

Experience of Abuse by The Elderlies in an Urban setting

Abstract

Aging brings with it physical and mental frailty which requires depending on others for the fulfillment of their needs. In such, abusive conduct towards them left them vulnerable and helpless. The present study aimed to observe the situation of elderlies in terms of experiencing abuse, in urban household setting with a cross sectional study design with assessment instruments of the “Questions to Elicit Elder Abuse”. In this study, 175 elderlies, aged 60 years or above have been interviewed and 59 (33.7%) have been reported to undergone abusive behavior. Losing their spouse and getting dependent on other family members initiated the abusive activities in 40.7% of cases, the reason behind being abused was being a burden to the family in 57.6% cases, and abused by the family members other than spouse or designated caregivers were in 84.7% cases. Emotional abuse and negligence was more prevalent than physical or financial form of abuse. Type of family, numbers of family members and monthly family income found to be significant determinant of conducting abuse ($p < 0.05$), where, joint family, family members of 1-6 members and lower monthly family income had higher proportion of abuse incidents. This study concludes that, in an urban setting, elderlies who are living with their families, not having spouse, living in joint family with lower income were marked with higher trend of elderly abuse.

Keywords: Elder abuse, urban, aging, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, financial abuse

Introduction

In this era of rapid globalization, the definition of old age is changing across countries and cultures, even within each family. ¹ In Bangladesh perspective, the elderlies are generally looked after by their families. ² People at their advanced years of life, looks for living in their home with their children and grandchildren, sharing their life with their descendants and to be taken care for their diminished capabilities. ³ Looking after the elderlies at their last period of life, is the commonly practiced social norm in our country, which is also regarded as a very fundamental concern for their physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing. ² In the recent past, only a small proportion of population lived beyond their middle ages, therefore, those few who survived into old age, were treasured as a valuable person for their insights and knowledge, therefore, they had a strong role in the family. Thus, elderly support was not an issue to be concerned for. Although now, more

people are expected to live beyond the age of 60 years, simultaneously, the breakdown of the extended family tradition and the reduction in the family size in terms of having fewer number of children are resulting in disfigurement of the traditional family support system for the elderlies.² In 1950, the world was home to 205 million people aged 60 or older. The number of older people had risen to nearly 810 million from 2012. By 2050, it is expected to double to 2 billion.⁴ With life expectancy increased from 40 years in 1951–1967 in 2015, a person has 25 more years to live than 50 years ago.⁵

As detonated by Aristophanes “Old men are children for second time”.⁶ Aging brings with it, a distinctive set of complications². Besides the biological changes, ageing also accompanies other transitions of life situations, such as retirement, economic dependency, change in accommodation, change in social and familial roles. Besides the physical, mental and social alterations, economic status transition from independent to dependent make their life furthermore complicated and vulnerable. Among these vulnerability, the most silent though considerably prevalent issue is elderly abuse.⁷ As defined by WHO, “abuse is 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”.⁸ Elder abuse can take various forms such as financial, physical, psychological and sexual.⁸ Negligency, whether it be intentional or unintentional, can also result in abusive act.⁸ The prevalence rates of elderly abuse may differ conferring its type. Globally, abuse rates were 11.6% for psychological abuse, 6.8% for financial abuse, 4.2% for neglect, 2.5% for physical abuse, and 0.9% for sexual abuse.⁸ A successful aging thorough a satisfactory life condition can lead to utilize the life long experience of an elderly person, in the extent of future social and functional work areas through their consultancy, advocacy and assistance. On the other hand, exposure to abuse and negligence can cause detonation of the quality of life and make their condition even more vulnerable and effect their wellbeing in reverse direction. Statistics on the abuse of the elderly are difficult to find and analyze because the abuse of the elderly is relatively recently known, has a wide variety of state-to-state interpretations and is subject to cultural interpretation.⁹ Therefore, the present study aims to observe the extent of elderly abuse in the household setting.

