Original Research Article

Elder abuse among residents of Shivamogga: a cross sectional study

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ABSTRACT

Background: As per the WHO estimates the global population of people aged 60 years and above will increase from 900 million in 2015 to about 2 billion in 2050. Abuse of elderly has become a problem even in India. Due to social taboo, the elder abuse at community setting is usually not reported. Even though elder abuse is an important public health problem, very little is known about the extent of abuse especially in developing countries.
Methods: A community based cross-sectional study was conducted in Shivamogga. A total of 200 elderly persons were interviewed using a pretested semi structured questionnaire. The person showing suggestive score was further asked about type of abuse and perpetrator of mistreatment.
Results: Our study showed total prevalence of elder abuse in the community to be 24%. The extent of abuse was more among females especially the housewives. The most common type of abuse was verbal abuse followed by psychological abuse. Son was the common perpetrator of mistreatment.
Conclusions: Elder abuse is much prevalent in the community. There is a need for further studies to generalise the findings.

Keywords: Elder abuse, Hwalek–Sengstock elder abuse screening test, Mistreatment, Community

INTRODUCTION

As per the WHO estimates the global population of people aged 60 years and above will increase from 900 million in 2015 to about 2 billion in 2050.

India is under a epidemiological and demographic health transition. It is well known that the average life expectancy of Indians has increased over the years, which in turn has resulted in chronic functional disabilities creating a need for assistance by the older person even to manage as simple as the activities of daily living.

Elder abuse is a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which cause harm or distress to an older person. It is estimated that globally 1 in 10 people aged above 60 years experience abuse every month.

The global prevalence of elder abuse in community settings is 15.7%, which can further be classified into psychological abuse (11.6%), physical abuse (2.6%) financial abuse (6.8%), neglect (4.2%) and sexual abuse (0.9%).[1]

In India due to social taboo, the elder abuse at community setting is usually not reported.[2] Even though elder abuse is an important public health problem, very little is known about the extent of abuse especially in developing countries.[3] So this study was taken up to study the prevalence of elder abuse in community settings with the following objectives

- To assess elder abuse among rural and urban residents.
- To find association between elder abuse and selected socio demographic variables.

METHODS

A community based, cross-sectional study was conducted for the duration of 3 months in urban and rural field practice areas of Shivamogga Institute of Medical Sciences from June 2017 to August 2017. The study included subjects in the geriatric age group of 60years and above. Sample size was calculated to be 200. House to house visits were done until 200 subjects were met. Informed consent was taken from the subjects after explaining the purpose of the study to them. Information was collected by trained interviewers by face-to face interviews with each respondent. The socio-demographic information included age, gender, education, marital status, type of family. To assess the extent of abuse, a pretested predesigned Hwalek-Sengstock questionnaire for elder abuse which contained 15 items was used. A response of "no" to items 1, 6, 12, and 14 a response of "someone else" to item 4 and a response of "yes" to all others are scored in the "abused" direction. Based on the score, the extent of abuse was divided into three categories- no abuse (scale value 0), mild abuse (scale value ranges from 1 to 3) and severe abuse (scale value 4 and above). The person showing suggestive scoring was asked more on type of abuse and perpetrators of abuse. The study mainly focused on abuse of elders in the home settings. Elderly persons those who were severely ill were excluded from the study. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from institutional ethics committee. Pilot study was conducted for feasibility.

Microsoft Excel spread sheet was used for data entry and SPSS for analysis of data

Data analysis was done using appropriate statistical tools such as mean, percentages and Chi-square test.

RESULTS

A total of 200 elderly people were interviewed. Majority were in the age group of 60-69yrs accounting for 70.5%. Females (52.5%) outnumbered males. 88% of them were married and 70.5% of the respondents belonged to Hindu religion. 56% were illiterate. Majority of them were housewives (36%). Most of them lived in 3 generation family (68.5%). 48% of them belonged to lower middle class. The other socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are as shown in Table 1. Out of 200 elderly interviewed 48 (24%) reported being experienced some form of abuse.

Using Hwalek sengstock questionnaire, based on the score, the extent of abuse was divided into three categories- no abuse (scale value 0), mild abuse (scale

value ranges from 1 to 3) and severe abuse (scale value 4 and above).

Table 1: Background characteristics of study population.

| Socio demographic variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	95	47.5
Female	105	52.5
Age group (in years)		
60-69	141	70.5
70-79	53	26.5
80 and above	6	3
Literacy		
Illiterate	112	56
Below high school	69	34.5
High school and above	19	9.5
Occupation		
Self employed	3	1.5
Cultivators	62	31
Casual labourers	30	15
Housewives	72	36
Retired from service	24	12
Unemployed	9	4.5
Socio-economic status		
Upper class	16	8
Upper middle class	7	3.5
Middle class	57	28.5
Lower middle class	96	48
Lower class	24	12

Table 2 represents the extent of elder abuse by background characteristics of respondents. It is evident from the table that the extent of severe abuse was more in females (28.6%) than elderly male (5.3%). Regarding education of the respondents 20.3% of those who were educated below high school were severely abused compared to 5.3% of them who were educated high school and above. Severe abuse was more among the respondents belonging to age group 70-79 years (37.7%). Respondents those who were widowed (31.8%) were severely abused compared to those who were single (0%). By occupation housewives (34.7%) were more severely abused followed by those who were unemployed (33.3%) compared to those who were self employed (0%).

