Research Article

VICTIMS OF ABUSE OR FEELING SECURE: AN EXPLORATION OF FEAR OF VICTIMIZATION AMONG ELDERLY IN CITIES OF EASTERN INDIA

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A R T I C L E I N F O	A B S T R A C T
	Elder abuse is a global crisis. The increasing trend of crime against elderly calls for serious introspection and points out a societal debacle. The disrespect, neglect and abuse of the elderly makes the future murkier and gory. For us, who are yet to reach the age, the incidences of violence against elderly makes us apprehensive and fearful of our future. It needs serious research, awareness and introspection on our part to overcome the crisis and allow the elderly to age gracefully. The present study is a humble attempt to explore the fear of victimization among the elderly in six cities of eastern India through a small sample survey.

INTRODUCTION

Aging is a process which leads to physical weakness and a decline in bodily strength. It also results in weakening of the senses including hearing and eyesight. Again many elderly people suffer from severe and progressive cerebral damage leading to dementia. Further old age is accompanied by damage in economic and financial health. There is also a sense of negative attitude and neglect from the society. Thus the elderly become vulnerable and easy target of abuse. The fear of victimization pushes them into a life of seclusion and loneliness. In this regard, the present study attempts to identify the physical, economic and psychological abuse that the older people suffer from or apprehend of, which alienates them from normal life and leads them to a life of helplessness, mistrust and insecurity. However not all the elderly are subjected to the same level of fear of victimization or are victims themselves: factors like gender, religion, caste, urbanism, education and financial status can also act as variables determining victimization. Past instances of being victims can also trigger the fear more. The present study is an endeavour to explore whether the elderly in eastern India feel secure about the effectiveness of law enforcement or suffer from a fear of victimization. The recent crime statistics, electronic and print media are highlighting the increasing trend in regard to crime against elderly. The vulnerability, dependency and lack of social security is acting as a boon to the criminals to victimize the elderly.

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They are thus soft targets of not only near and dear ones but also their acquaintances and strangers. Lack of trust and distant interaction with the police adds on to their woes. A society which fails to provide security to its vulnerable like women, children and the elderly calls for serious introspection, revision of policies and proactive measures on the part of law enforcement agencies to make them feel safe and secure.

Conceptualizing Victimization and Elder Abuse

An elderly or senior citizen in Indian context is a person who has attained an age of 60 years or above.(The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 : 2). **Fear** is used to describe a physiological and emotional reaction to a stimulus that is both threatening and immediate. **Victimization** implies a kind of social transaction in which an individual or group is an object of harm authored by another individual or group. The essence of victimization is predation where we use the term victim to describe one person who has been raped, robbed, murdered or assaulted by another person (Fattah, 1989). The term **victim** suggests that harm has been experienced by an entity whether that be a person, business or community. People are victims of accidents, harmful behaviour perpetrated towards them (criminal or otherwise), disasters (natural or man made) and other such events (Burgess, 2013). According to Bayley, a victim is one who has suffered a loss or some significant decrease in well-being unfairly or undeservedly in such a manner that they are helpless to prevent the loss whereby the loss has an identifiable cause and further, the legal or moral context of the loss entitles the sufferers of the loss to social concern (Underwood, 2003).

