



# PROBLEM OF ELDER ABUSE: IN CHANDIGARH CITY

**Amita Sharma**

*Research Scholar in Sociology, NIILM University, Kaithal*

India's aged population is currently the second largest in the world. The absolute number of Indian population falling in the age group of 60 plus will increase from 77 million in 2011 to 137 million by 2021. According to Population Census 2011 there are nearly 104 million elderly persons (aged 60 years or above) in India; 53 million females and 51 million males. Both the share and size of elderly population is increasing over time. From 5.6% in 1961 the proportion has increased to 8.6% in 2011. The new data put out by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme shows that the growth rate of elderly population in the country has been rapidly increasing even as the general population growth has slowed down over the past few decades. India's population increased by 17% between 2001-2011.

Family violence is not a new phenomenon. Spouse abuse, child abuse, female exploitation had been with us for a long time. The latest problem which has been recognized is the abuse of elderly people by others, either in the institutional setting or in the family setting. The problem is emerging as an issue for public debate and research inquiry. The National Elder Abuse Incidence Survey (NEAIS) uses the phrase 'Elder maltreatment' to cover seven general types of behavior (United States, 1998) physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse or psychological abuse, financial abuse or material abuse, abandonment, neglect and self-neglect. The crux of the issues is linked not only to the increasing number of elderly person but rather to the changing significance of ageing in modern society. Factors like urbanization, industrialization, scientific and technological development, growth of individualism, increasing materialism emergence of nuclear family have changed the attitude of people towards elderly person. It will be meaningful to analyze the changing status and role of elderly person in the modern context against the backdrop of an historical discussion on the problem.

Attempts to define elderly abuse have not always been satisfactory. There does not appear to be a standard definition that is acceptable to everyone involved. There are arguments about what should be included and excluded. There are problems as whether neglect, self-neglect, crimes against elderly people and such other behaviour should be considered as elderly abuse. Perhaps one way out of this dilemma is to follow the suggestions of Penhale<sup>1</sup> (2002) and make a distinction between 'macro, mezzo and micro' level abuse. Macro abuse refers to issues at the societal level such as lack of access to health care, poor social security and lack of alternative social support system. Mezzo level abuse refers to the injustice heaped on an elderly person basically at the community level such as anti-social activities against older people and marginalizing them. Micro level definitions usually deal with the conflict and interaction between two people. It may be between an elderly

---

<sup>1</sup> Bridget Penhale, (2002) "International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA)", The Journal of Adult Protection, Vol. 4 Issue: 2, pp.28-31, <https://doi.org/10.1108/14668203200200013>.



person and an adult family member or a caregiver in an institution. Elderly abuse is usually defined as any ill treatment of an elderly person (usually over 60 years). Such ill-treatment may occur both in a domestic setting, in the elderly person's own home, a relative's home, in sheltered housing or institution-day care center, residential care, nursing home or hospital. It refers to behavior within a relationship that connotes trust. Despite the glorification of the importance of Pita (father), Mata (mother) and the Guru (teacher, preceptor) in the Indian tradition, the real picture is quite contradictory. There is a massive increase in the number of old age homes, or the more fashionable, retirement homes. Aged people are becoming more and more isolated due to decreasing level of patience in youngsters. Many affluent men and women in society leave their old and ailing parents in obscure old age homes to wither away, not even looking back once.

The definition of family is transforming from all-inclusive to "me, my wife and my kids", hence the new generation is turning a blind eye to their parents. "Young India sees parents more as an obligation and not a part of the emotional need system satisfying the mutual need for love and care." Every other day, we see news of parents being beaten up by their children, parents and in-laws being forced to do the household chores, being made to live in small dungeon-like rooms, their property being forcefully taken over by over ambitious children.

#### **Case 1:**

On December 9, 2011 an elderly couple<sup>2</sup> was beaten up by a youth who was in an inebriated state. The incident occurred in Sector 18 of Chandigarh. Victims are the neighbors of the accused. The accused had told the police that he got furious at Santosh Kumar since she allegedly had said something "wrong" about his mother. The brutal assault by the accused was captured in the CCTV camera installed at the shop, following which a case was registered. Police sources said Santosh and Joginderpal have suffered multiple injuries. This is a perfect example of abuse by community members. As values as well as tolerance are decreasing in the society, chances of crime by community members cannot be ignored.

