

# An Approach to explore the determinants of Elder Abuse, a case study conducted in Dakshina Kannada District

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**Abstract:** Elder abuse is a burning issue of the day, which has to be addressed immediately to ensure quality of life of the drastically increasing aging population in India. To rectify this challenge, it is very important to understand the determinants of elder abuse which is the overall goal of the current research. A descriptive study template with predetermined questionnaire and interviewing method was used as a tool for data collection, for a case study of 50 respondents in Dakshina Kannada district Descriptive Statistical analysis would be done. Majority of the respondents had experienced abuse, among which 80% had physical abuse, 75% were emotionally abused and 60% were financially abused. The reasons of abuse were mostly due to not getting the adequate provisions like, eye glass, hearing aid etc which was reported by 41% of the respondents, 28% of them felt they were left alone throughout the day, 11% felt they were neglected by the family and could not approach when needed, and the other 20% felt they were abused because they could not approach any one for help when needed. Abuse is the biggest mistake of humanity. It could be prevented only through awareness of humanitarian approach, which can be done through family counseling and non statutory approaches which could be given in the workplace of the family, who can take care of the elders.

**Keywords:** Aging, Abuse, Physical, Psychological, Gerontology, and Support systems.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The need for quality life for the elderly is increased by a rapid rise in the ageing population. While exploring the various needs of this sector paves way for the urgent need to understand the various problems faced by them. When we analyze the present situation of the growing aging population, the census report shows 0.5% increase in elderly population in India from 2010 to 2011 which indicate the emergency of investigation to be made to provide quality life to them. Without providing quality in the increased life span of the individual, quantity does not provide any benefit to the society or the individual [1, 2, 3]. Hence, elder abuse can be considered as one of the important challenges to elderly health. Many researches are conducted universally to understand the prevalence of abuse of the elderly but the determinants of abuse of the elders are not adequately discussed. If the various factors associated with the risk of being abused, probably the strategies to prevent the abuse could be identified. With this aim, the present study is undertaken, where the implication of the result could be used to bring various social security measures and policy to safeguard the vulnerable population. Elderly abuse could be discussed in various forms. Elders could be abused physically, sexually, neglect, verbal abuse and also most important financial exploitation [4, 5]. Elder abuse is also termed as elder mistreatment. For clear understanding of this term WHO, has defined elder abuse or the aging population 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" [6,7,8].

## 2. EFFECT OF ELDER ABUSE ON SELF AND SOCIETY

The author feels, the elder abuse is very important social issue, as this affects the humanity on the whole. There aren't any studies conducted on the effect of the elder abuse on the society. However, the effect is seen highly on self, de motivating to lead a quality life [9-11]. This adds with various normal aging problems like fear of death, physical deterioration, and other psychological problems like depression, anxiety etc. Elders are the bundle of experience and knowledge which could be utilized in the right manner, to establish the society to the fullest. Technological development is needed to the society, but in the sphere of Indian culture, where the social Institution like family is of prime importance, it is shameful on our part to neglect or harm someone who is no longer useful to us [12]. Elders are considered a burden because they are not productive. But a macro strategy could be done, by helping the aged, in spite of their limitation, to be economically and social productive. We could help them to be psychologically and socially fit to live in the society in dignity. Hence it is very much needed to understand the form of abuse and its precipitating factors. So, we need to understand initially that elder abuse is an important area to be taken care of as it is very sensitive issue because it harms the elders not physically alone, but also psychologically they are affected. This is the major issue we need to understand, because this will affect in the micro as well macro level. As discussed earlier in the present study, the productivity of the elders will decrease, which poses to be the major impairment of the society, not only in social terms but also economically [13,14].

