

# Approach to Identify and Assess the Factors Leading to Elderly Abuse – An Adult Perspective Study in Kanchipuram District, Tamil Nadu

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## Abstract

**Background:** Elderly 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 a person. There are increasing number of cases of elderly abuse coming to light. This study aims to understand the perspectives of adults regarding elderly abuse. It also attempts to assess the levels of awareness and understanding among adults regarding geriatric abuse and to evaluate the various factors leading to elderly abuse and to associate it with their sociodemographic details. **Materials and Methods:** A community based cross-sectional study was conducted in Kanchipuram district, Tamil Nadu. A total of 302 participants were selected using simple random sampling (lott method). A pre-tested, validated and structured questionnaire was administered and the desired information was elicited. Analysis was done using SPSS Software version 22. Chi square test was used to test the significance ( $p < 0.05$ ). **Results:** A total of 302 individuals were studied, of which 135 (44.7%) were males and 167 (55.3%) were females. It is observed that 23.2% of the respondents feel that there is lack of patience among the younger generation and 13.6% of the respondents feel that greed and desire to inherit property are major factors contributing to elderly abuse. Majority (38.2%) of those belonging to 40-49 years of age group feel that most elderly feel unhappy because of a perceived loss of authority in the family hierarchy, there is a statistically significant association ( $p = 0.047$ ) supporting this statement according to our study. A preponderance (74.7%) of those who have elders at home feel that most elderly feel unhappy due to the diminution of the frequency of outdoor social activities and interactions, there is a statistically significant association ( $p \text{ value} = 0.044$ ) supporting this statement according to our study. **Conclusion:** Most adults are well aware of the cruel realities of elderly abuse, though they tend to be very naïve in their beliefs regarding the severity of it. The formulation of better programs and laws to aid the elderly would also be highly beneficial to them.

**Keywords:** Perceptions, Adults, Elderly Abuse.

## INTRODUCTION

According to the 2020 National Commission on population report, there are 67 million male and 71 million female elderly people in India in 2021.<sup>[1]</sup> According to the WHO, “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 causes harm or distress to an older person.” This type of violence constitutes a violation of human rights and includes physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional abuse; financial and material abuse; abandonment; neglect; and serious loss of dignity and respect.<sup>[2]</sup> Elderly abuse could occur anywhere, in the community, in institutions, at home, or even on the streets.

There are a variety of risk factors which could lead to the causation of elderly abuse, there is an ecological model (Wallace & Bonnie, 2003) <sup>[3]</sup> which can be followed in reporting the main risk factors, focusing on the levels of the individual (victim and perpetrator), relationship, community, and society that are associated with the risk of elder abuse.<sup>[4]</sup>

The individual (victim) level risk factors include: functional dependence/ disability, poor physical health, cognitive impairment, poor mental health, low income / socioeconomic status, gender, age, financial dependence, race/ ethnicity. The individual (perpetrator) level risk factors include: mental illness, substance abuse, abuser dependency. The relationship level risk factors include: victim-perpetrator relationship, marital status. The community level risk factor includes geographic location. The societal risk factors include negative stereotypes on age, cultural norms. The situation regarding elderly abuse in India is that 11% of 60+ year olds have experienced at least one type of elderly abuse (Physical 5.3%, Verbal 10.2%, Economic 5.4%, Disrespect 6%, Neglect 5.2%).<sup>[5]</sup>

A study from Chennai (N = 400) found 14% prevalence of elderly mistreatment, where chronic verbal abuse was the most common followed by financial abuse, physical mistreatment, neglect and injuries from burns.<sup>[6]</sup> In another Indian study (N = 1000), 4% of the elderly respondents reported physical abuse.<sup>[7]</sup> With the increasing cases of elderly abuse coming to light, which yet represent just the tip of the iceberg, it has become essential to increase awareness regarding elderly abuse and its various forms. It is important to ascertain the perceptions and attitudes of adults as they constitute the primary caregivers of the elderly. The attitudes of adults towards the elderly are a very important factor in their treatment of the elderly, as negative attitudes towards the elderly means that abusers can abuse the elderly without feeling guilty. Thus, it is essential to enlighten them regarding the plight of the elderly in modern society.