#### **Case 2:**

On February 6, 2006, in Chandigarh, a triple murder<sup>3</sup> of a retired Group Captain T. P. Singh, his wife Shibani and sister AjitKaur happened in their house in Sector 34. Their son, Pawandeep, was found guilty of their murder. Pawandeep had reportedly admitted that he had murdered his family as his parents were indifferent to him. He had been a "problem child" and his parents always scolded him. He needed money desperately as he wanted to marry his girl-friend.

#### **Case 3:**

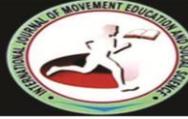
On September 5, 2006, in Chandigarh an elderly woman<sup>4</sup> (71 years old) was found murdered and raped in her house in sector 15 Chandigarh. A teenager was found guilty of this heinous crime. Once arrested, the minor named his other two accomplices and confessed to have committed the crime. The police added that the boy,

---

<sup>2</sup> The Tribune: 2011, Elderly couple was harassed by youth in Sector 18, Chandigarh in December.

<sup>3</sup> The Tribune: 2006, Triple Murder Case February 17, Sector 34 in Chandigarh.

<sup>4</sup> The Tribune: 2006, Elderly Women was raped and murdered by teenagers in Sector 15, Chandigarh on September 5.



living in the house just behind that of the victim's house, planned the entire operation, along with two others, with a view to raping and subsequently robbing her. They first gang-raped the aged victim and then strangled her before decamping with the valuables. They, however, committed the mistake of leaving behind the vial of white fluid and a used condom. According to the police officer, the boy said they had planned the whole sequence of the act and were waiting for an opportunity to come. On one fine day, they entered into the victim's house and committed the crime. The other two boys were also drug addicts. They were reportedly disowned by their families and sleep in the corridors of shops during the night. The father of the minor boy, a driver, expressed ignorance about the entire episode. Above mentioned case is worst example of elderly abuse at community level. Where an elderly woman experienced looting, rape and murder that too in the hands of juvenile delinquents. Such heinous crimes by juveniles later on forced government to amend Juvenile Act.

According to Population Census 2011 there are nearly 104 million elderly persons (aged 60 years or above) in India; 53 million females and 51 million males. Ironically 40% of senior citizens living with their families are reportedly facing abuse of one kind or another, but only 1 in 6 cases actually comes to light. Elderly abuse is usually defined as any ill treatment of an elderly person (usually over 60 years). Such ill-treatment may occur both in a domestic setting, in the elderly person's own home, a relative's home, in sheltered housing or institution –Day care- Centre, residential care, nursing home or hospital. It refers to behavior within a relationship that connotes trust.

The focus of present study is on the problem of elder abuse experienced either directly or indirectly by the elderly men and women living in family settings of urban areas from different income groups. The place of study is Chandigarh city. The present study signifies different aspects related to elder abuse. A number of cases of elderly abuse are highlighted in Chandigarh by the media but there is dearth of sociological literature in Chandigarh. Moreover population of elderly is increasing in Chandigarh. So the most important motive of the present research proposal is to fill the research gap.

#### **Objective(s):**

1. To find out the different forms of elderly abuse.
2. To examine the causes of elderly abuse.

Researcher collected information from 300 elderly living in Chandigarh with the help of interview schedule. Sample was collected with the help of Snow ball sampling technique. Information was gathered from 50 males and 50 females each from upper, middle and lower class of the society. Presence of abuse is found in the sample, when researcher asked them about experience of abuse 146 respondents from different class categories and genders, agreed to have exposure of one or another type of elderly abuse. Whereas 154 respondents said they don't have any such direct experience in their life. However they mentioned that they are aware of this problem as many of their friends or relatives keep on mentioning about one or another type of abuse. Moreover through media also they get to know about many such narratives. Out of 150 females 80 said they had suffered from abuse. When compared with men folk, no. of abused elderly women was high. Out of



