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ABUSE, VIOLENCE AND CRIME AGAINST ELDERLY WOMEN IN MODERN INDIA



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ABSTRACT:

The cases of abuse against the elderly women are rising fast across India as 50% elders experience abuse, with Women as being more vulnerable with 52% facing abuse as against 48% men (Help Age India report on Elder Abuse in India, 2014). This study is based on case study research approach to explore qualitatively, the types of violence and the nature of reasons behind the abuse elderly women face at hand of their family members. Various Cases are collected from newspapers and various secondary sources. The study is conducted through the framework of feminist and sociological perspective. It has been seen that abusive individual use violence and abuse to gain and maintain power and control during the last years of elderly women making the life of elderly women very complicated.

KEY WORDS:

Abuse, Violence, Status of older widows, power control theory, abuse.



Shikha Kumari

INTRODUCTION:

Every society has one gender that is dominant on other genders. This is a universal phenomenon for every society. Our Indian society is a patriarchal (male dominated) one, that exploit or abuse the other gender (female) directly or indirectly. Women of any age are the victims of violence in the form of acts like Acid throwing, Breast ironing, Bride burning, Dating abuse (Date rape), Domestic violence, Marital rape, Domestic violence and pregnancy, Dowry death, Honour killing, Female genital mutilation, Female infanticide, Femicide, Foot binding, Forced abortion, forced not to do abortion, Forced pregnancy, Forced prostitution, Genocidal rape, Human trafficking, Murder, Rape, Pregnancy from rape, Sati, Sexual slavery, Sexual violence etc.

The emphasis of this paper is only on elderly women. The term "elderly" is related with the age of the woman and it has differences and diversion from society to society. Some society says 50 plus (As far back as 1875, in Britain, the Friendly Societies

Act, enacted the definition of old age as, "any age after 50") age is elder but most of the society follows 60 plus age criteria for the elder people. As per the United Nations following procedure, 60 plus age is the criteria for the elder people. But as per The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizen Act, 2007, India, "Senior citizen" is any citizen of India of 60 years and above whether living in India or not. So in accordance with The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizen Act, 2007, India, this paper follows the 60 and above years criteria for elderly women. India's demographic manifestation shows an escalating growth in elderly population. The population of elderly of age group 60-99 years was 76.5 million in 2001; it went up to 103.2 million in 2011. India with 77 million is the second largest home for the elderly in the earth next to China with 127 million. By 2031 India's aged population will be 179 million and by 2051, it will increase to 301 million.

There has been little attention to date to the neglect, abuse and violence against older women. The cases of abuse against the elderly women are rising fast across India as 50% of elders experience abuse, with women as being more vulnerable with 52% facing abuse as against 48% men (Help Age India report on Elder Abuse in India, 2014). These cases have certainly affected the way of life and sense of wellbeing of the elderly women to a large extent in the family as well as in the society. While elder abuse has been the object of many studies, abuse of older women has had only modest attention in the gender-based literature. The United Nations Special Report on Violence against Women observes that the inequality and discrimination experienced by women intensifies with old age. Discrimination against older women on the basis of age and gender can result in situations where they experience neglect, abuse and violence.

Most of the studies on elder abuse till now are quantitative in nature. They are not sufficient to explain the nature of violence. The purpose of this study is to explore qualitatively, the types of violence and the nature of reasons behind the abuse elderly women experience.

Main forms of abuse include physical, sexual, psychological (also called emotional, verbal and non-physical), financial (also called material) exploitation, neglect, and violation of personal rights.

To analyse the cases, the researcher has employed Power and Control Theory of feminism (Hagan, Gillis, Simpson, 1988)-

Power and Control Theory highlights the abuser's use of a pattern of coercive tactics to gain and maintain power and control in the relationship. There is also a power difference between older adults and younger adults. Stemming in part from ageism, in Power and Control theory, perpetrators often believe they have exclusive rights entitling them to mistreat and/or neglect the older adult. From this perspective, elder mistreatment does not result from the increased needs of the victim but from the "deviance and dependence of abusers" (Pillemer & Finkelhor, 1989). Feminist theory in violence emphasizes gender and power inequality in opposite-sex relationships.

This study is based on an interpretative framework under qualitative research approach as it provides a flexible framework to understand the reasons of the problem of abuse and violence experienced by the older women. Cases are collected from newspapers and various secondary sources as magazines, internet etc.