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 1) To understand the perspectives of adults regarding geriatric abuse.
- 2) To assess the levels of awareness and understanding among adults regarding geriatric abuse.
- 3) To evaluate the various factors leading to elderly abuse and to associate it with their sociodemographic details

## METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

A community based cross sectional survey was conducted in the field practice area of a Tertiary care medical college and hospital in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu among the adult residents irrespective of their gender. Based on a national survey done by HelpAge India <sup>[8]</sup>, it was seen that the perception that elderly abuse exists was prevalent among 22% of the study population of 18 to 59 years. Using the formula  $4pq/d^2$  and considering 5% allowable error the sample size was calculated as 274. Taking 10% non-respondent rate, the final estimated sample size is 302.

The participants were sampled using simple random sampling after getting the list of male and female members of the village from the Panchayath Office. A pre-tested, validated and structured questionnaire based on the survey done by HelpAge India - National Survey and related baseline sociodemographic details was used. The respondents who voluntarily consented to participate in the study, and who were greater than 18 years of age were included and written informed consent was taken from them. The data was then entered in the excel sheet and analyzed by using SPSS Software version 22. The frequencies and percentages were calculated. Chi square test was used to find the association and p value <0.05 was considered significant. This study had obtained the ethical

clearance approval from the Institutional Ethical Committee of Saveetha Medical College and Hospital, Chennai.

## RESULTS

### *Baseline Details*

A total of 302 individuals were studied, of which 135 (44.7%) were males and 167 (55.3%) were females. Majority (36.1%) were in the age group 40-49 years. Majority (55%) were married. Majority (69.2%) had elderly present at home. The relationship of maximum participants (25.8%) with the eldest person in their family was that of being their daughter, followed by 19.5% being granddaughters and 17.9% being sons.

### *Awareness of Elderly Abuse*

Majority (45%) felt that the elderly in India were moderately satisfied with the quality of their life. It was seen that 36.1% of the respondents felt that elderly abuse exists to some extent in Indian society. Most (36.8%) of the respondents felt that prevalence of elderly abuse is the same everywhere. A lion's share (62.6%) of the respondents felt that there is not a significant prevalence of elderly abuse in nursing homes. Majority (56.3%) felt that there is not a significant prevalence of elderly abuse in homes for the elderly. It was observed, however, that 57.9% felt that there is a significant prevalence of elderly abuse in public places.

### *Perceptions Regarding Elderly Abuse*

52.6% of the respondents felt that it is somewhat easy to spot elderly abuse among neighbors. Many (53.3%) of the respondents felt that the most important way by which families can prevent elderly abuse is for families to spend adequate time with their elders. 38.4% of the respondents felt that the second most important way by which families can prevent elderly abuse is for elders' opinions to always be given due importance. It was observed that 25.5% felt that the third important way by which families can prevent elderly abuse is for elders' financial/ material needs to be taken care of by their families.

Majority (53.6%) felt that the most important measure the elderly can take to prevent abuse is for the elderly to social and active. 46.7% felt that the most important measure the elderly can take to prevent abuse is for the elderly to keep their possessions/ finances organised. A greater proportion (53.3%) of the respondents felt that the most important measure the elderly must take after experiencing abuse is to talk about it to other family members. 29.1% felt that the next most important measure the elderly must take after experiencing abuse is to talk about it to other friends and neighbours.

### *Experience*

It was observed that 47.7% of the respondents felt that elderly abuse takes place among all income households equally. Most (65.6%) of the respondents felt that elderly abuse takes place among all education categories equally. 55.3% felt that staying in a large joint family helps keep the elderly from being abused. The vast majority (68.5%) of the respondents had not come across any instances of elderly abuse. The greater proportion (39.7%) of the respondents felt that if they came across any instances of elderly abuse, they would speak to the abuser and ask them to change their behaviour.