Elder abuse is the larger ambit under which elder maltreatment and elder neglect is covered. It can be physical, sexual, emotional or financial and can occur in the community, the hospital, or a long term care facility. Elder abuse can be at the hands of a kin, friend, facility peer or employee or a stranger. (Smith, 2014). Elder abuse can be typified as the following:(a) **Physical Abuse** is the deliberate act of a trusted person to a defenseless elderly that may result in bodily or physical pain of the older adult. (b) **Financial or material Abuse** is inappropriate taking, misuse or hiding of a vulnerable older adult's resources, property or assets. (c) **Sexual Abuse** is the non-consensual sexual contact or exposure with a undefendable elderly by a trusted person. It also includes sexual contact with an older adult incapable of giving consent. (d) **Psychological or Emotional Abuse** includes threats of impairment, desertion, deprivation of contact, blaming, compulsion, verbal abuse. It results in mental pain and distress in the elderly person. (e) **Neglect and Self abuse** involves disregarding the need for medical or physical care. Self abuse is a state in which an individual fails to provide the essentials of life for himself such as food, clothing, protective cover, sufficient medical care and sensible management of financial resources. It ranges from poor grooming and consumption habits to decomposition of the body through unheeded medical care. (f) **Parent Abuse** takes place when children are the main perpetrators in elder abuse case. Adult children who ill-treat their parents commit psychological abuse or neglect. (g) **Spouse Abuse** is said to happen when spouses are assailant of physical elder abuse. Spouses who have been batterers when they were young are likely to continue the practice even in old age. (h) **Patient abuse** are incidents of physical abuse that occur in hospitals, nursing homes, adult care centres and other residential care centres. It pertains to confinement both physical and chemical to control a senior patients behaviour, appeasement and over-medication. (i) **Institutional Abuse** relates to health care crimes like unneeded surgery, guile, dual billing, medicine theft, falsification; patient dumping and financial crime (Wallace, 2017; McCreadie, 1984; Payne & Thomas, 2011 and Quinn & Tomita, 1986).

An Assay to Discern Elder Abuse

The incidences of elder abuse have aroused concern because of the upward trend in the number of occurrences. Elder Abuse also shows a troublesome trend. In India in the year, 2016, a total number of 21,410 cases have been registered as offences against senior citizens. It shows an increase of 4.3% from the year 2015. The most common form of violence is murder (1055), grievous hurt (920), cheating (1941) and robbery(1024) (Crime in India, NCRB, India, 2016). In this regard, effective police practices and problem oriented approach from the government can help to tackle the problem. In urban areas the elderly can suffer from social exclusion due to an assemblage of related issues like unemployment, poor skills, loss of income, favoritism, pitiable housing, high crimes, poor health and breakdown of family. Three dimensions of social exclusion can be experienced in urban setting: change in neighbourhood, generic pressures in urban environments and the impact of globalization on perceptions of place and identity (Phillipson, 2010).

Elder abuse is socially constructed. There may be many explanations to explain **why at all it happens**. The following are some such answers : (1) the elderly victim may be highly dependent on the caregiver, who may be become abusive due to the nonstop demands of the elderly person; (2) elder abuse can be the outcome of abusive individual learning to exercise aggression to resolve conflicts; (3) a feeling of being deprived by the elderly person, an individual may use violence to reconstruct coveted balance in life; (4) abusive behavior may occur if the abuser is a co-dependent adult child or caregiver of the elderly person ; (5) the abusive individual might desire to gain and maintain a relationship of power and control with the elderly person; (the abuser may be influenced by individual relationship, community and social influences and (6) status inequality, type of relationship, power and exchange dynamics all influence the nature of relationship the elderly share with the abuser (Siegal, 2016).

