

Old Age Challenges

Paper Submission: 15/12/2020, Date of Acceptance: 25/12/2020, Date of Publication: 26/12/2020

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Abstract

As per Indian National Policy on old persons 1999 Senior Citizen or elderly person is one who attains the age of 60 or more. Elders are highly vulnerable to abuse and more prone to harassment. Ageing begins at conception and ends with death. Ageing refers to change in biological, psychological, and socio-cultural processes. Biological ageing refers to bodily changes such as graying of hair, loss of teeth, short of sight, trouble in knees, general decay in health. Psychological ageing is said to have been known as decline in mental abilities and deficiency in inbuilt qualities that ultimately lead to depression. Elders become shy and feel underrated because of ill-mannered behavior of family members. Socio-cultural ageing refers to the change in behavior of family members who indulge in misbehave, rough handling and torturing elders.

Keywords: Old age, Elderly people, Abuse, Neglect

**Introduction
Problems**

In India one out of every three elderly persons is neglected or ill treated by their own family members especially their daughter in laws and sons. Family members use violence against the elder because they have no fear of being hit back. Violence against the elder is a violation of human rights, denial of leading a dignified life and is a significant cause of illness, injury, loss of productivity, isolation and despair. Elders are victimized by the person who is in a position of power and control over them. In the past, our old persons were considered to be the key persons. They enjoyed honor, respect, and legitimate authority within family and society. Today the old social structure has been broken. Most of the family members object to any substantial assumption of authority by old persons. They are viewed as a non-productive and dependent lot. Majority of elders are unaware of their rights and entitlements. They are ignorant about currently available redress mechanisms hence they are compelled to listen to bad names and tolerate injustice done to them. If family members know about the mechanism, they pretend as if they are unaware of them. On the other hand, if elders are aware of the mechanism some of them prefer not to spoil the dignity of the family, others are afraid of rude behavior, unordered functioning of police and social tyranny. They keep themselves away from lodging complaints with the police. Purposefully or inadvertently seniors impose self-isolation on them.

It has rightly been said that we start dying the day we are convinced. Ageing is accepted as a natural part of one's life cycle. Decay in health is the main problem that elders face. Deterioration in health is aggravated because of non-availability of nutritional diet and denial of necessary health care system. As such old persons are not in a position to generate an adequate income and earn enough money for survival. They need financial support to fulfill their essential requirements. If they are not met, then most of them live in isolation.

Today industrialization has promoted consumerism. Younger generation is attracted towards the constant marketing campaign to buy more. More buying needs more money. For a man having a limited source of income, it is hard not to crack for him to save more and buy more. In such a situation one has to borrow funds. If borrowings are not repaid in time that may lead to spiraling indebtedness. This makes the behavior of the borrower bitterer, family becomes disrupted, envy aroused, tension exacerbated, values derecognized, ultimately elders become prey to victimization. Handicapped, ugly, demanding elders are at a greater risk of being abused by family members, whereas they require physical, mental, and emotional care and support. If they are left uncared and unattended, they will be forced to live in isolation.

Aim of the Study

It is very difficult to define old age. There is no general acceptance of the age at which a person becomes old. By and large it is not equivocally said that a person attains the age of 60 is an old person. Mentally sound, full of humor, playful, sex-ridden, stormy storyteller, full of thrill person cannot be called an old person. In spite of this phenomenon public perception proclaims it is a social tangle. Hundreds of thousands of elders in India are abused, neglected, and financially exploited. Not only the person who has no money in pocket, no income in store but the pensioners is also prey to abuse.

Abuses

1. Physical abuse occurs when an elder is scratched, bruised, fractured, bitten, slapped, pushed, hit, burned, assaulted, or threatened with a weapon like knife, gun, stick or human bite and has lacerations and abrasions.
2. Sexual contact against an elder's will; intentional touching through clothing; touching of genitals, anus, groin, breast, inner thigh, buttocks are sexual abuses.
3. Psychological or emotional occurs when elders feel humiliation, embarrassment, social isolation, loss of property.
4. Financial abuse or exploitation is the improper use of elder resources such as forgery, misuse, theft, compels to surrender finances or property.
5. Neglect is the failure to protect the elder from harsh conditions such as providing no adequate nutrition, hygiene, clothing, and shelter.

Review of Literature**Consequences**

Decay in health, paucity of funds, arrogance of Youngers, change in lifestyle and deteriorating values of nuclear family structure are responsible for neglecting elders. They live in fear. They are virtually confined in small rooms under inhuman conditions and most unhygienic surroundings. Their splendid buildings, attractive belongings and farmhouses either are sold or taken into custody by family members. Now living in such hazardous conditions elders suffer from chronic diseases such as tuberculosis, asthma, bronchitis. They are mercilessly discarded by the family members. Some elders are forced to beg on streets and are languished. This is a failure-to-thrive syndrome. The tortured elders may appear retarded, may be unwilling to participate in activities, may run away, may have poor peer relationship, may indulge in delinquent behavior.