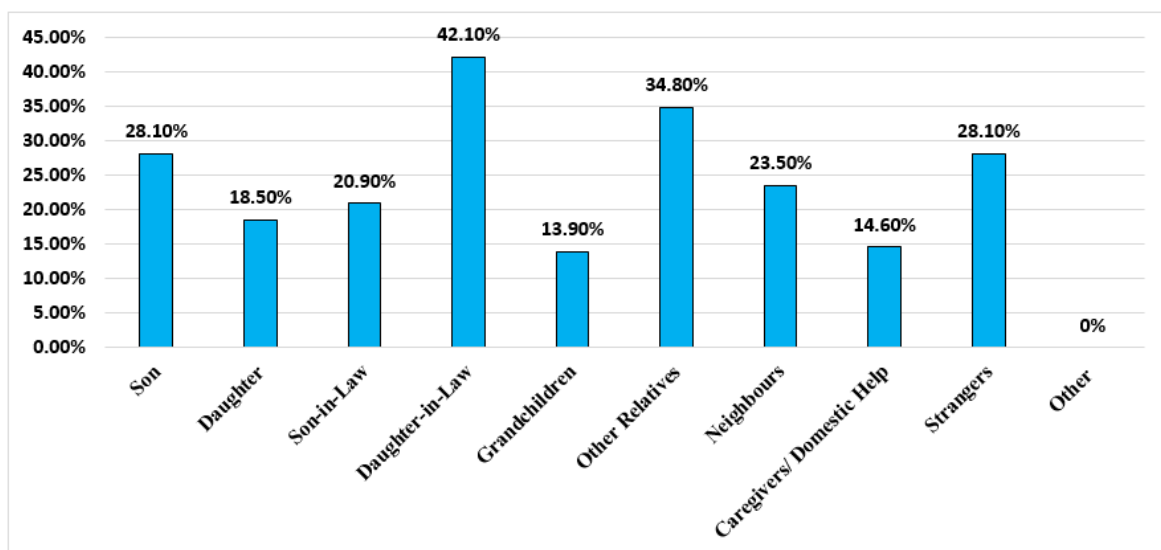
### ***Association between baseline details of the study participants and their perceptions on Elderly abuse***

Majority (38.2%) of those of the 40-49 years age group feel that most elderly feel unhappy because of a perceived loss of authority in the family hierarchy, there is a statistically significant association ( $p=0.047$ ) supporting this statement according to our study. A preponderance (74.7%) of those who have elders at home feel that most elderly feel unhappy due to the diminution of the frequency of outdoor social activities and interactions, there is a statistically significant association ( $p=0.044$ ) supporting this statement according to our study. Majority (40.6%) of those of the 40-49 years age group feel that most elderly experience being talked to rudely or in an abusive language, there is a statistically significant association ( $p<0.001$ ) supporting this statement according to our study. Majority (42.6%) of those of the 40-49 years age group feel that most elderly experience emotional abuse or silent abuse or being isolated, there is a statistically significant association ( $p=0.025$ ) supporting this statement according to our study. Majority (64.6%) of those who are married feel that most elderly experience being talked to rudely or in an abusive language, there is a statistically significant association ( $p=0.045$ ) supporting this statement according to our study. Majority (73.3%) of those who are unmarried feel that the elderly does not experience financial abuse, while majority (63.5%) of those who are married feel that the elderly does, occasionally, experience financial abuse, there is a statistically significant association ( $p=0.020$ ) supporting this statement according to our study.