The overall prevalence of elder abuse in our study was 24%. Regarding the type of elder abuse majority of the residents had not experienced any kind of abuse. However 14% of them had experienced verbal abuse, 8% psychological abuse, 1% had undergone physical abuse and 1% of them the financial abuse. In our study no one reported being sexually abused (Figure 1).

**Table 2: Extent of elder abuse by selected socio-demographic variables.**

Sociodemographic variables	No abuse	Mild abuse	Severe abuse
Sex			
Male	86.3	8.4	5.3
Female	63.8	7.6	28.6*
Age group (years)			
60-69	85.8	3.5	10.6
70-79	41.5	20.8	37.7*
80 and above	100	0	0
Literacy			
Illiterate	74.1	8	17.9
Below high school	72.5	7.2	20.3
High school and above	84.2	10.5	5.3
Occupation			
Self employed	66.7	33.3	0
Cultivators	90.3	3.2	6.5
Casual laborers	83.3	13.3	3.3
Housewives	56.9	8.3	34.7*
Retired from service	79.2	12.5	8.3
Unemployed	66.7	0	33.3
Socio-economic status			
Upper class	81.3	18.8	0
Upper middle class	57.1	14.3	28.6
Middle class	63.2	7	29.8
Lower middle class	82.3	3.1	14.6
Lower class	70.8	20.8	8.3
Family type			
Nuclear family	82.1	10.7	7.1
Joint family	82.9	2.9	14.3
3 generation family	70.8	8.8	20.4

*Chi square test: p<0.05.
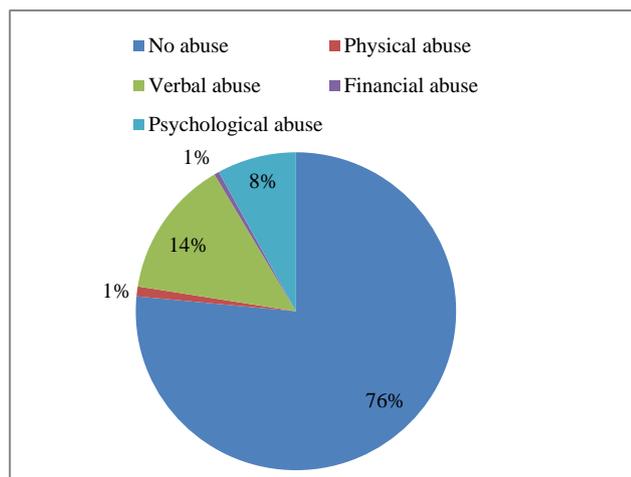
Figure 1: Percentage distribution of type of abuse.

The main perpetrator as per our study was son (40%) followed by daughter in laws (30%) and daughters (23%) as shown in Figure 2.
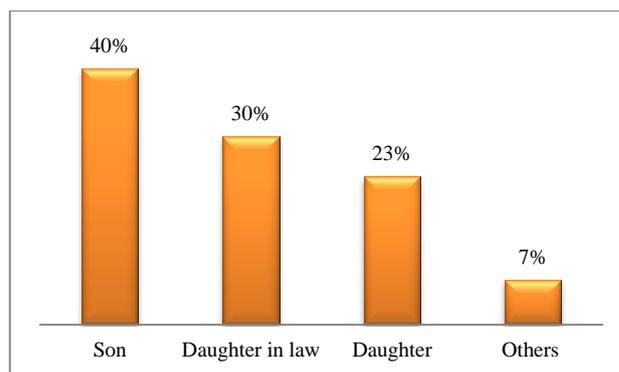
Figure 2: Percentage distribution of perpetrators of mistreatment.

DISCUSSION

In our study it was found that the overall prevalence of elder abuse in community was 24%. The finding was consistent with the findings of the study conducted by help age India which showed the national prevalence to be 23%.[4] The study done by Koul et al also showed the overall prevalence of 24%.[5] Similar findings were seen in other studies.[7-9]

In our study statistically significant association was observed between elder abuse and age, gender, occupation. Similar findings were seen in the other studies. Females especially the housewives were severely abused which could be due the socially disadvantaged status of the victim. Most of the elders had experienced verbal abuse followed by psychological abuse. Studies done in various parts of the world showed varied findings.[10-12]

Our study found that the main perpetrator of abuse was son followed by daughter in laws similar findings were seen in other studies.[6,13] It could be due to most common living arrangement of elders in India where they usually live with their son.

CONCLUSION

Elder abuse exists in various forms and degree of severity in the community. Victims of elder abuse can be characterized by risk factors such as deteriorating health with advanced age, physiological and psychological functioning also the financial difficulties. These risk factors function as signal to recognize and prevent elder abuse, so there is a need for further research of relevant elderly in specific situation. However this study would help policy makers to take necessary decisions to prevent elder abuse.

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