sometimes further subdivided into upper and lower middle classes. But based on the narratives as the elderly victims was found that the class division was not clear as they could not gauge their financial condition properly. But they opine that they belong to the middle-class category of the society in terms of their occupation as well as income distribution.

Occupational status of the victims

Marital status of elderly victims	Percentage of victims							
	Reported				Unreported			
	Unemployed	Government	Private	Business/Self employed	Unemployed	Government	Private	Business/Self employed
Single woman	0%	100%	0%	0%	11.11%	0%	100%	20%
Widow	66.66%	0%	50%	50%	55.55%	0%	0%	0%
Married woman	33.33%	0%	0%	0%	33.33%	0%	0%	20%
Married man	0%	100%	50%	50%	0%	100%	0%	60%
Total	99.99%	100%	100%	100%	99.99%	100%	100%	100%

Monthly income of the victims

Marital status of elderly victims	Percentage of victims									
	Reported					Unreported				
	Below 5,000	5,000 - 10,000	10,001 - 15,000	15,001 - 20,000	Above 20,000	Below 5,000	5,000 - 10,000	10,001 - 15,000	15,001 - 20,000	Above 20,000
Single woman	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	25%	0%	0%	0%	20%
Widow	66.66%	75%	100%	0%	33.33%	62.5%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Married woman	16.66%	12.5%	0%	50%	33.33%	0%	66.67%	0%	0%	40%
Married man	16.66%	12.5%	0%	50%	33.33%	12.5%	33.33%	0%	0%	40%
Total	99.98%	100%	100%	100%	99.99%	100%	100%	0%	0%	100%

Source of income of the victims

Marital status of elderly victims	Percentage of victims					
	Reported			Unreported		
	Self-Income*	Spouse's income**	Other income***	Self-Income	Spouse's income	Other income
Single woman	100%	0%	0%	18.18%	0%	25%
Widow	33.33%	25%	76.92%	45.45%	0%	0%
Married woman	0%	75%	15.38%	9.09%	100%	50%
Married man	66.66%	0%	7.69%	27.27%	0%	25%
Total	99.99%	100%	99.99%	99.99%	100%	100%

*Self Income (salary, own pension, family business, savings in bank)

**Spouse's income (pension/salary)

***Other income (savings in banks, MIS, rent, property)

From the above economic profile of the respondents, it is found that under both the categories category the elders were involved both in government sectors as well as private sectors. They were self-employed too, although the widows were found to be more unemployed. Their monthly income usually varies from Rs. 3000/- to Rs.10,000/- and in some cases it is Rs. 50,000/-. In most of the cases the source of the family income is business, from small scale to medium scale. Those elderly respondents who have their source of income from government jobs, they receive pension. The respondents who are widows have their source of income either from their husband's business or from their pension. Therefore, all the elderly victims have some or the other source of income, even if they are unemployed. So, it was easy for the perpetrators to abuse them financially because the perpetrators found out other sources of income by the elderly population.

Extent of elderly abuse

Marital status of elderly victims	Percentage of victims									
	Reported					Unreported				
	less than 6 months	6-24 months	2-5 years	5-10 years	more than 10 years	less than 6 months	6-24 months	2-5 years	5-10 years	more than 10 years
Single woman	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%	33.33%	0%	100%
Widow	0%	20%	60%	100%	100%	0%	45.45%	0%	0%	0%
Married woman	50%	40%	20%	0%	0%	0%	27.27%	33.33%	0%	0%
Married man	50%	40%	20%	0%	0%	0%	27.27%	33.33%	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	99.99%	99.99%	0%	100%

The elderly victims are suffering abuse for 3 to 10 years and in some cases even more than 10 years, sometimes on an interval basis. The extent of their suffering depended on their resistance as parents never think of complaining against their children. It is only when the extent of abuse reaches to such an extreme level that they are left with no other option than to file a complaint against their perpetrators.

It is found that females are more prone to abuse than their male counterparts irrespective of their complaints, as they are considered more likely to be dominated by men. In case of couple respondents, where both the spouses were subject to abuse, it is the male counterparts who requested their female counterparts to file the case under Protection of Women from Domestic Violence (PWDV) Act, 2005 as there is a specific legal provision for women. In this regard, the local police station also advised the same to the victims. In this case, the male counterparts often think that if the court gives any positive verdict to their female counterparts, then automatically they will also be relieved from abuse by their perpetrators. For the female widow victims, even when their spouses were alive, they neither reported nor filed any complaints against their perpetrators.