**Table 1: Perceptions of adults regarding prevalence of the reasons for the elderly to feel unhappy**

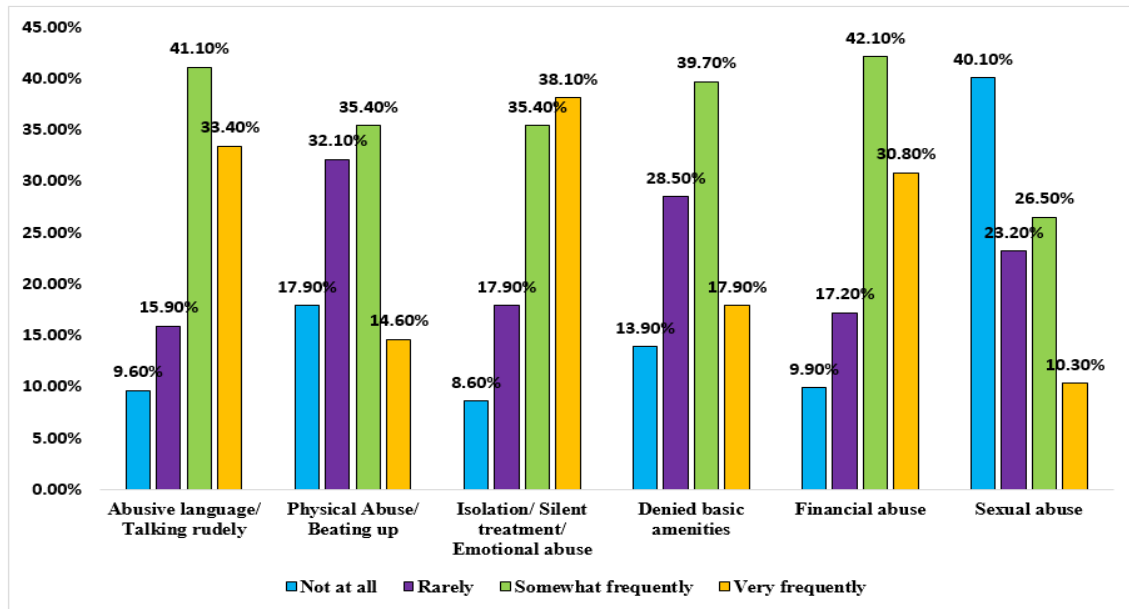
Reasons of being unhappy	Some Elderly	Most Elderly	All Elderly
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Unable to spend as before	41.1%	50%	8.9%
No outdoor life	26.2%	58.9%	14.9%
Not being given respect	29.8%	55%	15.2%
Being abused by family	55%	37.4%	7.6%

From **Table 1**, it is observed that most adults perceive that most of the elderly feel unhappy due to being unable to have an active outdoor life (58.9%) and not being respected (55%).



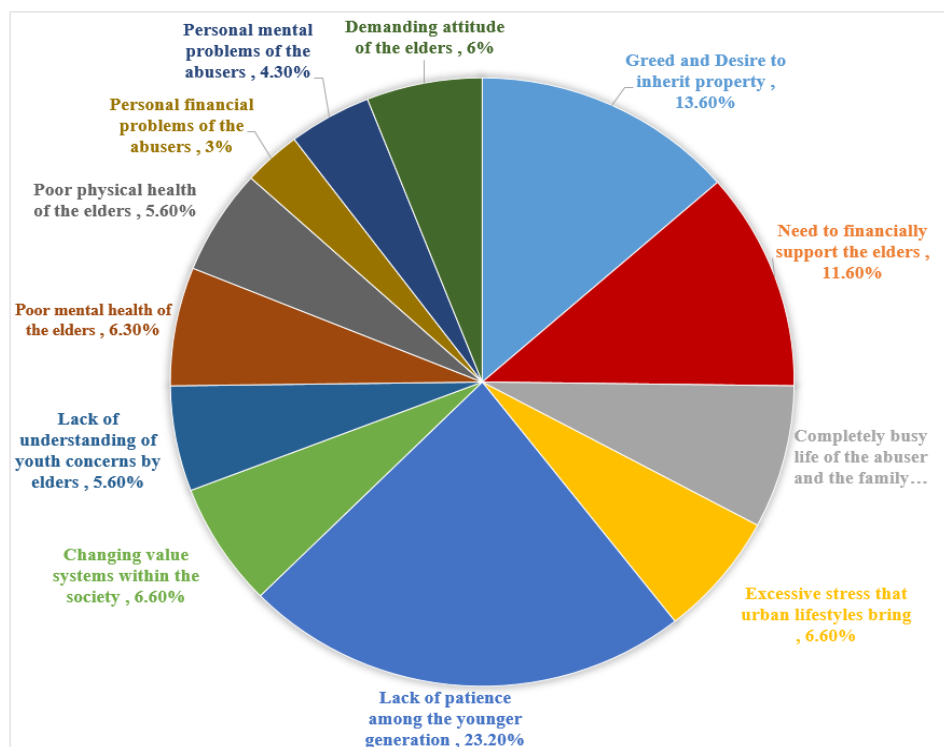
**Fig 1: Perception on the primary abusers of the elderly among study participants**