Attempting to find and an answer to **elder abuse through theories** we can categorise them as follows: (i) **Intraindividual Explanations**: The perpetrators of elder abuse suffer from personality disorders, low self-esteem and related mental problems. Two theories that would address how emotional problems contribute to elder abuse in the family are Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Ellis's rational emotive theory. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, elder abuse occurs because offenders have problem meeting certain needs and hence the absue is directed towards thwarted or unrealized necessity (Hafen and Brog, 1983). Ellis's (1989) rational emotive theory sees the root of abusive behaviour as being an irrational belief system which results in abhorrent behaviour such as elder abuse. (ii) **Stress** has also been a source of elder abuse. Stress can be classified into internal and external stress. External stressors includes mishap, financial loss, occupation, status, economic problems, employment issues, unemployment, restricted educational opportunities, divorce and death of a loved one. Internal stressors are those that originate within the individual and include anxiety, headache, insomnia and depression. Individual perception of the stress and feeling of burden are far stronger predictors of abuse than more objective factors (Fulmer,1984). (iii) **Dependency** is a natural result of the aging process and older persons need assistance with daily activities. It can result in a condition where the abuser uses the dependency to coerce and abuse the elderly person (Fulmer, 1991). (iv) **Transgenerational Violence** refers to the possibility that abusers learned how to be abusive from their parentsor other role models. It refers to violence that has been passed from generation to generation. Elder abuse takes place in homes where there have been a history of violence and abusive acts (Myers&Sheldon, 1987). (v) **Symbolic Interactionism** focus on the way the two parties interact with one another. Implicit with this perspective is the idea that conflict may arise out of the meanings participants gives to various behaviours and interaction. Caregivers who were physically abused by their patients were more likely than those who were not to have directed abuse towards patients in their care (Coyne,1993). (vi) **Isolation** of elderly is a major cause of they being targets of abuse. Industrialised societies have made nuclear families more isolated than they were in the past. As a result abuse gets unnoticed. Abused elderly withdraw from social network (Tomita, 1990 and Phillips,1983). (vii) The **neutralization theory** provides an answer to rationalization by abusers of elderly people. *Denial of injury* is a situation when abusers justify that nobody is hurt. *Denial of responsibility* is concerned with ways when offenders will deny responsibility of their action by suggesting their behaviour is beyond their control. In *denial of victim* the offender contends that the victim deserves to be injured.

Condemnation of condemners is concerned with instances where offender allege that everybody does wrong things and try to find fault with the offender. *Appeal to higher loyalties* refers to instances where individual's actions are justified on the grounds that they meet the needs of the larger group to which the individual is a part (Sykes & Matza, 1957). (vii)**Routine Activity Theory** states that there are three elements of crime: 'a motivated offender', 'a suitable target' and 'the absence of a capable guardian'. The lack of any of these elements is enough to stop a crime. Crime is best explained by considering 'the manner in which the spatio temporal organization of social activities helps people to translate their criminal inclinations into actions' (Cohen & Felson 1979). Elderly people who live with others would be expected to be physically victimized by their near ones more often than those who live alone because there would be more interaction with the motivated offenders, suitable target and absence of a capable target.

Several factors as the following make the elderly easy targets of abuse*:* (1) Physical Impairment: Elderly individuals with poorer health or limited mobility are at a higher risk of abuse. (2) Mental Health problems: Clinical depression is associated with financial or psychological abuse. (3) Alcohol abuse is associated with aggressive behaviour in perpetrators of abuse.(4) Cognitive Impairment: Cognitively impaired adults are at a greater risk of abuse.They often cannot report abuse.Dementia may cause increased stress in caregiver. (5) Lack of Social Support: Social contact can diffuse tension and allow others to monitor behaviour.The increased dependency on caregiver increases risk of abuse (Burgess, 2013).

In India there are the following Legislative Security for the protection of the Elderly*:* (1**)** Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007.(2) Article 21 of the Indian Constitution protects life and personal liberty of an individual.(3)Article 41 Indian Constitution Directive Principles of State Policy refers to Old Age Social Security.(4) The Pensions Act, 1871 applies both to Union and State Pensioners and a pensioner has complete right to his or her pension on account of past service consideration or merit. (5) The Indian Succession Act, 1925 states that the father succeeds to the property of an intestate who dies without leaving any lineal descendants.(6) Employees State Insurance Act, 1948 ensures that the employer, the state and the person makes contribution in order to provide for sickness, old age and other contingencies. (7) Employee's Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952 states that provident fund is an old age and survivorship benefit.(8) The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956 sets on obligation on a person to maintain his or her aged or infirm parents.(9)The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 states that in case of the death of the son the mother inherits the property of his son along with his other heirs.(10)The Income Tax Act, 1961 provides income tax rebates in case of senior citizens.(11) Criminal Procedure Code, 1973, Section 125 is made if any person having sufficient means neglects or refuses to maintain his father or mother who are unable to maintain himself or herself (Sekhar, 2016).