Types of elderly abuse

Marital status of elderly victims	Percentage of victims											
	Reported						Unreported					
	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4	Code 5	Code 6	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4	Code 5	Code 6
Single woman	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	33.33%	0%
Widow	100%	50%	100%	60%	33.33%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Married woman	0%	25%	0%	20%	33.33%	50%	0%	0%	0%	0%	33.33%	50%
Married man	0%	25%	0%	20%	33.33%	50%	0%	0%	0%	0%	33.33%	50%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	99.99%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	99.99%	100%

Code 1 – Physical + Verbal + Financial + Psychological + Neglect
Code 2 - Physical + Verbal + Financial + Psychological
Code 3 - Physical + Verbal + Financial
Code 4 - Verbal + Financial + Psychological
Code 5 - Verbal + Psychological + Neglect
Code 6 - Physical + Verbal + Psychological + Neglect

It is found that the respondents who officially reported against their perpetrators faced financial abuse (taking away money and/or property illegally, transferring the property without the knowledge of the holder, etc.) the most, followed by verbal abuse (using abusive language, calling by names, etc.). But the respondents who have not reported any case tried to adjust with their perpetrators, failure of which they were left with neglect. However, the common factor for both kinds of respondents is psychological torture (blackmailing, putting pressure for various reasons, filing false cases, etc.) that made them suffer a lot.

Perpetrators of abuse

Marital status of elderly victims	Percentage of victims													
	Reported							Unreported						
	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4	Code 5	Code 6	Code 7	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4	Code 5	Code 6	Code 7
Single woman	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Widow	100%	100%	42.85%	100%	33.33%	100%	0%	0%	100%	14.28%	0%	33.33%	0%	0%
Married woman	0%	0%	28.57%	0%	33.33%	0%	0%	0%	0%	42.85%	0%	33.33%	0%	0%
Married man	0%	0%	28.57%	0%	33.33%	0%	0%	0%	0%	42.85%	0%	33.33%	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%	99.99%	100%	99.99%	100%	0%	0%	100%	99.98%	0%	99.99%	0%	100%

Code 1 – Son/s only
Code 2 - Daughter/s only
Code 3 - Son/s & daughter/s-in-law
Code 4 - Son/s, daughter/s & daughter/s-in-law
Code 5 – Daughter/s-in-law only
Code 6 - Husband only
Code 7 - Relatives (brothers, sisters, niece, husband's family)

The respondents were abused by either the son/s or the daughter/s or by both, or by son and daughter-in-law. In most of the cases the elderly were abused by their son and daughter-in-law. But for the respondents who were unmarried or childless, it was the relatives who were the perpetrators.

Sons being the male sections of the society overpower their widowed mothers. As daughters by nature are emotionally connected, tolerant and understanding towards their parents, they are mostly found to look after their parents, with only a few being perpetrators. It has also been found that daughter/s-in-law alone are capable enough to abuse their in-laws without the aid of their husbands who happen to be the son/s of the victims.

Reasons behind abuse

Marital status of elderly victims	Percentage of victims									
	Reported					Unreported				
	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4	Code 5	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4	Code 5
Single woman	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	33.33%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Widow	46.66%	100%	71.42%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
Married woman	26.66%	0%	14.28%	0%	0%	33.33%	0%	0%	50%	0%
Married man	26.66%	0%	14.28%	0%	0%	33.33%	0%	0%	50%	0%
Total	99.98%	100%	99.98%	0%	100%	99.99%	0%	100%	100%	100%

Code 1 – To get hold of property only (house, land, business)

Code 2 – to get hold of money only

Code 3 – To get hold of both property & money

Code 4 – marriage related issues (adjustment problems, having no children)

Code 5 – other causes (not being able to repay the loan, being vocal against wrong doings, not taking the responsibility)

It is found that the respondents who reported the cases are of the opinion that it is the want of money or property (be it house, flat, land, business enterprise) that compelled the caregiver to abuse the elderly. Thus, greed for money, bank accounts, post office accounts, ornaments, taking possession of empty land, family pension, getting hold of business, raising voice against wrong deeds done by the perpetrators, sharing suggestions with near and dear ones on how to protect property, and putting pressure on the elderly either to transfer the property in their names or to get the property by any means are different reasons behind abuse. The perpetrators also pressurize the elderly victims to leave their own house and stay in a rented house or old age homes. But the elderly population who raised their voices against the abuse did not hesitate to report their complaints in the local police station or to file cases in the court against their perpetrators to get back the property (house, land, and business). They also demanded maintenance from their perpetrators and thus appealed to the court in writing for their sustenance.

