

PERCEIVED ELDER ABUSE IN COMMUNITY ELDERERS : A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Present study aimed to investigate perceived elder abuse at the community level in Chandigarh city. A door to door random survey was conducted by the researcher and a specially designed performa to record socio-demographic and clinical details of the elderly was recorded. A total of 100 participants were recruited to participate in the interview. They were further interviewed for their perception of elder abuse on the Elder Abuse scale which includes physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and financial abuse. The findings obtained from the survey were statistically analysed with the help of SPSS. Results and conclusion of the study were 71% elderly participated in the present study perceived emotional abuse; 36% perceived neglect; 24% of elderly reported financial abuse and physical abuse was reported by 18% of the elderly population. This implies that maximum number of participants perceived emotional abuse in terms of humiliation, threat, being treated like a kid and insult was the prominent issue in the elderly residing in the Chandigarh.

Key words : Abuse, Elder, Survey, Chandigarh

INTRODUCTION

Abuse of the elderly is not a new phenomenon. Elder abuse and neglect may occur in any setting such as rural or urban, private homes or within health care setting. Many forms of elder abuse exist including physical, psychological, financial, sexual and social neglect.

There are many derogatory stereotypes of older people: 'senile', 'crumbly', 'wrinkly', 'old git', 'geriatric'. But as Norman pointed out in her paper on ageism in 1987, 'we don't call a sick child a

paediatric or a woman having hysterectomy an obstetric.^[1] We learn to be old... we acquire the stereotype from literature, film and from the stage. Above all there comes a time when we are treated differently by the young. The stereotype of the old is pernicious but very effective, because it permeates the self-image of the older person.^[2]

There is now evidence of elder abuse from Greece, Hong Kong, India, Israel, Japan, Nepal and South Africa. Clearly, there is an increasing international awareness that the mistreatment of elderly people is a social problem assuming world-wide proportions.^[3]

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ELDER ABUSE IN INDIA

A study on Crime Against Elderly covered the elderly in the age group of 60+ years across 9 cities

viz Delhi NCR, Mumbai, Ahmadabad, Kolkata, Bhopal, Chennai, Patna, Hyderabad, and Bangalore with a sample size of 100 per city. The study showed that three fifth (60%) of the elderly reported verbal abuse as elder abuse while more than two fifth (48%) reported physical abuse constitutes elder abuse. Half of the elderly from the lower socio economic strata reported facing abuse because of lack of emotional support.^[4]

In another study perceived psychological abuse (59%) and social neglect (59%) were reported to be most common followed by financial abuse (25%) and physical abuse (25%) among elderly residing in rural areas of Ludhiana District of Punjab. It was also reported that perceived physical abuse was higher among elderly residing in rural areas, whereas perceived psychological abuse, financial abuse, and social neglect were higher among elderly residing in urban areas.^[5]

In recent report released by HelpAge India, half of the elderly (50%) are experiencing abuse in which Verbal Abuse (41%), Disrespect (33%) and Neglect (29%) are ranked as the most common types of abuse experienced by the elderly.^[9]

AIM

To investigate the perceived elder abuse at community level among elderly living in the Chandigarh city.

OBJECTIVES

To assess the presence and type of elder abuse at community level in the elderly living in the Chandigarh city.

METHODOLOGY

Sample - Survey method was employed in the study to recruit the participants in the present study. A total of 150 participants above the age of 60 years were contacted by the researcher at their residence through door to door survey on random basis. They were interviewed by a trained researcher who was given the (two weeks) extensive and specific training

in conducting the structured interview with elderly population in this sensitive area by the Faculty in Clinical Psychology who is looking after the geriatric mental health clinic in a tertiary hospital. Finally, 100 participants gave informed consent to participate in the study.

TOOLS

1. Socio-demographic and clinical data sheet : This sheet contained age, gender, occupation, education, marital status, type of house, living conditions, domicile and monthly income as its dimensions. The clinical data sheet included type of illness, family history of illness and its onset and course (medical illness or psychiatric illness or both i.e., Depression, Diabetes Mellitus, Hypertension).
2. Elder Abuse Scale^[6]: This test is made up of 15 items divided into 4 dimensions of Physical abuse, Emotional abuse, Neglect and Financial abuse.

Operational definition and type of elder abuse used in the study :

- **Physical abuse** : involves being hit, sexually assaulted, burned or physically restrained.
- **Emotional abuse** : involves the abused person being insulted, frightened, humiliated, intimidated or treated as a child.
- **Financial abuse** : includes misuse of property or money, theft, forced entry into a nursing home, financial dependence and exploitation.
- **Neglect** : Elder being left alone, isolated or forgotten, withholding of items necessary for daily living (food, medicine, bathing, companionship) and not providing care for physically dependent person.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 20. The analysis included frequency tables and descriptive methods.