Initiatives have been undertaken by the Police in Six Cities of Eastern India which can cater to the elderly in the six cities of eastern India*:* **(**1) Kolkata: Pronam (legal and medical help to senior citizens through a 24 hour helpline); Dial 100(live programme in TV where citizens can interact with the senior police officials); Jano Sanjog Sabha(meetings in local police stations with local residents); Sukanya (safety for women); Medical helpline, Women in need helpline, Senior Citizens helpline.(2) **Patna:** Format for tenant, student and domestic help verification, emergency dial 100.(3)

Ranchi: Dial 100, Women Helpline, Senior Citizen Safety Tips, Woman Safety tip.(4)

Bhubaneswar: Senior Citizen Security Cells (SCSC)- safety and security of senior citizens, sensitization , problem solving, regular interaction, police verification of domestic helps, tenants by local police stations.(5)

Guwahati: Information about local police stations including their contact numbers, information about NGOs working for senior citzens, shelter homes, advises for citizens to counter crime, tenant verification forms.(6)

Agartala: Prayas Beat Committee, Citizens Awareness, Tenant Verification Form , Women Helpline, SMS based Complaint Monitoring System, Dial 100.(http://kolkatapolice.gov.in;http://www.patnapolice.bih.nic.in/;https://www.jhpolice.gov.in/;http://bhubaneswarcuttackpolice.gov.in/;http://guwahaticitypolice.gov.in/and http://www.tripurapolice.gov.in/ retrieved on 14.05. 2018).

To provide a sense of security and safety to the elderly the police has to be proactive, intelligent and people friendly. As a function of the law enforcement agencies, policing is characterized by divergence in public perception of police credibility and authority, opinion about police function, police-public relationship, primary programmes and technologies utilized(Morin,2013).The Community Policing Era saw the revival of patrol officer as a provider of the following community services: (a) the prevention of crime by ensuring a visible police presence (b) up-keeping public order and security in the community (c) providing a 24 hour service that is not limited to any community (Gaines and Miller, 2011). Enhanced interaction, speedy, unbiased attitude of the police towards the vulnerable can make the defenceless approach the police to complain about atrocities to eradicate the menace

METHODOLOGY ADOPTED

In this exploratory study, the area of research was the six state capitals of eastern India. Primary data was collected from face to face interview of senior citizens living in domestic sphere as well as in old age homes in the six cities. Governments reports were also utilized to collect primary data. Secondary data has been collected through books, journals, newspaper reports, websites and encyclopedia.

It is a small sample survey of 200 sampling units out of which there were 120 males and 80 females.Senior citizens above 60 years of age residing in urban areas of eastern India is the universe of the study.Non- probability sampling technique was used for selecting the sample. More specifically purposive and snowballing sampling were the techniques employed for data collection.

Revelations from the Elderly

The sample consisted of 200 senior citizens that is aged 60 years and above.72% of the respondents were between 60-70 years of age. The oldest respondent was 96 years old.The sample comprised of 120 males and 80 female.63% of the elderly were not employed. 60% of the elderly had an income

of less than Rs. 25,000 (400 US dollars) monthly. The maximum earning was rupees 50,000. 23% of the respondents were dependent financially on their family members and 36% of them were getting pensions.80% of the elderly were living with spouse, children or relatives. Only 20% of them were living alone.61% of the senior citizens were graduates and above. Only 6% of them were illiterate.Among the married 68% had 1-3 children 28% had more than 4 children. Eight were childless out of whom four were unmarried.