Cases of Neglect, ignorance and insult- Case 1-

60 years old female was staying with her family. The perpetrators of abuse were her both daughters-in-law. She was neglected, insulted by her family members when alone and also in front of others. She was not taken for treatment when ill or given medications as per the doctor's advice. She

did not have any financial support from family. She was an authoritative woman and had problems with adjustment with her daughter-in-laws.

Case 2-

A 75 years old widow residing with her younger son was called by her elder son to inaugurate a community water cooler on her husband's memory. She was totally ignored to the extent that the guests on her either sides were served refreshments while she was completely neglected .

Case 3-

A 65 year old widow belonging from an upper socioeconomic condition was neglected by her all five children. They were willing to provide monetary support but did not provide any moral and emotional support that was needed

Case 4-

A widow of middle income economic background, residing with her son and daughter-in-law was suffering from neglect. She cooked her own meal, no one spoke with her and they were least interested in her

Case 5-

A 62 year old widow faced neglect, emotional torture and insult from her sister-in-law (husband's sister) and her nephew (elder sister's son). The abuse from her sister-in-law was started from the time she came to the house after marriage. Her sister-in-law made her do all the household work like cooking, cleaning, washing of clothes etc. and she looked after her ill and old father- in- law. She was forced to cook meat despite of being a vegetarian. After her husband death, one time she fell ill and was hospitalized by her brother (not by her sister-in-law, with whom she was residing). When she recovered, her sister-in-law did not allow her to enter the house. She was insulted and humiliated. Then she went to her elder sister's house where she stayed for a few months. There too she was ill treated by her nephew, who always ask her for money that she received as her husband's pension. Whenever she resisted he used foul language with her .

Case 6-

Female, 69 year old, widow, residing with her son and daughter-in-law, belonging from upper middle class faced abuse and neglect from her daughter-in-law. Her daughter-in-law made it clear that they (son and daughter-in-law) would not take any responsibility for her. She had to manage on her own, was made to cook her own meal and do all her work by herself in spite of having a housemaid at home. She had no communication with her daughter-in-law. If she asked any question, she was replied in a disrespectful tone. If some relatives visited her, she was insulted in front of them without any reason .

Cases of personal rights violation-

Case 1-

Female, 68 years old, widow, staying with her son was not allowed to meet her friends and close relatives since the past four months, when her son got married .

Case 2-

A widow of 70 years of age was facing neglect in the hand of her son and daughter-in-law. The elderly lady had a habit of early rising and doing her worship that disturbed her daughter-in-law's sleep. The lady was vegetarian, so she cooked her meal separately but her daughter-in-law made it clear that there can't be two sets of utensils at the same house. So she had to cook her meal in the same utensils in which non-veg was cooked .

Case 3-

Female, 69 year old, widow, residing with her son and daughter-in-law, belonging from upper middle class faced abuse and neglect from her daughter-in-law. She has to take permission from her son and daughter-in-law to do anything .

Cases of verbal abuse-

Case 1-

A widow of middle income economic background, residing with her son and daughter-in-law was suffering from emotional torture and verbal abuse from the hand of her son and daughter-in-law for money and land. She used foul and abusive language with her .

Case 2-

A 77 year old widow staying with her nephew (husband elder brother's son) was facing emotional and verbal abuse from her nephew and his wife for money. Her nephew's wife conducted coaching classes and dance classes and those classes were held in her room. She could not sleep till the classes were over as she had no access to any other room. She also had to bear her nephew's wife cutting remarks silently .

Cases of Physical abuse-

Case 1-

A 70 year old widow, residing with her son and daughter-in-law was physically abused by her son. Her son was a violent man and hit her with leather belt, whenever she turned down his demand for money .

Case 2-

80 year old female widow had 5 sons. She stayed with her 3 sons in rotation for few months; the other 2 sons were settled abroad. She use to work in their houses but not was treated properly. Her younger daughter-in-law use to beat her occasionally and his son always took his wife's side. She was beaten so brutally that her hand got fractured. After this she refused to go her youngest son house and it angered her other two daughter-in-laws. They refused to allow her to come in their homes too .

Case 3-

A 75 year old female widow, staying with her two sons was physically abused by them. They sold her house and divided the money between themselves. They treated her well until her share was not transferred to them but once the transfer was done; she had to do all the household chores and was beaten badly occasionally .

Case 4-

An 80 year old woman was physically abused by her relatives to give them her gold jewellery worth around 90,000 rupees. The elderly lady's hand and legs bear marks of bruises, cuts as a result of abuse.