In an urban setting, people have fast-paced life, always running around to beat the cut-throat competitive environment; there is shortage in terms of time given to people at home, especially the elderly members. This is leading to negligence of parents and other elderly members in the family, and in some cases, it is taking the form of abuse. The abusers, mainly the children of the elderly victims, are detached from the family environment due to their busy personal lives, deterioration of values like taking care of the elderly parents, and lack of emotional bonding that keeps the family united and functioning within the society.

There are several factors that lead to both intentional and unintentional neglect of the elderly which are cited below:

- Changing family pattern like breakdown of the traditional joint family is the major reason behind the scene. It forces the elders to stay alone. Moreover, massive employment of women also led to the same problem. Also, the families have become so small in nature that they are unable to provide the emotional support that is needed by the elders of the family.
- An individualistic style of living is to be blamed for this change in societal patterns. The children, in order to live separately, either move away from their parents' house or they send their parents to old age homes.

- High rate of rural-urban migration, decline in the rate of youth resources also led to the neglect of the elderly. The migration of Kolkata's youth to other cities in search of jobs, i.e. Bengal's brain drains cause loneliness among the elderly as they are left alone.
- A gap between the old and the young is also created due to inability of understanding between them on various issues. Sometimes degeneration of social norms and values lead the elderly to face abuse, isolation, and social abandonment. The young generation is more modern in its approach than the old generation and this creates a conflict of values between the two generations.

The study also reveals that there are mainly three reasons behind the increase in the number of cases of elderly abuse, viz., social, psychological, and economic. Socially, in the nuclear families of modern times the elderly parents are often regarded as totally useless as they, instead of maintaining the family, become dependent on others. They are rather treated as sources of money which is very much needed by the younger ones to satisfy their urge for career building and affluent standard of life. So, whenever the elderly parents refused to be puppets in the hands of their offsprings, the latter shade off their so-called civilized faces to use all sorts of violence against their parents in order to fulfill their selfish desires.

Psychologically, the parents suffer indignity and rude behaviour of their children because of their weak mental make-up. On the one hand, they become psychologically weak as a result of big cut in their income and weak health due to diseases. On the other, they fail to exercise power and authority over their sons and daughters that they could in earlier days. The sons and daughters also become ambitious and self-seeking. They know nothing but quick satisfaction of their own material desires. That is why they do not hesitate to inflict all sorts of abuses including physical assault on their helpless parents.

Economically, the most powerful factor is the growth of the market economy. Particularly in the period of globalization, market has crowned the Darwinian principle of survival of the fittest. In this age the weakest sections of the society are the senior citizens and children. But while the children have a whole future before them, the former, devoid of any rosy future, are doomed to fail in every respect. For, they are unfit for competition. This spirit also works inside the family where the poor parents deserve only backstage. The Durkheimian 'malady of aspirations' drives the young adults to the realm of anomy and alienation where being detached from society, they only think about themselves as rootless and normless beings. Naturally the elderly people have no place in this dehumanized society.

Awareness level of the victims

The respondents who have filed the case under PWDV Act were not aware of the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007. Their lawyers encouraged them to file the case under 125 Cr.Pc. i.e., Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973, though this law has now become obsolete. Earlier the local police stations encouraged the elderly to file cases under this law but now they also insist upon PWDV Act, depending on the gender of the victim. Hence, the respondents were totally unaware of the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007. On the other hand, the respondents who did not file any complaint against their perpetrators in the local police stations nor in the court never thought of doing so keeping in mind the prestige of the family members.

The elderly victims who are still living with their abusive children have no option left to move out of the family and let the world know about their family problems. They decided to tolerate the situation and continue to live with their abusive children. The victims are of the opinion that –
“*Ki hobe barir kechcha baire prokash kore? Doshira toh nijederi lok.*” (What is the point of bringing out the ugly scenarios of home in the public? The culprits are your own people.)

Outcome of abuse and neglect

All the respondents, no matter whether they officially reported or not, want to lead a peaceful life and expect legal interventions for their smooth living. They demanded separate laws for them as they were not aware of any such significant laws, strict vigilance from the local administration, smooth and profitable banking facilities,

and more elderly schemes for their better living. For giving protection to the elderly victims, the local police stations and the judicial system provided help to the elderly in every possible way, as they received support from the Protection officers under PWDV, lawyers, and even from various courts where the cases were filed.

