



Elder Abuse and Neglect: A Case study of Elderly Women in Vrindavan Ashram

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Abstract

The increasing population of the elderly in every part of the world has poses social, economic and psychological problems. The vulnerability of the elderly will be doubled if they are subjected to various forms of abuse. Therefore the abusive and neglectful behaviour towards the elderly is a matter of immediate concern which is to be solved. In this paper an attempt has been made to track the cases of increasing elder abuse. The study was conducted on five elderly women living in Vrindavan of Mathura district in Uttar Pradesh. The finding of the study revealed that the elderly women experienced different forms of abuse such as physical, mental, financial, etc, by their own children and relatives. Moreover they were taken alienated from their families and still they were happily coping up with their old age life.

Keywords: Elderly, Abuse, Neglect and Copping-up Strategies

Introduction

Traditionally in India, there was a norm of joint family and the elderly invariably lived with their son's family. The elderly in the families were generally provided respect and taken care of by the family itself (Gupta 2009). But people have never lived this long. The rapid industrialisation, urbanisation, westernization and growing individualism has badly affected the traditional joint families, the social cultural values and attitudes of the young generation (Mishra 1979). Now the youths are in great hurry to have every source of pleasure by totally ignoring the consideration of others (Jain 2008). Therefore such attitude can lead to indignity, abuse and neglect towards the

elderly (Khan 2004). Particularly the elderly women are ill-treated and abused in the families and exposed to violence of differing nature and magnitude (Chowdhury et al. 2014).

Elder abuse and neglect is not a new phenomenon in India. It is a complex problem that would confront societies. As ageing population is growing in number, so the consequences of abuse, neglect and exploitation (Gangadharan 2014). But for the elderly it is still unrecognised and insufficiently acknowledged due to lack of valid statistics and systematic collection of facts (Shankardass 2008).

Defining Elder Abuse



Elder abuse can be described as intentional actions that cause harm to the physical and mental well being of the elderly. It is a violation of human rights which affects the dignity and diminishes the prestige of a person (Ara Begam 2014). According to World Health Organisation (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”* (WHO 2002: 3). The term abuse consist of various dimensions such as, physical, sexual abuse, psychological, verbal, negligence, material and sexual abuse (Cohen et al. 2006).

Different Types of Elder Abuse

Physical Abuse: defined as the use of physical coercion to give physical injury and assault. Also the failure of the caregiver's to satisfy the basic needs and safe living conditions of the elderly.

Verbal or Psychological Abuse: defined as causing fear of violence, isolation or feeling of shame. Also includes getting pain, or distress through verbal or non verbal acts.

Financial abuse: defined as illegal or improper use of elderly money, property, or assets. **Neglect:** defined as a direct neglect to elder people, being left alone, isolated, or forgotten and indirect neglect to elder people by withholding of items that are required for daily living, such as food and medicine.

Material and methods

The study is based on a number of case studies conducted with the respondents from different social and economic background. The sample of the study consist of five female elderly in the age group of 60 years and above, residing in Mahila Ashray Sadan, Vrindravan (Mathura) for a minimum of three years. The narratives have been used as a technique to capture the subjective view point of elderly involved. Further the case studies have been interpreted on the basis of narratives shared by the elderly respondents during the field work with a view to arrive at the conclusion.

Objectives

To know the social and economic background of the elderly women

To know the different forms of abuse experienced by the elderly women

To know the causes of abuse and neglect

Case Studies

Case 1. Rajni Raghav (name changed) is a 71 years old widow by memorising her earlier days mentioned that: I have four sons. My husband died at very early age in an accident, since then I worked hard in my agricultural land and up bring my five sons. I have my own house in the town I



stay happily near my husband's relatives with my all sons. With the passage of time as my three sons get married things have started changing. I distributed my land among my four sons and the elder two sons also run their general store in the town itself. We all are living jointly but after the distribution of agricultural land and house my son's families started quarrelling with me. Now they did not want to adjust with me and my youngest son who is disabled and not married yet. At this time I am physically well and use to help my daughter-in-laws in the house hold chores, also help them in agricultural field and household chores. But after some time when I get ill and physically weak no one use to take care of me. I and my younger son were shifted to one small room in my house and daughter in -laws started giving me food on turn basis. I am suffering from arthritis but nobody listens to me. Moreover my sons keep on forcing me to shift to the ashram. They use to say that 'now you are too old; you must stop interfering in family matters and leave all pleasures of your living. As soon as you get involved in religious tasks you will get moksha'. I ignored all this nonsense and keep on staying in the same house with my young son. My young son has a mental disorder so I have to stay with him in the

same house. I cannot leave him. Each and every day my son's family members verbally abuse me and the day comes that they even denied me to serve meals. My grand children also use to insult me and forced me to leave home. One day my younger son fell ill due to hunger and cause death. Upon his death I get all alone and feel very isolated but still I am coping-up and staying in the same house, doing cooking and washing for myself with the money which I use to earn from the agricultural labour. I am very much disheartened with my son's attitude. One day I got a fight with my eldest daughter-in law, she physically hit me and then also in the same evening my eldest sons blamed me and take me out of the house. My dear since then I have taken refuge in this ashram and keep on going with this life. Here I used to prepare garlands and sell them in the temple near-by.

The above case shows that how the widow elderly women were misbehaved in her family. She was verbally and physically abused by her own sons on the issue of food and living arrangements. She distributed all the landed property and house among her sons then also they forced her to live alone in a deteriorating position.