## 3. REVIEWS ON ELDER ABUSE

There are various studies conducted to find the types or forms of elder abuse. When we deeper analyse the literature, it found that elder abuse is so wide globally [15, 16]. Although, abuse done on children and women have been extensively recognised and research have been conducted for many years, abuse against elders took a very long time to be recognised. It was first identified in 1975 by British gerontologists. At that time, it was labelled as "granny battering" (Baker, 1975, Burston 1975). The World Health Organisation has classified abuse of the elderly into three areas: violation of human, legal and medical rights neglect, which includes isolation, abandonment and social exclusion; which includes violence; and deprivation of choices, decisions, status, finances and neglect. (WHO, 2002). In one of the studies conducted by Beaulaurier, Seff & Newman, 2008, O'Connor, Hall & Donnelly, 2009, have deconstructed the WHO definition of abuse into five different categories of abuse against elders. So according to them the definition of elder abuse is categorised into psychological, physical, sexual, economic and neglect. The WHO report on violence and health states that "Regardless of the type of abuse, it will certainly result in unnecessary suffering, injury or pain, the loss or violation of human rights, and a decreased quality of life for the older person" [17].

In order to understand the severity of the problem, it is also required to know who the abusers are. Review was done in this area, and was seen that many studies were conducted to understand the relationship of the abusers to the elders. Hence, The NCEA in the US (1998) discovered that 47.3% of abusers were adult children, 30.3% were spouses, 8.8% other relatives, 8.6% grandchildren and 5% were non-family members. We find similarity in the Australian statistics: 43% adult children, 38% spouses, and 10% other relatives and 9% were non-family members (Kurrle et al. 1997). In one of the studies conducted by Kurrle et al again in 1992, they reported that that 51% of abusers were spouses, 24.5% were adult children, 18.8% were other relatives and 5.7% were non-family members [18, 19]. Another study conducted by Sadler (1992) found that 49% of abusers were spouses, 27% were adult children, 18% other relatives and 6% were non-family members. According to a study result of Biggs et. In 2009, in UK 51% of abuse was found to be partner or spouse, 49% other family members, 13% non-family members and 5% close friends. When the gender wise category analysis was done to find the abusers, majority abusers were found to be males reporting the split between 56% of male and 44% of females. The present author also felt it a need to understand the duration elders would suffer the abuse. This was very important to understand the need for rehabilitation strategies to save the elders from the abuse. The statistics reported by Kurrle et al., 1992, Kurrle et al., 1997, Sadler, 1992, most of the senior women continue to go through the abuse for more than two years, as they do not feel comfortable making decisions to live away from their abusers [21,22]. This is because most of the people who abuse them are their own family members, and it would further lead to abuse. This could be understood by a deep review of a report by Biggs et al. (2009) which, reports that 51% of abuse incidents are committed by a spouse partner or, 49% by another family member, 13% by a care worker, and by a close friend or neighbour is 5%. When we analyse and study the report, we can understand that abuse is viewed as a family problem and is not a societal concern [22, 23].

However, further reviews bring to notice that elderly abuse is not only the family problem, but also it is seen in other places also. The present situation forces the elders to live in Institutions like old age homes, nursing homes also. Living away from home cannot be avoided as the changes is inevitable due to various reasons. Migration for search of jobs by the younger generation, leave the elders alone in the home town, which also means they are neglected. With the concern of the children and family, the elders are forced to be institutionalised, which is actually safer than being alone. In Institutions they are cared, medical facilities is provided, overall safety is ensured. But unfortunately, elder abuse is also seen in Nursing homes and other Institutions. The reference derived from Nerenberg (2002), who formulated a study on Elder Abuse in a Nursing home, found that elder abuse is seen in these places, which was considered to be safer at one time. The elder abuse was found in various forms like, neglect, inappropriate restraint, financial abuse, isolation, homicide, physical and sexual assault verbal threats and intimidation. Together with these forms, chronic neglect, sub-standard care, overcrowding, authoritarian practices, and failure to protect residents against untrained, troubled or predatory workers, or against abusive residents or visitors was also seen [24].

With the above-mentioned reviews, and many more, the author felt the need to understand the elder abuse thoroughly. Discussions with various experts, the author felt that there is need to understand the variables causing the abuse done on the elders and then contributing strategies to prevent this abuse. This would ultimately lead to increase quality to the life of elders. Hence with the aim of Decreasing elder abuse by assessing the various types of abuse, and exploring the determinants of the elder abuse, and finally enhancing awareness on the existing support to the elders, making them more essential to the society [25,26].