Behavioral characteristics of emotional abuse are habit disorders such as biting and then weeping; conduct disorder such as cruelty and destructiveness; neurotic traits such as sleep disorders, behavior extremes such as extremely passive or aggressive attempted suicide.

When an elder begins to lose control over his/her body he/she becomes insecure, walks staggeringly, delivers faltering speech, gnashes teeth in anger, and becomes schizophrenic. He/she needs physical and moral support. Losing self-confidence results in lowering self-esteem among elders. They have a complex etiology. Self-worth and value can be

improved by encouraging the elder to take part in family and society activities, to share their experiences and skills with family members. Isolation is a terrible feeling if not addressed leads to tragic deterioration in quality of life. Handicapped and demanding elders are at a greater risk of being kept in isolation and are afraid of being beaten. Emotional instability and behavioral disturbances can affect social values engendering age conflict and fostering anti-social values.

Though elder abuse is not a new thing, elders in Indian society have been victims of humiliation, torture, and exploitation for as long as we have written records of family life but today their condition is pitiable. In spite of the legislative measures adopted in favor of elders, spread of education countless elders still continue to be victims of violence. Humiliated and tortured elders feel that only counter violence facilitates their voice to be heard but shabbily dressed weak and diseased old persons cannot dare to go that extent and cannot become rebellious, revolutionary irrational and indisciplined. Therefore, they have been left with no other alternative than to surrender to the wills of family members. Family members then indulge in blackmailing, threatening, irritating, torturing, humiliating the elders snatching their happiness, independence, and mental peace. Elders are compelled to surrender to depend on the perpetrator's demand. If daring elders want to revolt against thy will of the family members and have the courage to fight unto the last, no one can snatch their property, no one can humiliate and punish them. Law will help them. But delayed justice, aggressive attitude of family members prevailing loneliness, loss of sense of belongingness and continuously advancing age are the contributory factors for their failure. Failure of social institutions to instill and establish confidence among those failed elders aggravates their miseries. If they win the battle age identity tends to diminish.

Suggestions

To optimize the use of available skill and experience of aged persons society should take up and in-depth exercise. Elders should be included in all activities of family. Those involved in elder care can play a significant role in making elders active through counselling. Very little is needed to make elders people happy who are weak and dependent. They should not be uncared and unattended. Elders should spend so much time improving themselves that they have not time left to criticize others. Despite all odds their strong will to live with grace will drag everything in their favor.

In fact, there is a feeling that very little has been done for safeguarding elders. While there is ample justification for providing facilities to elders then by itself is not enough. Ensuring that elders not merely live longer, but lead a secure, dignified, and productive life, the government of India enacted the act in 2007 but little has been done. There is neither the will nor the skill to implement the provisions of the Act in letter and spirit for safeguarding the interests of elders family members are advised to follow the maxim that –

1. Before harassing and assaulting elders go into an in-depth study about the attitude and behavior of your own children what they think of you?
2. Before you neglect and keep your elders in isolation think of the prestige bestowed upon your family only because of your elders.
3. Before you drag your elder in a scanty muddy hut, think over it, will your soul not cry in the splendid house you are living in once built by your elder?
4. Before you leave your elder to strive for food imagine what will happen when your children will force you to beg on the street?

“What this life is full of care we have no time to stand and stare” if you care and motivate the elders rather than ignore them their skill and experience will help you in gaining respect and appreciation. You should take strict action against errant family members. Elders who suffer from fear need to be reassured. Those with real fear and its preventive measures need to be identified followed by appropriate action where and when possible. It will enhance the prestige of your family. If a heavily drunkard family member assaults an elder it is important here is the act of the drunkard, and the reaction of the society. the family should keep away from such a brutal attack. Elders can be motivated to carry out productive activities of their interest which are useful to them.

Though some of the women attain the age of 60 or more, yet their fair color, attractive and ornamental dress, hair style, body posture and smiling face remain charming and attractive. Sensible persons prey to God for their safety. But the incidence of these old women getting raped, abducted and murdered by cruel criminals and notorious persons are on the increase. Crime suspect women are raped by fail superintendent and police officers, women patients by hospital personnel, maid servants by their masters, daily wage earners by contractors. Even deaf, dumb, lunatic, blind, beggars are not spared. They face anxiety, depression, distress and low-esteem. it is the duty of the family members to take utmost care of them. At least one family member should accompany the old women as and when she wants to go out of the house for a specific purpose. If it is not possible for the family then government agencies or social workers should come forward for safeguarding their dignified lives. If family members are afraid of constant outrageous behavior of perpetrator, actured status and notorious personality of criminal then the victim will accept that she has no right to protest. Each woman lives in a social environment composed of different persons with varied perceptions and expectations. One can only pray to god to save her.