RESULTS

Table 1 Depicting the socio-demographic and clinical characteristics and their frequency and percentages

Variables	Frequency (%) (n=100)
Age	
<70 years	58(58)
70-80 years	37 (37)
80 above	5 (5)
Gender	
Male	49 (49)
Female	51 (51)
Education	
Illiterate	20 (20)
Primary	16 (16)
Matric,	38 (38)
10+2	15 (15)
Graduation & above	11 (11)
Occupation	
Unskilled	11 (11)
Semiskilled	18 (18)
House wife	35 (35)
Retired	29 (29)
Pvt Jobs	7 (7)
Marital Status	
Married	63 (63)
Widowed	34 (34)
Divorced	2 (2)
Separated	1 (1)
House Type	
Own	82 (82)
Rented	11 (11)
Govt.	2 (2)
Old age home	5 (5)
Domicile	
Urban	60 (60)
Rural	40 (40)
Living	
Alone	8 (8)
With family	76 (76)
With spouse only	16 (16)

Variables	Frequency (%) (n=100)
Income	
Less than 10000 pm	25 (25)
Above 10000	75 (75)
Presence of Illness (Medical/Psychiatric)	
Yes	59 (59)
No	41 (41)
Family history of illness (medical or psychiatric i.e. Diabetes, Hypertension, Depression)	
Yes	22 (22)
No	78 (78)
Course of illness (medical or psychiatric i.e. Diabetes, Hypertension, Depression)	(n=59)
Episodic	4 (6.78)
Continuous	16 (27.11)
Fluctuating	4 (6.78)
Static	18 (30.5)
Improving	17 (28.81)

Results are presented in the table 1 in which majority of the participant's age was between 60-80 years of age and almost equal number of male and females were interviewed.

In case of clinical characteristics (table 1) more than half of the elderly were having some kind of psychiatric or physical illness out of which only around twenty percent were having any positive family history of illness. Amongst those who had any illness almost equal number had continuous, static and improving course of illness.

Table 2 Frequency of participants and type of abuse

Type of Abuse	Items	Yes (n=100)	Total
Physical Abuse	Are you afraid of anyone at home?	4	18
	Have you been struck, slapped or kicked?	6	
	Have you been tied down or locked in a room?	2	
	Has anyone touched you without your permission?	6	
Emotional Abuse	Do you ever feel alone?	30	71
	Have you been threatened with punishment, deprivation, or institutionalization?	8	
	Have you received the "silent treatment"?	8	
	Have you been force fed?	2	
	What happens when you and your caregiver disagree? <i>Subjective Response was interpreted in yes/no</i>	23	
Neglect	Do you lack aids such as eyeglasses, hearing aids, or false teeth?	8	36
	Have you been left alone for long periods?	3	

Type of Abuse	Items	Yes (n=100)	Total
	If you need assistance, how do you obtain it? <i>Subjective Response was interpreted in yes/no</i>	10	
	How do you get help? <i>Subjective Response was interpreted in yes/no</i>	15	
Financial Abuse	Does your caregiver depend on you for shelter or financial support?	18	24
	Has money been stolen from you?	6	

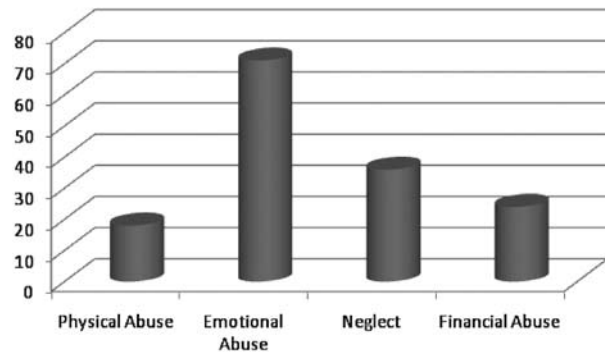


Figure 1 Bar diagram depicting type of elder abuse.

DISCUSSION

Study was carried out with the aim to investigate perceived elder abuse in elderly residing in community in the Chandigarh city. These findings presented in table 2 and figure 1 are consistent with findings of study conducted in Ludhiana about perceived abuse and social neglect among elderly in which psychological abuse (59%) and social neglect (59%) were most common followed by financial abuse (25%) and physical abuse (25%).^[5] These findings are consistent with study findings reported by Gaikwad et al. who conducted

a study on perceived abuse among elderly residing in rural areas of Bengaluru where perceived psychological abuse (71%) was the more prevalent form of abuse followed by financial abuse (37%) and physical abuse (14%) among elderly.^[7] Similar findings were also found in study conducted in the urban community of Chennai by Chokkanathan and Lee.^[8]

Although these participants were interviewed from the community on random basis, it is less likely that they were having any severe cognitive impairment; also almost half of the participants did not give consent because of various reasons such as not willing to tell, may be fearful of telling, may be not comfortable, may have suspiciousness etc. But the possibility of these problems cannot be ruled out for which a well systematised assessment is needed.

CONCLUSION

Almost, 71% elderly participating in the study perceived emotional abuse; 36% perceived neglect; 24 % of elderly reported financial abuse and physical abuse was reported by 18% of the elderly population. This implies that maximum number of participants perceived emotional abuse in terms of humiliation, threat, being treated like a kid and insulted. These were the prominent issues in the elderly residing in community in the Chandigarh city.

Future directions : The current study was a preliminary study in order to get the idea about

abuse among elderly and surprisingly elder abuse has come out to be a major concern in senior citizens residing in Chandigarh city. Sample of the study was less and not truly representative therefore, future research projects should focus on the factors affecting perception of abuse and identification of potential risk factors in a well representative sample using standardised tools and scientific methodology.

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