Methodology:

Subjects & methods: This study had been carried out with a cross sectional study design, conducted within a period of one year, from January to December, of the year 2019 in one of the selected area of Mohammadpur, Dhaka. With ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of National Institute of Preventive and Social Medicine (NIPSOM), and informed written consent from the respondent, the study interviewed 175 elderlies aged 60 years or above.

Data collection and analysis: With a semi-structured questionnaire, through face to face interview, data was collected regarding the sociodemographic background of the respondents and the experience of their abuse. With the use of IBM Software- Statistical package for Social Science (SPSS) version 22, percentage, mean and range were calculated and used to describe continuous and categorical variables.

Evaluation of elderly abuse: In this study data regarding elderly abuse includes physical, psychological or emotional, neglect and financial abuse. The experiences of elderly abuse have been measured by using the assessment instruments of the “Questions to Elicit Elder Abuse”.¹⁰ The questionnaire contains 15 items which addresses four domains, namely, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and financial abuse. Each item is scored on a nominal scale, on which participants chose either “yes” or “no” based on their experiences.

Results

As recorded in this study, 59 (33.7%) elder people experienced abusive conduct (Figure I). Respondents gave history of being abused by their husbands in 1.7% of cases, by their wives in 5.7% cases, by their caregivers in 15.3% cases and majority of the respondents (84.7%) gave history of being abused by their family members (Table: I).

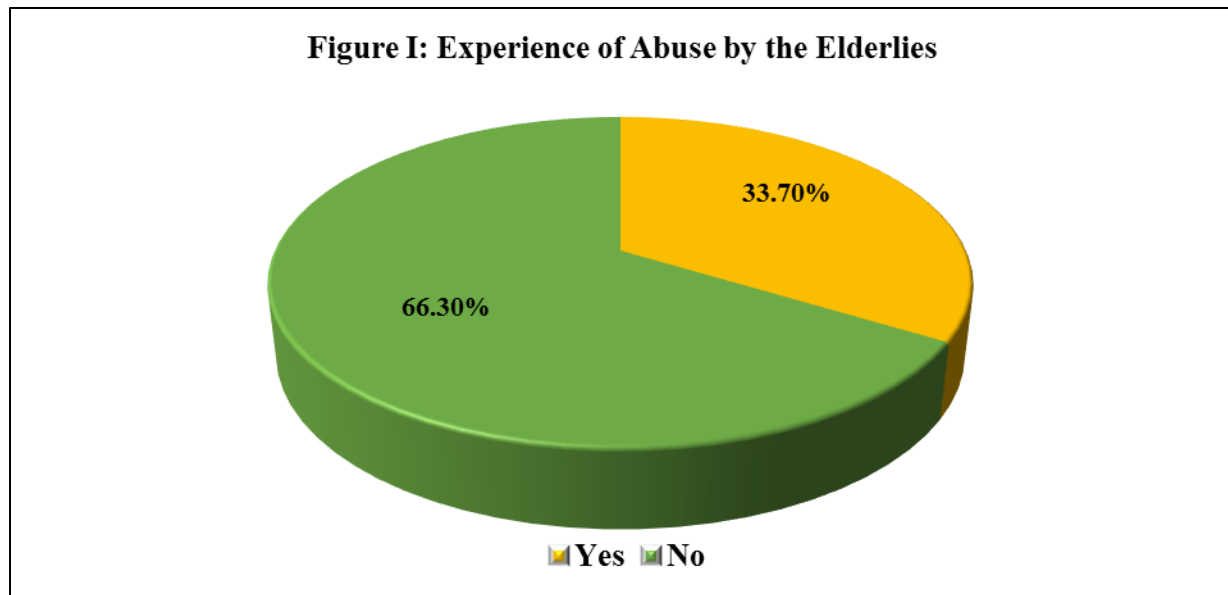


Table I: Abusers in relation with the abused elderlies

Abused elderly by abusers	Frequency	Percentage
Husband (n=91 Male)	3	1.7
Wife (n=84 Female)	10	5.7
Family members (n=Total abused=59)	50	84.7
Caregivers (n=Total abused=59)	9	15.3

When asked, from when they were being abused, 40.7% reported that, the abusive behavior started from when they lost their spouse and got dependent on others, 18.7% reported that, it started with their turning into frail and weak due to extreme age, 13.3% were being abused since they no longer remain an earning person or lost their business, in 7.5% cases the conduct of abuse started when their son got married, 1.7% were being abused since they became weakened by stroke and couldn't work, 1.7% were abused when they became widow and their son became addicted, 1.7% were abused since they worked less and started forgetting things. In 10.2% cases the respondents didn't respond (Table II).