Whether or not an elder is exploited, elders should fulfill some obligations towards society. It is expected of an elder that before you complain against your daughter-in-law and son- think of the anxiety of an issueless couple. Before you complain about the taste of your food, think of someone who has nothing to eat. Before you argue about your dirty house think of a homeless person. Before you think of saying

bitter words, think of the miserable condition of your kith and kin. Before you complain about your miserable life think of someone who went too early to heaven.

An elder who used to spend lavishly on goods and services for maintaining social status now is more likely to have a pretty chance of getting such facilities because of the fact of being a personality factor is ignored, social status is snatched and spending on essentials is treated as conspicuous consumption. An elder should go on compromise with whatever is available. Obviously, the basic problem is excessive spending on food articles, clothing, rents, transportation and electricity and water services resulting in less savings. In such a situation family members are compelled not to pay any head to the demands of elders. If the family members earn more hence save more but pretend to have less in hand elders have nothing to demand. They come in low priority zones; their demands remain in low level. As such if they feel ignored, they should move to an old age home, where if this facility is not available then God will help them.

Identification

Elder abuse or neglect contains 71 items grouped in 9 categories – physical assault, excessive restraint, putting health at risk, failure to give care by someone acting as a paid or unpaid caretaker under pressure, humiliating behavior, abuse in an institution, material exploitation, verbal humiliating. In fact the concept of elder abuse and neglect is developed when an elder is identified with his exclusion from the labor market and with a perception that his role in society is limited.

Preventive measures

15 June is recognized “United Nations World Elder Abuse Awareness Day”. Millions of people around the world organize events to raise awareness about this global injustice “our rights do not change as we grow older. Sadly, what does change is that older women and men are considered to be inherently less valuable to society”. Said Help Age CEO Richard Blewitt. Elder abuse spans a broad spectrum. It ranges from physical violence to the neglect of elders. There has always been lack of attention on the part of governments towards this social problem. Older people’s rights are protected under international human rights law, but as the existing commitments are not enshrined in human treaties governments have no legal obligation to implement them. A new convention on the rights of older people is necessary to bring about this change. It would provide governments with a legal framework, guidance, and support to help them protect older people’s rights. Little is known about elder abuse in India. Greater importance must be attached to prevention of abuse. The population of elders is increasing in India by leaps and bounds. It is expected to increase this population more than 10 percent by 2021. There is a need to initiate requisite appropriate programs and policy intervention on the part of the government to ensure life and dignity for its senior citizens. Ensuring that the elders not merely live longer, but lead a secure, dignified, and productive life, the government

of India enacted an act in 2007. The main purpose of bringing out this act was to provide for more effective provisions for the maintenance and welfare of parents and senior citizens guaranteed and recognized under the constitution and for matters connected therewith or thereto. The act provides for –

1. Maintenance of parents/seniors citizens by children/relatives made obligatory and justiciable through tribunals.
2. Revocation of transfer of property by senior citizens in case of negligence by relatives.
3. Penal provisions for abandonment of senior citizens.
4. Establishment of old age homes for indigent senior citizens.
5. Adequate medical facilities and security for senior citizens. The Rajasthan government notified the act and made rules in 2010.

As per rules maintenance would include provisions for food, clothing, residence, medical attendance, and treatment.

Earlier the national policy on older persons was announced in January 1999 to reaffirm the commitment to ensure the wellbeing of the older persons. The policy envisages state support to endure financial and food security, healthcare, shelter, and other needs of older persons, equitable share in development, protection against abuse and exploitation and availability of services to improve the quality of their lives.

Conclusion

Much has been done on paper, but little seems to be done in practice. Emphasis should be given and importance should be attached in resolving the problems facing seniors. Media can play a better role therefore should take the initiative to popularize the provisions of enacted laws relating to general improvement in the healthcare system, maintenance, and welfare of senior citizens. Merely announcing the national policy on older persons and enacting laws for the seniors is not enough, rigorous efforts must be expected to be done for effective implementation of laws. Elders are thrown away from their own houses, their properties are attached, and belongings are sold. Helpless elders have no option but to see with their

naked eyes and face consequences. Forcefully thrown away elders after being stigmatized choose not to live in the world that gives nothing but shock and pain. If some of them try to get entry in old age homes they cannot get success. It seems that old age homes are meant only for the upper caste and privileged class. Victimized and suppressed elders cannot move hence cannot lodge a complaint against the errant. Their anger emanates from their heart. Officers concerned *Suo moto* act against the perpetrator. Efforts should be done for renewing, redeeming, restoring, reviving, and revitalizing elders' lives.

Elders must admit that when they interrelate violence with their rude behavior then they are at fault. They must refrain from interfering too much in the affairs of family members, having illicit relations with someone, indulging in backbiting, and criticizing family members. They must appreciate achievements of family members; play with small kids; tell them sensational achievements, stories, and experiences; ignore sarcastic remarks.

Social workers should try to educate people, make the public aware of the provisions of recently enacted laws and help the elders in leading dignified lives. The reengineered environment process will definitely be conducive to keep pace with the fast changing socio-economic scenario and also to address the emerging concerns of the aged persons.

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