150 males 66 said they had direct experience of abuse. When question was asked about the presence of elderly abuse in general from both abused as well as not abused elderly, they said that there is existence of various types of elderly abuse in the contemporary society. They also believed that elder abuse is present in all types of societal arrangements ranging from state, community, institutions and family settings. They were of the firm opinion that status of elderly is changing because of rapid transformation in the society as well as in relationships. In case of indirect elderly abuse 25 males said they got to know about abuse from the narratives shared by friends, relatives and neighbors. Whereas 49 of elderly men said they got to know about abuse from media. Same question was asked to women who were not directly suffering from any kind of abuse. 60 females said they get to know about abuse through informal means and 20 were well informed on the issue from formal means of interaction such as media and newspapers. Majority of the elderly talked about videos which they have seen either on Whatsapp group or on Facebook. Knowledge of these mediums of social media substantiate the fact that elderly in one of the modern city of India are having direct or indirect access of these mediums, which keeps them up to date on what is happening around them.

**Table 1.1 Distribution by Experience of Types of Abuse**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Physical Abuse	2	.7	1.4	1.4
Emotional Abuse	65	21.7	44.5	45.9
Financial Abuse	62	20.7	42.5	88.4
Neglect	17	5.7	11.6	100.0
Total	146	48.7	100.0	
Missing System	154	51.3		
Total	300	100.0		

No abandonment is reported in the sample, as purposefully the researcher has selected only those elderly who are living with their children in family settings. Further it was reported that there was no case of sexual harassment. Presence of physical abuse was almost negligible. Presence of neglect was relatively very low. Concept of neglect is not much acknowledged by majority of the elderly as a type of elder abuse. Although in comparison to lower class more cases of neglect were reported by middle and upper class elderly. This may be possible due to the difference in the sensitivity level of different class categories. Out of 146 elderly who reported abuse by family members, majority stated either experience of emotional abuse or financial abuse in this stage of life by their own immediate family members.

**Table 1.2: Distribution by Causes of abuse**



	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Financial Reason	56	18.7	38.4	38.4
Dependance	31	10.3	21.2	59.6
Substance Abuse	9	3.0	6.2	65.8
Stress	50	16.7	34.2	100.0
Total	146	48.7	100.0	
Missing System	154	51.3		
Total	300	100.0		

For many elderly people, family represents a sense of belongingness and home is considered as a safe place to live in but it is found that in the sample of 300 elderly, 146 are facing one or another form of abuse within the four walls of their home. Both men and women in upper, middle and lower classes are facing abuse. Few causes of abuse were highlighted by the elderly in the current study namely physical dependence, financial reasons, abusers under the influence of alcohol and stress of abusers etc. 56 elderly admitted financial abuse, 31 elderly experienced abuses due to physical dependence, 9 elderly experienced abuses when their children were under the influence of some substance. Ironically speaking elderly with good amount of income as well as very little income both are at risk nowadays. Along with this, abused elderly believe that there is overall change in the values and lifestyle of younger generation due to material culture and modernization. Moreover, most of the abused elderly had less faith in current political and legal system. They were of the opinion that in the current scenario, it's difficult to trust social, political and legal system. Whereas in earlier times due to informal social control and overall respectful position of elderly as the 'heads' of their families, chances of getting abused were next to impossible.

**Table 1.3 Distribution by the Main Abuser**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Son	53	17.7	36.3	36.3
Daughter	4	1.3	2.7	39.0
Daughter in law	52	17.3	35.6	74.7
Spouse	17	5.7	11.6	86.3
Grand Children	20	6.7	13.7	100.0
Total	146	48.7	100.0	
Missing System	154	51.3		
Total	300	100.0		



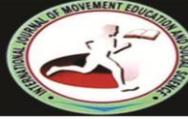
Majority of the elderly in the sample confirmed that now a day's elderly abuse is taking place with in family settings. 52 elderly confirmed abuse by daughters- in -law, 53 said their own sons are sometimes abusive towards them. Some of them stated that their sons under the influence of liquor sometimes they become abusive. Whereas for daughters- in- law main reason of abuse was they considered elderly as extra burden on them both physically as well as financially. They also stated that their daughters- in laws- want to maintain their independent life style, especially in upper and middle class they are busy in kitty culture so they don't want to live with elderly, 20 were unhappy because of their grandchildren's misbehavior. Surprisingly 17 of elderly reported abuse by their spouse .only 4 elderly talked about abusive behavior of their daughters. Majority believed that elderly abuse is increasing in society in general. 106 admitted that they did not report about the incidents to anyone as they are feeling ashamed or fearful to the abuse or neglect. Most of them believed that family matters are private and should stay that way only. They are fearful of the consequences of abuse as they had less faith in government, law and community. 40 mentioned that sometimes in order to pour out their heart, they discuss about their problem with their friends and relatives. Out of the 40 respondents, 6 have reported to the police although with little mediation, and counseling, the matter was resolved there and then .When asked about reporting of abuse from abused elderly ,majority of abused elderly refused to report abuse to police. Elderly are reluctant to report abuse to anyone because they fear that they will lose the assistance which they are getting from their families. They think police, law and other social agencies can hardly help them. Moreover, many of them, especially in lower classes are not even aware whom to speak and what can be done. They also said it's very difficult to get involved in all such things as they are left with little energy at this stage of life. Although they admitted that they have narrated their experiences to their friends, relatives and neighbors.

