

VIOLENCE AGAINST THE ELDERLY PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

There has been abuse and imposition of violent and criminal acts against the elderly people not only in India but all over the world. In all kinds of societies, whether they are wealthy, affluent or socio-economic backward societies, elderly individuals do experience some or the other kinds of abuses and violent acts. These may assume a major form or a minor form; there have been different forms of abuses, physical, sexual, psychological, financial, neglect, or self-neglect. Some of the abuses may be extremely harmful and detrimental upon the elderly individuals, whereas some may be minor and may not inflict dire consequences. For instance, when an elderly individual is physically assaulted then this may impose dire consequences upon his health, mindset and overall existence; he may require medical treatment and becomes extremely defenseless and vulnerable. On the other hand, if an elderly individual suffers economic loss of a small amount of money which has been taken by a family member without informing him, he may feel disturbed but his disappointment may not assume a major form, this is termed as financial abuse of the elderly. The main purpose of this research paper is to look into the violent acts against the elderly individuals; the main areas that have been underscored are different forms of abuse, rates of crime against the elderly individuals, variables related to the violence against the elderly people, risk factors associated with elder abuse and violence, and the relationship between elder abuse and domestic violence. The older people who are unaware of their rights and when they are not provided with comprehensive, accurate and accessible information about the alternatives and the assistances that are available to them get more subjected to abuse and mistreatment; taking assistance and help from the organizations and other helpful and caring individuals may solve the problems of the elderly individuals so that they can make their living serene and peaceful.

Keywords: Violence, Abuse, Elderly People, Family Members, Neglect, Loneliness

INTRODUCTION

The abuse of older people by the family members has been an issue since ancient times. Until the beginning of programs to address child abuse and domestic violence in the last quarter of the 20th century, it remained a private matter, which was kept hidden from the public outlook. In the beginning, it was seen as a social welfare subject and consequently a problem of ageing, abuse of the elderly, like other forms of family and domestic violence, has developed into a public health and criminal justice concern. These two fields, the public health and criminal justice have therefore stated to a great level how abuse of the elderly is observed, how it is investigated, and how it is dealt with. In this research area, focus has been put upon the abuse of older people by family members or others whom they are familiar with, either in their houses or in inhabited or other institutional locations. It

does not take into account other types of violence that may be directed at the elderly people, such as violence by strangers, street crime, gang warfare or military conflict (Abuse of the Elderly, n.d.).

The abuse and violence against the elderly may be of physical nature, it may be psychological which may involve emotional abuse and infliction of mental aggression, or it may involve financial or other material mistreatment, this may involve illegal or improper exploitation of finances or resources of an older individual, sexual abuse and neglect, which may be denial or stoppage to fulfill the care giving requirements. Regardless of the type of abuse, it will definitely result in preventable suffering, injury or pain, the loss or violation of human rights, and a decreased quality of life for the older person. Whether the behavior is regarded as offensive, negligent or unfair will probably depend on how commonly the exploitation takes place, its time period, rigorousness and outcomes, and the most important of all, the cultural context (Abuse of the Elderly, n.d.).

DIFFERENT FORMS OF ABUSE

Against the elderly individuals, there has been prevalence of different forms of abuse and violence, which is also referred to as mistreatment of older adults; the classification of different forms of abuse and violence is stated as follows: (Neglect, Abuse and Violence against Older Women, 2013).

Neglect - Neglect is defined as the rejection, denial or failure on the part of the responsible caregivers to provide care to the older adults with assistance in daily living tasks or vital support such as food, clothing, shelter, health and medical care. This can also include abandonment of a care-dependent older adult, also called neglect. When care is not provided to the elderly individuals particularly in the activities of daily living, such as eating, bathing, dressing, toileting and transferring then it is termed as neglect, which is a form of abuse.

Physical Abuse - Physical abuse includes actions imposed upon the elderly people in order to cause them physical pain or injuries; actions of physical abuse includes pulling, shaking, pushing, throwing, slapping, hitting, or assaulting with a weapon or by throwing an object. Physical abuse always leads to bodily hurt and injury of older individuals which may be severe and rigorous for them. Physical abuse may even call for a medical treatment and proper care for the older individuals.

Sexual Abuse – This is the kind of abuse, which is also inflicted upon the older individuals, this can include unpleasant sexual behaviors as well as physical contact of sexual nature. Elderly women in most cases become victims of sexual abuse, in this form of abuse also, elderly women undergo rigorous consequences and physical as well as emotional hurt, it involves inappropriate contact with the person, in order to physically and emotionally harm her.

Psychological Abuse – This kind of abuse involves verbal as well as non-verbal abuse, this is considered to be the most common form of abuse which involves communicating with the elderly individuals in a harsh manner, speaking abusive language, screaming at them and the main purpose of this form of abuse is to inflict mental and emotional pain, misery, and torture upon an elderly

individual. Psychological abuse hampers the mental balance of an individual and makes him feel vulnerable.