The respondents who have filed the cases in various courts have either received relief from the court or are still struggling for the relief. To give protection to the elderly, in maximum cases the court has passed the order of giving maintenance to the elderly by their perpetrators and the maintenance amount is to be paid within a stipulated time period as fixed by the court. It is either the 7th or 10th day of every month that the maintenance amount must reach the concerned elderly, and in case of failure the court has the right to take action against the perpetrators. If a perpetrator disobeys the court order either willingly or unwillingly, then the court directs the local police station to arrest the perpetrator as a measure of punishment for not paying the maintenance amount.

In some cases, the verdict is pending in the court. The elders are eagerly waiting for the verdict in order to get rid of the torture. As the court procedure is a lengthy one and they all are aged people, they are always worried whether they will get a positive verdict from the court and if their health will permit them to see the positive verdict when it comes. They are keener to get solutions than to drag the matter in the court for a long time.

The implications of abuse cannot be measured in the parameter of the society. The elderly victims become detached from their families, thus creating a vacuum in the family. Thus, the physical and psychological well-being of the elderly is affected by social isolation, loneliness, and chronic health problems (both physical and psychological), while symptoms like tears, frustration, expressions of a desire to die and feelings of being stripped of self-worth and dignity are the common outcomes that are visible among the elderly victims. They even confine themselves to overmedication/over-sedation out of frustration, suffer from malnourishment (like sunken eyes, loss of weight, etc.) due to self-neglect as they are least bothered to meet the doctors or involve themselves in regular check-ups. It is also seen that the voice of the elderly victims is often subdued by their abusers/caregivers as they are not allowed to speak to anybody in the absence of their caregiver/s.

Suggestions to curb the problem of Elderly Abuse and Neglect

The cases of elderly abuse are very sensitive and thus the elderly population always try to keep their secrets within the fourfold of their houses. They fear that their family prestige or honour will be shattered if the secrets come out in public. So, they always try to restrict themselves from reporting their cases of abuse either in police stations or in courts. Now, in order to find out a solution to the problem and to help the elderly population live life in a peaceful way, the present researcher feels the need to put forward some suggestions -

- Keeping in touch with the elderly and proper counselling are needed to support the elderly – The family members as well as the informal caregivers should receive basic training to protect and care the elderly. They should also be given the lesson of ‘healthy ageing.’
- The parents often feel hesitant to complain against their children even if they torture them. Though various laws (Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens ACT, 2007, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, 125 CrPc) are available for their remedy, very few know about it. It is the need of the hour to create more awareness among the elderly in order to know about their rights and to raise their voice against any injustice caused to them. In this case, the role of NGOs and senior citizen’s forum is noteworthy in creating awareness by spreading the information of utilization of various laws and tribunals to fight against the abuse.
- TracFone for the elderly – the Government should give free cell phones to the senior citizens for emergency purposes as they spend a lot of time at home. They are encouraged to keep some neighbours on speed dial. The senior citizens should be allowed to have 60 minutes of talk time on a monthly basis and in case they need more time they can purchase prepaid minutes.
- Senior Rights helpline should be initiated and Social Security Cell should be set up in every police station. As per the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, registration for the elderly at respective police stations is a must and thus a separate wing called the Social Security Cell (SSC) is mandated to set up in every police station. As there is little awareness of senior rights, Helplines should be

initiated, and all major services need to be available to the elderly so that they do not run from pillar to post. It is mandatory to gather information about the senior citizens living in the jurisdiction of respective police stations. Each police station should send one personnel, dressed in plain clothes, to make door-to-door visit to collect information.

Conclusion

The present researcher had the chance to meet the elderly victims personally and talk with them, hear their stories, and suggest some measures for their peaceful living in the society. They were unaware of other elderly abuse cases but after meeting with the present researcher got to know of such cases. As they belong to an important and experienced section of the society, they put forward several suggestions for the people and the government so that their position in the society can improve and they can regain their dignity. They were also quite eager to know whether the government would give them any financial benefit for their cases against the perpetrators or would help them to solve their cases.

There is an urgent need for the society at large to think positively for the elderly population and to act collectively to curb the problem as soon as possible, otherwise it will penetrate deeply into the minds of the people and will jeopardize the existence of the elderly people, who happen to be important pillars of the society. Thus, the government and the administration should think positively about the elderly population and make the laws more stringent to save them from mistreatment by their perpetrators. Furthermore, to create an 'elderly-friendly' environment, the government and civic bodies need to come up with various schemes to enhance their participation in the mainstream society. This will open additional scope for research in this area. It is also necessary to motivate the elderly population to come out of their situation and live the 'sun-set years' of their life with dignity.

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