

Elder Mistreatment: Prevent it

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Abstract

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Elder mistreatment is growing problem worldwide. There are various factors associated with it such as generation gap, life style changes, chronic disabilities of elders, career ambitions of younger generation; all these factors have affected the care of the older people. Elder abuse may include physical, psychological, sexual, financial abuse and neglect. It can lead to different consequences physically, psychologically and financially. Awareness on the part of elders and members of the society is must to prevent elder abuse from happening. The reporting of the elder abuse and recognizing the signs of elder abuse are the other important aspects of elder abuse.

Keywords: Mistreatment; Abuse; Awareness; Neglect.

Introduction

An elder person is that who is of 60 years of age or older. The population of elderly people is increasing in India. According to a report, at present there are 77 million older people in our country and this is going to increase up to 177 million in the coming 25 years. This may be because the life expectancy has increased from 40 years to 64 years. It may affect the financial, shelter and health aspects of the care [1]. The generation gap between the younger generation and older generation, life style changes, chronic disabilities of elders, career ambitions of younger generation; all these factors have affected the care of the older people. The younger generation may perceive them as a burden than a responsibility which may lead to certain kind of elder abuse.

A study conducted Helpage India conducted a study to understand the elder abuse, its prevalence in different cities and perceptions of elderly. This study found that one third of the elderly experienced the elder abuse. Other findings of the study were; Most of the elderly population is financially dependent on others and many of them feel that the constituents of elder abuse are emotional abuse, verbal abuse, physical abuse, economic abuse and showing disrespect. Many of the elderly experienced

one or the other type of abuse with highest incidence reported in Bhopal, followed by Chennai and kolkata [2].

Definition

Elder mistreatment is also known as elder abuse. According to WHO elder abuse is defined as "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"[3].

Types of Elder Abuse

- *Physical Abuse:* This type of abuse refers to use of the physical force intentionally which may lead to the trauma, injury, acute or chronic illnesses, impairment of the functional abilities or death.
- *Sexual Abuse:* It includes the forced touching or non-touching kind of acts with the elder person. Any kind of unwanted sexual interaction comes under sexual abuse if committed against the incapacitated people who are incompetent to provide informed approval.
- *Psychological Abuse:* The verbal or nonverbal kind of behavior which may result in the anger, mental

Pain, anxiety, or distress among elders.

- *Domestic Violence*: Violence used by the care provider to exercise power and control.
- *Neglect*: If the care provider fails to protect an elder from harm, does not meet needs for necessary medical care, adequate nutrition, hydration, hygiene or cleanliness, clothing and shelter, which may lead to serious risk of compromised health and safety; comes under the neglect.
- *Financial Abuse*: This refers to the illegal or improper use of the elder person's resources by the care provider for the benefit of others than the elder person [4].

Consequences of Elder Abuse

- *Physical Effects*
 - Wounds and injuries
 - Physical pain
 - Sleep disturbances
 - Susceptibility to new illnesses
 - Exacerbation of preexisting health conditions
 - Increased risks for premature death
- *Psychological Effects*
 - Increased levels of distress and depression.
 - Increased risks for developing fear and anxiety reactions
 - Helplessness
 - Posttraumatic stress disorder
- *Sexual Abuse*
 - Bruises around breasts or genitals
 - Genital infections or STDs
 - Unexplained bleeding from anus or vagina
 - Torn and bloody underclothing
- *Neglect*
 - Unusual weight loss
 - Malnutrition and dehydration
 - Untreated physical problems e.g. bed sores
 - Unhealthy living conditions: dirt, bugs, soiled bedding and clothes
 - Unhygienic conditions such as left dirty or unbathed
 - Unsuitable clothing in accordance with weather

conditions

- Risky living conditions
 - *Financial Exploitation*
- Sudden changes in financial condition of older person
- Doubtful changes in wills and power of attorney
- Pending bills or lack of medical care
- Cash or items stolen/missing from home

Prevention of Elder Abuse

Recognizing the Signs of Abuse

- *In an Older Adult*: Be watchful for an older person who seems to be in the problem situation but is reluctant talk about it or answer the related questions. Also look for hungry & unclean appearance, scared of his or her caregiver, bruised, ill/sick, neglected, or often confused, all these factors indicate abuse. Other factors to consider are; lack of interest in activities that he or she used to enjoy, or strange nervousness.
- *In a Caregiver*: If the caregiver tries to dominate an older adult and is verbally or physically abusive to the older person, it indicates the abuse.
- *In the Home*: If an elderly person or caregiver does not allow the others to come to their home then there may be a problem. Other signs include an accumulation of newspapers and mail, home in a state of disrepair, odd noises or bad odors coming from the home [5].

The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior

It extends to the whole of India except the State of Jammu and Kashmir and it applies also to citizens of India outside India. After being passed by the parliament of India received the assent of President of India on December 29, 2007 and was published in the Gazette of India on December 31, 2007. According to this act it is the legal obligation for children to provide maintenance to senior citizens and parents, by monthly allowance. This Act also provides simple, speedy and inexpensive mechanism for the protection of life and property of the older persons [6].

International Day of Elderly

This day is celebrated on 1st of October to appreciate the contributions of elderly people to the society and also to raise the awareness regarding the

issues of elderly such as elder abuse [7].

Responsibilities of Care Giver to Prevent the Elder Abuse

- Request for help from others (friends/relatives/ local care agencies)
- Find an adult day care program
- Stay healthy and never necessary get medical care
- Indulge in stress reduction activities
- Seek counseling/help for depression
- Find out support group for caregivers of the older persons
- In case of drug or alcohol abuse, seek help.

Responsibilities of Concerned Family Friend to Prevent the Elder Abuse

- Watch for the warning signs of elder abuse and report accordingly.
- Check the elder's medications, amount in the vial and date of the prescription
- Watch for possible signs of financial abuse.
- Try to visit or call the elderly person as often as you can.

Responsibility of the Elderly Person

In case of the elder abuse, it is the responsibility of the elderly person to report it. Reporting to a trustable person (family member/family friend/doctor) is essential.

Conclusion

Elder mistreatment and abuse has become a major health concern. Magnitude of the problem is still underestimated. The routine screening of the elderly

persons must be done to assess for the elder abuse. Mass awareness programmes must be organized to create awareness about elder abuse. Government funding schemes must provide for all the essential requirement of life.

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