Financial Abuse and Exploitation – This kind of abuse involves making an illegal or improper use of an elderly person's money, property and other assets. This involves forcefully taking the finances and other valuables from an elderly person without his or her consent, stealing and taking things without informing the elderly individual, this includes financial abuse and exploitation. Making the elderly individuals look after the household chores solely and not assisting them, using their money for each and every daily living activity is termed as exploitation of an elderly individual.

Self-Neglect – During old age, a person normally suffers from visual, hearing impairments, word usage and vocabulary begins to decline at the age of 70 and he does not possess the ability to meet his own basic requirements due to mental impairment and decreased abilities. This is termed as self-neglect when a person due to his old age, loses the ability to perform his daily life activities and quite often refuses the assistance that is offered by others; he becomes mentally depressed and pessimistic in his outlook.

RATES OF CRIME AGAINST THE ELDERLY INDIVIDUALS

For the period 2003-13, elderly persons above the age of 65 experienced nonfatal violent crime victimizations at lower rates that is 3.6 victimizations per 1,000 persons belonging to the age of 65 or older as compared to the younger individuals of ages 12 to 24 (49.9 per 1,000), persons ages 25 to 49 (27.6 per 1,000), and persons ages 50 to 64 (15.2 per 1,000). Nonfatal violent criminal acts include sexual assault, physical assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault. Each year, the elderly accounted for approximately 2% of violence and 2% of serious violence, which equals 136,720 violent crimes and 47,640 serious violent crimes. However, the elderly made up about 21% of the population during this time period. The main points that rate the violent acts against the elderly individuals have been stated as follows: (Morgan, 2014).

1. The rates of nonfatal violent crime that is 3.6 per 1,000 persons and property crime that is 72.3 per 1,000 against elderly persons were lower as compared to the individuals of younger age group.
2. The ratio of the estimates of property crime to violent crime was higher for the elderly individuals that are 13 to 1 as compared to younger individuals aged 25 to 49 that are 3 to 1 and individuals aged 50 to 64 that are 5 to 1.
3. Elderly homicide rates decreased to 44%, from 3.7 homicides per 100,000 persons in 1993 to 2.1 per 100,000 in 2011.
4. Individuals aged 65 or older experienced more incidents of identity theft that is 5.0% than individuals aged 16 to 24 that is 3.8%, but less than individuals aged 25 to 49 that are 7.9% and aged 50 to 64 that is 7.8%.

5. Among the elderly violent crime victims, about 59% are accounted of being victimized at or near their homes.
6. A smaller percentage of elderly victims that is 18% undergo a wound during the incident, as compared to victims of ages 12 to 24 which is 30% and ages 25 to 49 which is 25%.
7. The elderly individuals that account for 56% experienced occurrences of violent criminal acts and abuses and took measures in order to regulate and control them more as compared to the individuals of age groups of 12 to 24 which is 38%; there were no disparities identified with the elderly and other age groups.
8. About 11% of elderly victims of violent crimes received support and help from victim service agencies.

VARIABLES RELATED TO THE VIOLENCE AGAINST THE ELDERLY PEOPLE

There has been identification of several variables that are related to violence against the elderly individuals: (Prevalence Study of Violence and Abuse against Older Women, 2010).

Age – People who are in the age group of 80 and above feel more vulnerable to abusive treatment and violence; they experience more stern level of abuse when they are maltreated.

Physical Health – As a result of different forms of abuses, neglect, violence, verbal abuse, and so forth, the physical health conditions of elderly women tend to get affected. Elderly women feel easily strained due to these forms of abuse and their health conditions began to get influenced in an unconstructive manner.

Mental Health – When elderly individuals experience violence, their mental health also does get severely affected and women are influenced more as compared to men. The main symptoms that elderly individuals suffer as a result of affecting mental health are hopelessness, misery, depression, and despondency.

Marital Status – Elderly women who are married or divorced are more likely to be abused and experience violent acts as compared to women who are widowed or single. Women who are widowed or single may have less social circle and family members as compared to women who are married or divorced.

Household Income Management – Elderly individuals, particularly older women who possess the responsibility of household income management, experience neglect and violent acts on a large scale and as a result, their management of household income get rigorously affected.

Loneliness – Women experiencing violent acts and any kind of abuse or mistreatment may suffer from loneliness as compared to women who are not mistreated. As the rate of mistreatment and violent acts begins to increase amongst the elderly individuals the more the loneliness they experience.

Pressure and Anxiety – Elderly women experience violence and abuse tend to feel anxious, nervous, worried, uneasy, apprehensive, concerned, restless and fearful; they are not able to

implement any tasks or jobs in accordance to their own judgments and decisions. They often feel pressurized in order to fulfill certain tasks and duties and do not feel independent.

RISK FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH ELDER ABUSE AND VIOLENCE

There have been classifications of the following risk factors that are associated with elder abuse and violence: (Loughlin & Duggan, 1998).