Case 2. Gita Kushwaha (name changed) is a 68 years old lady from Murena stated that: Sometimes I belonged to a rich and prosperous family. My husband was a employee in irrigation department who passed away long ago leaving behind one daughter. My educational qualification is till 2nd class but still I got a fourth class job in my husband department after his death. I worked very hard and simultaneously played the role of both mother and father to brought up my daughter. I gave her a best and do as much as possible for her. I have my own house and property which my husband made for me. When my daughter was 20 years old she was a B-Tech 2nd year student in a private college. I paid a lot of donation to get her admitted in this college. During her college days she started coming late to home and not doing any of her studies. When I use to ask her anything she started frequent conflicts with me. Never listen to me and keep on arguing. Further I came to know that she had a boyfriend who had a bad reputation and involved in criminal and false activities. But my daughter was in complete catch of him. She gets married with him and somehow they both manipulate me to stay with them in the same house. I also thought of that she is my daughter, how I can be so rude for her

but I was wrong. As the days passes on they take me in trust and I transferred half of my property and house to my daughter name. Further my daughter husband asked me to hand over the remaining property to his name because he was still an arrogant and criminal type of man. He made my daughter in his side and then both of them scared me and mentally tortured me that if I will complain in police and go out of home then he will kill me. One night he dranked alcohol and used abuse language for me .that night he hit me very badly and forcefully take my signature on the property papers. My daughter also did not help me in the entire matter and asked me that if I want to save me life then I must find some other place to live. Now I am staying here in this ashram and sometimes my daughter come to meet me here but now I have no attachment with her. I am very much depressed because of her wrong doings and keep myself busy working in this ashram.

The above case illustrates that how the elderly women easily become the victims of financial and economic abuse. Due to the involvement of her daughter with the fraud and criminal type of person and also being elder and alone she was easily targeted for the mental, physical and economic abuse.



Case 3. Meenu Devi was a 64 year old, a resident of Mathura district. She stated that:

I had a small family of four members consisting of my husband, my two children and myself. My husband was a doctor but I am educated up to sixth class. Both of my children are well settled. My husband has divided his property into three equal shares, one for son, one for himself and one for me. We had two plots and a house in Mathura district, but situation become worse since my husband lost my son sold all the plots without any information. Somehow he also took out a huge amount of money from my account. Further he also demanded to transfer the remaining money left in the account and farmhouse to his name. I did not react to his wrong demands due to which frequent conflict resulted into physical violence against me. One fine morning my daughter-in-law and I had an argument on property related matters and on this my son and her wife catch my hand and push me down the stairs. I got hurt badly and kept on crying for help whole day. Then in the same evening one of my neighbours inform my daughter about the whole matter. She came next morning and took me to hospital. When I recovered, my daughter asked me

to stay with her but I refused her and shifted to this ashram with my friends and enjoying my life.

Again the above case illustrates that the elderly women experienced economic and physical abuse in her own family. It can be seen that how the alone elderly women is pressurized by her son to give up all her property and other assets in his hands.

Case 4. Sheela kumari (named changed) was an old man of 69 years from Rajasthan expressed her grief mentioned that:

My husband was a teacher in a government school. I have two sons. Sometime after my marriage, I and my husband started staying with my husband's elder brother in whose wife died of cancer when his son was 8 years old. I brought my brother-in-law son up and never made him feel the absence of his mother. I had a very happy life but after some years of my husband's death. Both of my sons had a petty business and they used to give me a lot of care and respect. But, unfortunately one day both of my sons met with a car accident and they got a on spot death. Since then I was staying with my brother-in law sons in a rented house. After his marriage we moved to a new house built by him. There they started treating me like a servant. I use to perform the entire house



hold task such as washing, cooking, dusting and cleaning. Beside this I also look after the new born baby. If sometimes I refuse to do some work the son and daughter-in-law and son of my brother-in-law get angry and keep on shouting the whole day and often used foul languages. They use to say that 'you are a big burden for us, if you will not work who will give you food and place to live free of cost'. As I was growing too old my health was deteriorating and I was fed up of doing household work. Then I decided to leave home and stay in this ashram.

This case reveals the mental and verbal abuse of the elderly women who had no children. Even in her old age she had to listen foul language and was forced to do work whole day.

Case 5. Sashi Verma (name changed) was a 77 years old lady. She narrated her story in the following words:

I have one son and three daughters. All are married and busy with their respective families. Six years ago, I and my husband were staying alone, far from our children. My husband was a retired pensioner. My husband was very caring towards me and we both lived happily. But after the death of my husband I was all alone and became physically weak. After few days of my

husband death my son and daughter-in-law called me to stay with them. I am an ill old woman and require regular medical checkups. Due to all this my son got fed-up of me and started getting angry every now and then. Both of my son and daughter-in-law started treating me invariably and keep on abusing me. All finances management of the house was in the hands of my daughter-in-law. She even took away all my pension payment and whenever I ask her for money she ignores me and usually says '*now it is time for you to quietly sit at home and do bhajans*'. If I argued with her, she denied to provide food to me and kept in complete isolation. One day I stole some money from her draw and came out of the house. Since then I am spending my life in this ashram. I distribute food to the tourist who came here and earn money for my survival.

This case reveals that above case the family had a resource but they never treated the elder women as the member of their family. Therefore the elder abuse and neglect in this case comprised of keeping the elder women in isolation, denying of medical treatment and taking away all her pension money.

Conclusion



The case studies in the above paragraphs presents a pictures of increasing elder abuse and neglect in Indian families and its effects on the mental and well being of the elderly women. It can be concluded that elderly women are more prone to the different kinds of abuse and neglect because they were left alone after the death of their husband and also due to the economic dependency on the other family members. Being elder is a process from which no one can escape so instead of ignoring and abusing the elderly particularly the elderly women one must take care and respect the elderly.

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