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

The study is focusing to identify an approach to explore the determinants of elder abuse, a case study conducted in Dakshina Kannada District. And the objectives of the study are;

- To find out the extent of elder abuse.
- To measure self-reported physical and psychological problem faced by the elders.
- To analyse their awareness regarding support systems

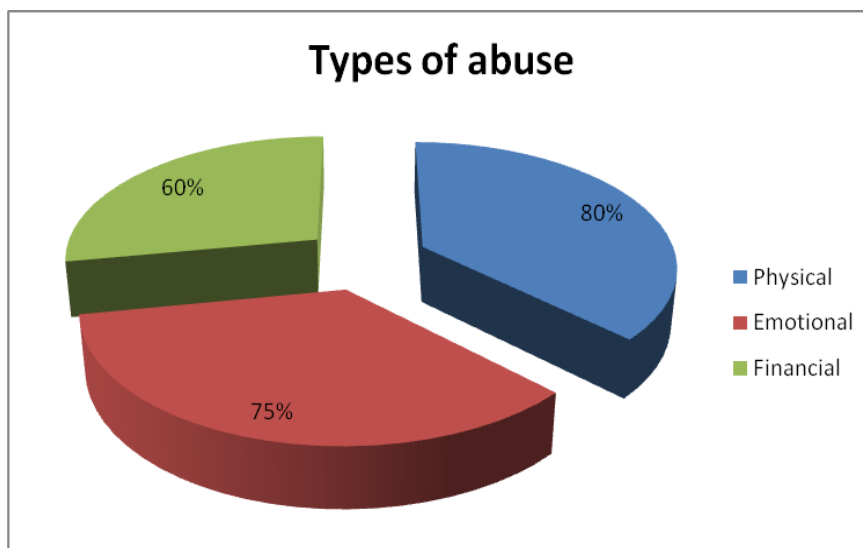
The Present study is Descriptive design to analyse the various forms of elderly abuse. Data regarding the forms of abuse pertaining to physical, emotional, financial and neglect of the elders are collected through pre-determined questionnaire, and descriptive analysis is conducted. Interviewing technique was used as a tool of data collection. Ethical consideration was done and confidentiality was maintained. Research was conducted in Dakshina kannada district. Since the present research is case study, only 50 respondents were chosen on random sampling method. study is limited to only one restricted geographical region, the result may be influenced by the culture, practices and other social factors. The implication of the study will be discussed by providing strategies to decreasing the factors influencing elder abuse

#### 5. ANALYSIS

Personal profile of the respondents: Demographic data is very important in any study, to find the association between variables. The present study, concentrates on the determinants of the elder abuse, personal profile is equally important.

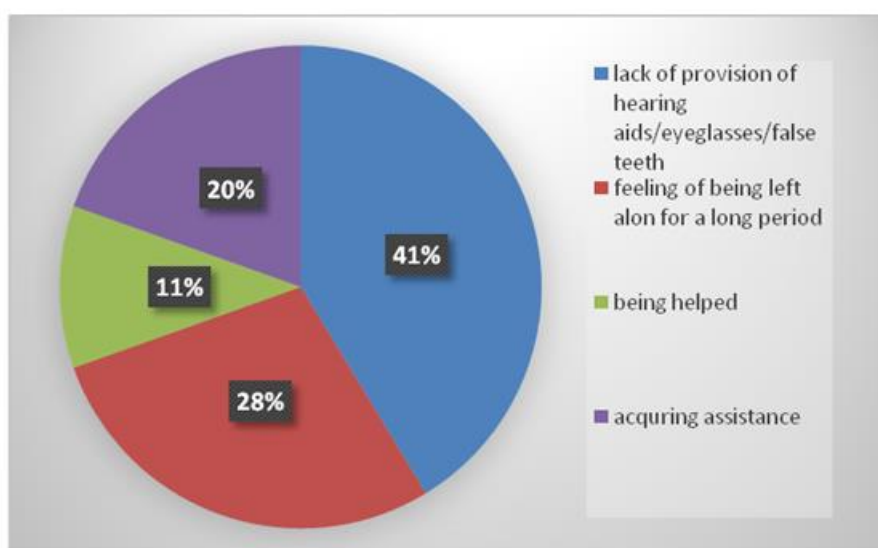
**Demographic Profile of the Respondents:** Out of 50 respondents, in the present study, 27 of them were in 61-70 years, 13 are in the age group of 50-60 years 8 are in the age group of 71-80 years and only two in 81-90 years. The educational qualification to the research respondents were found to be limited to graduation and below and hence only 3 of them were found to be graduate, 12 had primary level of education, 20 of them studied upto 10<sup>th</sup> grade and 15 of them were illiterate. Majority (42) were married, 4 of them were single, and 4 of them were divorcee. With this descriptive data, it is understood that 85% which constitutes majority is married, and only 5% are single. Although the spouse is living with the respondents, they are considered vulnerable due to the increasing age.