Table II: Participant's response on incident of abuse initiation (n=59)

Incidence	Frequency	Percentage
From the time when I lost my spouse	23	39.0
When got frail and weak due to aging	11	18.7

Since no longer being a earning person	9	13.3
From the time my son get married	5	7.5
From the time of decreased working ab	1	1.7
Weakness due to my stroke	1	1.7
Followed by sickness of husband	1	1.7
Not having spouse and affection toward my son	1	1.7
Became widow and son got addicted	1	1.7
Did not respond	6	10.2

As according to the respondents, the reason behind the abuse they experience was being a burden to the family in 57.6%, due to carelessness in 49.2%, cases due to financial burden 52.5% cases, due to having no role in decision making in 45.8% cases and in 8.5% cases they were abused as they thought to be causing excessive expenditure (Table III).

Table III: Reasons for being abused according to the respondents (n=59)

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Financial problem	31	52.5
Excessive expenditure	5	8.5
Less important in decision making	27	45.8
Carelessness of the elderly	29	49.2
Feeling burden of family	34	57.6

As evaluated by the “question to elicit elder abuse” to observe the incidence of abusive behavior with the elderlies in various domains, it has been seen that, left them feel alone was the most prominent form of abuse which was reported by 33.1% of the respondents, followed by lack in aids such as eyeglasses, hearing aids, or false teeth which was reported by 27.4% respondents. Also, negligence toward availing assistance and help were reported by high fraction of the respondents, that is, 25.7% and 25.1% respectively.

Table IV: Participant’s response on different domains of abuse

Domains of abuse		Yes	No
Physical abuse	Afraid of anyone at home	25(14.3%)	150(85.7%)
	Struck, slapped or kicked by anyone at home	27(15.4%)	148(84.6%)

	Ever been tied down or locked in a room	14(8.0%)	161(92.0%)
	Touched by anyone without permission	0 (0.00%)	175 (100.0%)
Emotional abuse	Felt alone	58(33.1%)	117(66.9%)
	Threatened with punishment, deprivation, or institutionalization	38(21.7%)	137(78.3%)
	Received the “silent treatment”	30(17.1%)	145(82.9%)
	Forced fed	17(9.7%)	158(90.3%)
	Caregiver disagreed	43(24.6%)	132(75.4%)
Neglect	Lack in aids such as eyeglasses, hearing aids, or false teeth	48(27.4%)	127(72.6%)
	Left alone for long periods	28(16.0%)	147(84.0%)
	Getting assistance when need	45(25.7%)	130(74.3%)
	Get help when need	44(25.1%)	131(74.9%)
Financial abuse	If the caregiver depend on the respondent for shelter or financial support	37(21.1%)	138(78.9%)
	If ever respondent’s money got stolen	19(10.9%)	156(89.1%)

When the experience of being abused was compared with the sociodemographic background, it has been observed that, female respondents were abused more in comparison to male respondents (36.9% vs 30.8%), although this difference in proportion of male and female abused elderlies were not statistically significant ($p>0.05$). Among other sociodemographic characteristics, type of family, number of family members and monthly family income found to be statistically significant in relation with being abused ($p<0.05$). Elderlies in joint families (42.1%) rather than in nuclear families (23.8%) found to be abused more. Number of family members with 13 to 18 found to be abused the most (100.0%). It was also observed that, with the increase if the monthly family income the rate of abuse also gets higher (Table V).