Level of Dependency of the Elderly

- 150 out of 192 of the elderly who had children were living with offspring.
- 184 of the seniors were going out of home. 65% (119) of them were going out daily out of them only 13 were going out alone.
- Out of the 200, 49% go for shopping, 33% go to banks, 29% go for a walk in the morning or evening and only 25% go for outdoor recreation.
- 60% of the seniors go out at morning hours.65% (130) go out on tours out of them 72% go yearly. 60% of those who go on tours are accompanied by family members.

Community feeling Among the Elderly

- 44% of the seniors complain about the society's reaction towards elderly. They expect respect, politeness, cooperation and care from the society.
- 170 of the seniors own the house they live in. Out of them, 62 have tenants. 43 of the owners are having tenants for the last 10 years. 69% who have tenants in their house share informal relationship with them.
- 60% have house-help. Only 24 % of them have informed the police about details of the house-help. 40% of the seniors do not take help from external sources for doing domestic chores.

Comfort level of the elderly with the police

- 65% of the senior citizens live within 5 km of the local police station.
- 73% of the elderly were comfortable contacting the police.
- 131 of the seniors have the telephone number of the local police station. Out of them only 57 have called the police station and 46 have found the response to be good.
- 113 of the elderly have visited the police station. 59 of them went for the purpose of lodging a complaint. 74 of the 113 of them were satisfied with the police response.

Attitude of the elderly towards the police

- 63% of the senior citizens opined that the police never visit them.
- 56% of them were satisfied about the approach of the police towards the elderly.
- 45% of the seniors feel that the attitude of the police towards the elderly can improve.
- 52% of the elderly feel that the relationship between the police and people should improve.

- 76% of the senior citizen expect good behaviour and better work performance from the police.
- 134 of the aged persons stated that the police does not do any community service. only 13 out of 200 mentioned police patrolling as community service.
- 146 of the seniors said that the police provide them with a sense of security. However only 23 % would like to first contact the police when in trouble.

Implications

Most of the elderly live in the company of near ones and prefer to go out only in the company of others. This shows that there a feeling of insecurity and fear of victimization among them. They are dependent on caregivers and this dependency results in abuse within and outside the domestic sphere. They do not feel comfortable interacting with the society and confine themselves within the household. The feel deprived, rejected and disrespected by the society hence they keep themselves aloof from the people. Awareness about law enforcement initiatives for their security is less and therefore they do not inform the police about house-helps or tenants. This is cause of concern and infiltrates further abuse and crime. Even though most of them were living near the police station they hesitated visiting it. Those who did were happy with the response. The feeling that the police is there to help is not among the elderly. The relationship between the police and the elderly is distant. Even though in all the six cities there were programmes for the elderly, there is lack of percolation of information among the elderly. For which the elderly fear victimization, keeps themselves isolated, interact only with near ones, hesitate reaching out to the police and suffer from insecurity and immobility.

A Search for Remedial Measures

The present study explores and analyses the trends in elder abuse in India. India is witnessing an increasing trend in crime against vulnerable in general and the elderly in particular. Inspite of the rich cultural heritage of India and a high regard for values which includes respect for the elderly such a gruesome scenario calls for moral degradation and a sense of responsibility towards the protection and security of those who have sacrificed their years to build the society.

It is not wide off the mark to say that such a ghastly picture arouses concern and worry to researchers and social scientists about the future that we are erecting for the upcoming generations. It also calls for more innovative and effective measures on the part of the law enforcement agencies to create safer and secure environments for us and the generations to come. To reduce fear of victimization among elderly the following measures can be taken: (a)Reduce incidences of crime against vulnerables: children, women and senior citizens.(b)Increase symbols of security or reduce symbols of threats to security and initiate confidence building strategies.(c)Increase interaction with the community groups and the police to assure that others will come to assistance.(d) Restructure the urban environment to decrease crime and fright of transgression among elderly through better street lighting, improving circulation of people, building neighbourhood cohesion, increasing surveillance by police patrolling and visits.

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