For many elderly people, family represents a sense of belongingness and home is considered as a safe place to live in but it is found in the sample of 300 elderly, 146 are facing one or another form of abuse within the four walls of their home. Both men and women in upper, middle and lower classes are facing abuse. Few causes of abuse were highlighted by the elderly in the current study namely physical dependence, financial reasons, abusers under the influence of alcohol, stress of abusers and changing ethos of the younger generation. Ironically speaking elderly with good amount of income as well as very little income both are at risk nowadays. Along with this, abused elderly believe that there is overall change in the values and lifestyle of younger generation due to material culture and modernization.

### **Suggestions for All Elderly for Better Adjustment in Life**

As we get older, life starts changing in physical, mental, financial and social aspects of life.

1. Try to maintain social connections in order to avoid isolation in old age.
2. Involve yourself in nearby community activities, local organisations and events.
3. Stay connected with friends, relatives and neighbours.
4. Make friends of similar interests in your locality.
5. Watch TV in your free time.



6. Involve yourself in religious textbooks and religious organisations
7. Read newspapers and magazines regularly so that you get to know about your rights.
8. Stay connected to your friends and family with social media.
9. Those who do not know how to use social media, for them telephones are of great help to get connected.
10. Read inspirational or motivational books.
11. Stay positive in life.
12. Plan your routine, starting from bathing, eating, sleeping to socializing.
13. Physical routine including walking, light exercises and pranayama is fruitful for elderly.
14. Take care of your health.
15. Develop interest in some hobby like gardening or listening to music etc.

Conclusion : Elderly abuse has become a glaring issue in the society which is spreading like an epidemic. Looking up to the western experience to strengthen their social support system, we need to work on the same lines in India. application of laws, support of social welfare agencies and generating awareness on the issue at all levels.

## REFERENCES

1. Amarjit Mahajan, Madhuria, *Family Steinmetz, S. K.: Family Violence Towards Elders*. In S. Saundev C, A. Hart and G. M Pubenstein (Eds) *violent Individuals and Families: A handbook or practitioner spring field* Charles C. Thomas 1988, 139-163.
2. NEAIS -1998, the administration on ageing by the National Centre on elder abuse at the American Public Human Services association in collaboration with Westat.inc.
3. Goode William. J 1976, *The family* published by Englewood cliffs<sup>1</sup>.
4. Steinmetz, S.K.1988: *Family Violence towards Elders*. In S. SaundevC, A.Hart and G.M Rubenstein (Eds) *violent Individuals and Families :A handbook or practitioner spring field* Charles C. Thomas 139-163.
5. *The Tribune*: 2011, Elderly couple was harassed by youth in Sector 18, Chandigarh in December.
6. *The Tribune*: 2006, Triple Murder Case February 17, Sector 34 in Chandigarh.
7. *The Tribune*: 2006, Elderly Women was raped and murdered by teenagers in Sector 15, Chandigarh on September 5.
8. *The Tribune*: 2011, Elderly couple was harassed by youth in Sector 18, Chandigarh in December.
9. *The Tribune*: 2006, Triple Murder Case February 17, Sector 34 in Chandigarh.
10. *The Tribune*: 2006, Elderly Women was raped and murdered by teenagers in Sector 15, Chandigarh on September 5.
11. [www.censusindia.gov.in/vitalstatistics/.../9chap%20%20-%202011.page13](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/vitalstatistics/.../9chap%20%20-%202011.page13). DOD 3.12.2014.