Table V: Sociodemographic variability in association with elderly abuse in the household

Variables	Experienced abuse		p value
	No	Yes	

		n₁=116	n₂=59	
		N(%)	N(%)	
Gender	Male	63(69.2%)	28(30.8%)	0.426
	Female	53(63.1%)	31(36.9%)	
Educational status	Illiterate and informal	28(70.0%)	12(30.0%)	0.506
	Primary	18(72.0%)	7(28.0%)	
	Secondary	25(61.0%)	16(39.0%)	
	Higher secondary	15(78.9%)	4(21.1%)	
	Graduation & above	30(60.0%)	20(40.0%)	
Occupational status	Service	13(86.7%)	2(13.3%)	0.366
	Business	19(76.0%)	6(24.0%)	
	Day laborer	3(75.0%)	1(25.0%)	
	Retired	35(60.3%)	23(39.7%)	
	Housemaker	46(63.0%)	27(37.0%)	
Type of family	Nuclear	61(76.3%)	19(23.8%)	0.016
	Joint	55(57.9%)	40(42.1%)	
Number of family members	1-6	96(66.7%)	48(33.3%)	0.018
	7-12	20(74.1%)	7(25.9%)	
	13-18	0(0.0%)	4(100.0%)	
Monthly family income (Taka)	7000-30000	26(81.3%)	6(18.8%)	0.010
	30001-60000	54(65.1%)	29(34.9%)	
	60001-100000	35(66.0%)	18(34.0%)	
	100001-200000	1(14.3%)	6(85.7%)	

Discussion:

Aging is not experienced uniformly among older adults. Some people in their old age achieve a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction, while others become vicious and weakened by the decline of their physical abilities and social meaning.¹¹ Elderly people who are frail, lonely or depressed, as well as those with physical or mental illness, are vulnerable to abuse.

The present study revealed that, out of 175 elderlies, 59 were abused, which accounts for 33.7%. This is a very high and alarming rate of incidence. Addressed by other studies, elderly abuse in

Bangladesh is a serious concern that requires national attention to address the situation.¹² As compared to a study in our neighboring country, this abuse rate on elder people found to be at 10%.¹³ In the present study, the prevalence of emotional abuse and negligence were more prominent which is concomitant with other study findings where they found physical and sexual abuse were rare although neglect, psychological abuse, and financial exploitation ranged from 8.9% to 14.4%.¹⁴ Majority of the respondents who experienced abuse (84.7%) were abused by their family members other than their spouses or caregivers. In an another study, it was showed that 45% of the respondents were neglected by their spouses, 37% by their adult child.¹⁵ In a Korean study, the most frequent abuser found to be the son followed by the daughter-in-law.¹⁶

Regarding the reason behind elderly abuse, majority of the respondent (57.6%) reported to be abused due to being a burden on their family. In studies, older persons with physical and mental debility showed to undergone abuse in higher rate.^{17,18} The study revealed that, elderly with number of family member 1-6 were abused the most (33.3%). This association was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Urban elderly living in joint families were found to be more abused than nuclear families ($p < 0.05$). In the present study, majority of the respondents (34.9%) belong from the monthly family income of 30001-60000 tk. This association was statistically significant ($p = 0.010$). In another study was done in east Delhi, India, with a prevalence rate of 9.6% of elder abuse, among 12 elderlies, 11 found to be residing in joint families. Majority of the respondents faced abuse was from the low and upper low socioeconomic class.¹⁵ In another study in Portuguese, elderly abuse was prevalent among 23.5% of the study population among whom emotional abuse and neglect was the more noticeable type of abuse.¹⁹

Conclusion

Elderly people living in the home with their children or relatives face abuse which often remains imperceptible. It's a very disgraceful and unacceptable act. The present study showed that emotional abuse and negligence remained more prevalent than the physical or financial exploitation. Type of family they are living in and the financial status dependably effects the act of abuse. The insights that have been brought by this study is important to implement action strategy to safeguard the elderlies from any kind of abuse. Elder people, their life long experience and knowledge is valuable resource for us; abusive attitude towards them make their physical and mental condition vulnerable which apparently going to be a loss for the family members.

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