FIG: 1 Types of Abuse Faced by the Respondents



**Types of Abuse the Study Respondents Faced:** Interesting factor was found when data on the forms of abuse was elicited. Majority of them faced physical abuse like deprivation of adequate food, locked up in the restricted area, etc. Another majority of the respondents also faced emotional problems. Among these most of them faced rejection, where they reported to be of feeling lonely, deprived of love, non-caring etc. During the Interview with the respondents, it was told that they were not involved in decision making for various issues like treatment of ailments, diet pattern or deciding the type of food etc. among these respondents, 33.3% of them reported that although, they were not extremely abused psychologically, they were left isolated from the mainstream of the family, and they felt lonely. They were considered to be aged and not given any work to do. The author could interpret that this will be the main cause further psychological ailments like depression, anxiety etc, which has to be considered and taken care of. These issues could be easily prevented by counselling, and providing few strategies in improving the life style of the elders.

FIG: 2 Determinant factors of Abuse of the Elders



**Determinant factors of Abuse of the Elders:** Understanding the various types of elderly abuse will be useful, only if we understand the determinant factor of this abuse. With rich cultural practices in India, we had to take care of our own elders with optimum care and love. Elderly abuse is not a issue to be tackled with policies, but it is a question of the thinking of the family. It is a learnt behavior. Hence to understand the extent of this learnt behavior, this data was collected. The author wanted to find why the elders are abused, and how to rectify the need. Predetermined questions

were asked to the respondents regarding the reason of their abuse. Hence result derived showed that 41% of the respondents had experienced neglect as they could not get few things which would ease their life, like, provision of hearing aids/ eyeglasses/ false teeth etc. The family may have various reasons for not providing these benefits to the elders, which created problem for comfortable living. 28% of the elders reported that they were left alone and hence had a feeling of loneliness. This is the common problem faced by all our elders, due to changing life style of the younger generation. Hence, this brings to the emergency of creating a new strategy to keep the elders occupied, so that the situation of being alone for long hours can be avoided. Another factor added to this situation, when 11% of the elders felt that when they approached for any help, they were neglected. Another 20% of the respondents also felt that they could not get assistance when they needed.

## 6. SUGGESTIONS

Most of the reviews cited in the present study show the various forms of elderly abuse, and the demography of the elders suffering with this abuse. Elderly abuse is a prominent issue to be discussed due to their vulnerability. Old age homes are fast cropping up fast, in accordance of growing population. Indian culture always gave importance to the social Institutions, especially the family. With the drastic changes in structural and functional aspect of the family, problems emerged for the elders. Changes and development are inevitable, but there is a need for accommodating these changes and the consequences. The researcher feels, with reference to the result of the present study, there is need to improvise the communication to strengthen the relationship in the family. The need for change, growth and migration cannot be avoided. There is need to grow with the change. But there is also an equal need to accommodate these changes with alternate strategies. Bringing policy is not sufficient, but there is a need for positive reinforcement for the family. Awareness of aging factors in regard with the physical, social and psychological condition should be given during the formal education, so that the acceptance of aging is easier as we grow. Aging should be considered to be acceptable with their limitations. There is also a need for positive reinforcement from the workplace, with benefits availed to the aging parents like health insurance without extra expenditure, free travel and medical facilities, housing facilities etc. which will definitely reduce the elderly abuse.

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