Cases of Financial/material abuse-

Case 1-

A 70 year old widow, residing with her son and daughter-in-law was suffering from financial abuse as her all money was in joint account with her son and he refused to part with the passbook and bank statements.

Case 2-

75 years old lady residing with her only son was abandoned on the streets of Delhi after her son transferred the ownership of her house on his name.

Case 3-

An 80 year old woman was physically abused by her relatives to give them her gold jewellery worth around 90,000 rupees.

Cases of abandonment-

Case 1-

75 years old lady residing with her only son was abandoned on the streets of Delhi. He took her to meet their relatives by car and on the way asked her to buy some fruits and left his mother there.

Case 2-

An 80 year old woman was physically abused by her relatives to give them her gold jewellery worth around 90,000 rupees. After taking the jewellery she was abandoned in front of an old age home.

Cases of attempt to murder

Case 1-

75 year old lady's family members were trying to burn her alive at a crematorium because they did not want to pay for her cancer treatment.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS-

The responses of the victims in this analysis indicates that elderly women endure tremendous sufferings at the hands of their own children, specially their son and daughters-in-law, who are supposed to be their caretakers and protectors in the latter years of their lives. There has been more than one type of abuse present in all the cases. It has been seen that abusive individual's patterns of violence and bullying tactics are to gain and maintain power and control during the last years of elderly women. Dominating behaviour of son and daughter –in-law make the life of elderly women very complicated.

In the cases of Neglect, ignorance and insult, the care taker refused or failed to deliver the duties and obligation towards the elderly lady. This included basic necessities like food, water, clothing, shelter, safety and hygienic conditions. The elderly ladies were neglected, insulted, humiliated alone and also in front of others. No one spoke with them from their families; they had to manage on their

own. This form of abuse was common to all the cases. In the cases of neglect, medical neglect was also prominent in which the caretaker denied proper medications and treatment to the elderly. In the cases of personal rights violation, the care taker deprived the elder lady of her rights as freedom of choice, privacy or the way she want to lead her life. Her contacts were limited, she was not allowed to talk to anyone, and she was not permitted to share her feelings, thoughts to her close relatives and friends and was forced to eat and drink according to the wishes of the daughter-in-law or the abusers. They even had to cook meal in the utensils in which non-veg food was prepared and even had to cook non veg, despite being a strict vegetarian. They were humiliated and suffered harsh orders, and behaviour designed to increase social isolation. Cases of verbal abuse included insults, use of filthy and abusive language, foul words and disrespectful tone towards the elderly. In the cases of Physical abuse beating, hitting with belt, causing fractures, inflicting pain and injury, slapping, bruising, pushing or confinement and locking the victim up, making her do all the household chores was included. Cases of Financial/material abuse included using the resources of the elderly mother without her consent for their own benefits, asking for pension cheques, not using the funds to support the elderly, inappropriate use of elder's property. In the cases of abandonment and attempt to murder, the abusers had taken the money or resources and were not willing to support the elderly lady. They did not want to look after her. The reasons behind the abuse and violence are money, land, pension cheques, property, decrease in social value system, lack of adjustment with each-other and treating the elderly as a burden. It is like that they are unable to continue earning so they are of no use.

By analysing these cases through the lenses of Power and Control Theory of feminism, it has been found that the abusers, son or/and daughter-in-law or other abusers, wanted to assert their own will over the elderly lady in order to feel or prove a sense of power over the elderly lady. In fact, there has been a shifting dynamics between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, that has been identified as mother-in-law had an authoritative behaviour in early years and in later year's daughter-in-law abuses mother-in-law. All the case studies taken here are of elderly widows. After the death of their husbands they are depended on their son and daughter-in-law for finance and shelter. In some of the cases they have some resources as in money or jewellery or land or ownership of house but these have been taken by their son and make them totally depend. Abuse and violence start once they become dependent.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS-

It can be suggested that abuse, violence and crime against elderly women can be reduce through balancing traditional family beliefs with consciousness about gender equality and non-violence. Indian older women face triple jeopardy - that of being old, of being women, and of being poor

Empowerment of the elderly is extremely essential by helping and supporting them to build self-confidence, assertiveness, create awareness of their rights and privilege provided by the society, and those elderly women who areactive should be helped to make use of their skills and talents, to make them more independent and liberated free from the trapped net of the abusive families. Efforts be made to ensure that family violence against elderly women come out of closed doors. The silence of sufferings and injustice against elderly women need to be broken.

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