1. Trans generational Family Violence – In ones family, there may be occurrences of major conflicts and disputes between the members of the household with regards to different issues such as education, career, jobs, business, marriage, property, power, control, authority, finances and so forth. These issues give rise of violence and abuse against not only other family members but also the elderly individuals of the household.
2. Dependency – The elderly individuals, when they have reached the age of 80 and above are dependent upon their household members and other care providers; in the cases of dependency, these individuals are either neglected or are even considered to be a burden and usually experience financial and verbal abuse. Therefore, it can be stated that dependency is a risk factor that is directly associated with elder abuse and violence.
3. Psychopathology of the Abuser – Any person who is involved in violent and abusive acts against the elderly individuals is not considered to be mentally sound and normal. He may perform such acts either under the influence of alcohol or drug abuse or he may be extremely frustrated or angry due to some reason. The influence of pathological family cultures has been a cause of violence and ruthlessness by offensive family members.
4. Stress – In a household, frequent arguments, fights and hearing of too much condemnation and criticism from the family members may lead to stress on the elderly individuals; when a elderly individual is not able to carry out his tasks and duties, when he is dependent upon the other individuals for the fulfillment of his needs, or when he is living alone and is vested with all the responsibilities to take care of the household, he feels stressed and constant worry.
5. Social Isolation – The elderly individuals when suffer abuse and violence become socially isolated and disengage themselves from the society and other people of the community. They get subjected to loneliness, which is also regarded to be a chronic and a distressful state particularly for the elderly individuals. Social isolation causes a decline in their health conditions and the abuser of the elderly individuals puts more restraints upon them from communicating with the outside world.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ELDER ABUSE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Elder abuse is a broad area; it includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse, financial exploitation, neglect, self-neglect, and desertion. The distinguishing context of domestic abuse during the later life stages is the offensive use of power and control by a spouse or a partner or any other person known to the victim. Domestic violence programs are possibly to have skillfulness and practices in a supportive manner to make provision of assistance to older victims that have experienced violent acts and various forms of abuse. On the other hand, there are the elder abuse networks, adult protective services systems that have tasks, responsibilities and authorities to protect vulnerable elders and adult people. These authorities have particular expertise for helping the victims with decreased decision making abilities or those who are not capable to protect themselves from further violence (Late Life Domestic Violence, 2006).

Domestic violence is considered to be one of the most prevalent forms of violence, which mainly elderly people suffer from; domestic violence in ones later life occurs when an individual makes use of authority and power to inflict physical, mental, emotional, or financial injury or harm upon the elderly person with whom they have a relationship. These individuals may include spouse, adult children, extended family members and in some cases even care providers and domestic helpers. The problems of domestic violence against the elderly individuals are prevalent in all societies, and mostly women as compared to men get affected, and they may belong to different ethnic, religious, cultural, racial and socio-economic backgrounds. There is a direct correlation between elder abuse and domestic violence; the usage of threats, intimidations, coercions, exploitations and violence are common in inflicting domestic violence (Late Life Domestic Violence, 2006).

DISCUSSION

Elder abuse is termed as the single or the repeated act or lack of appropriate action that takes place within any kind of relationship whether it is of husband and wife, parents and children, or terms and conditions with unrelated members such as domestic helps or other care providers. The people whom the elderly individuals trust and have confidence in, they normally inflict harm upon them; the violence and abuses are of different categories such as physical abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse, neglect, self-neglect, and domestic violence. Elderly women get more affected by these forms of violence and abuses as compared to men; the main consequences that they suffer as a result of physical abuse are stress, social isolation, loneliness, they feel more vulnerable, depressed and downhearted. The elderly individuals lose interest in activities that they used to enjoy and their health conditions get affected such as having pain in the joints, having high or low blood pressure, loss of appetite, weight loss etc.

Well educated and wealthy people always treat their elderly parents and grand parents with respect; the societies where individuals are not educated, they are residing in destitute conditions,

they are poverty stricken, deprived and suffer major financial problems in some cases, do inflict violent acts upon the elderly individuals and mistreat them. When an individual reaches the age of 80 and above, he does require help and assistance and when he experiences refusals and denials on the part of the care providers, he feels being abused. Elderly individuals more than any other form of abuse get subjected to financial abuse; these includes, simply taking the money and the valuables, borrowing and not paying back, simple refusals and rejections, denying services or medical care for the elderly people who do not keep good health, giving away and selling possessions and assets without their permission, misusing ATM and credit cards, forcing the elderly people to part with resources and sign over property, forcibly sending them to old age homes, and treating them as a burden.

All these acts may be imposed upon the elderly individuals in all kinds of societies, financial abuse may not inflict any injury or harm upon the elderly individuals but are regarded to be distressing. Elderly individuals normally suffer all these kinds of abuses and violent acts at the hands of their family members, which may be immediate or distant; though it is required that they be aware of all the knowledge and information regarding their security and welfare, there have been existence of organizations and agencies that possess the required skills and abilities to solve the problems of the elderly and help them in making their living peaceful and secure.

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