From **Fig 1**, it is observed that majority (42.1%) of adults opine that in household where elderly abuse exists, it is the daughter-in-law who is the abuser, followed by 34.8% who feel that other relatives may be the abusers.



**Fig 2: Perceptions regarding various forms of elderly abuse among study participants**

From **Fig 2**, it is observed that 42.1 % of adults feel that the elderly experience financial abuse somewhat frequently, 41.1% of adults feel that the elderly experience being talked to rudely or in an abusive language somewhat frequently, and 38.1% of adults feel that the elderly experience emotional abuse, or being given the silent treatment or isolation



**Figure 3: Perception of adults regarding the most important factor leading for elderly abuse**

From **Fig 3**, it is observed that with regards to the perceptions of adults about the most important factor contributing to elderly abuse, the majority (23.2%) felt that it was due to the lack of patience among the younger generation, followed by 13.6%, who felt that it was due to greed and a desire to inherit property.

## DISCUSSION

### *Awareness of Elderly Abuse*

In our study, 45% of the respondents felt that the elderly in India were moderately satisfied with the quality of their lives which is similar to the survey <sup>[8]</sup> conducted in Chennai. According to our study, 50% felt that most elderly feel unhappy due to being unable to spend money as before, whereas in the aforementioned survey, 98% felt the same. 58.9% of the respondents felt that most elderly feel unhappy due to not having an active outdoor life, whereas in the survey, 76.2% felt the same. In our study, 55% felt that some of the elderly feel unhappy due to being abused by family members, whereas in the survey, 45.5% felt the same.

This study indicates that, 36.1% felt that elderly abuse exists to some extent in India society, which is in contrast to the survey wherein 72.5% felt the same. 36.8% of the respondents felt that elderly abuse has the same prevalence everywhere, whereas in the survey, 42.2% felt the same. According to the study, 37.4% felt that significant elderly abuse exists in nursing homes, whereas in the survey, 22% felt the same. The study by Myhre J et al <sup>[9]</sup> shows that care managers lack awareness of elder abuse and neglect, and that elder abuse is an overlooked patient safety issue. The consequence is that nursing home residents are at risk of being harmed and distressed. Care managers lack knowledge and strategies to identify and adequately manage abuse and neglect in nursing homes. In our study, 43.7% felt that significant elderly abuse exists in homes for the elderly which is similar to the survey wherein 43% felt the same. 57.9% felt that significant elderly abuse exists in public spaces, which is in stark contrast to the survey wherein only 11% felt the same.

### *Perceptions Regarding Elderly Abuse*

In our study, 52.6% felt that it is somewhat easy to spot elderly abuse among neighbours, whereas in the survey, 87% felt the same. According to our study, 42.1% felt that in households where elderly abuse exists, the daughter-in-law is primarily the abuser which is similar to the survey wherein 46% felt the same.

The respondents all agree that the elderly face many different kinds of abuse to a certain extent. 33.4% of respondents felt the elderly experience being talked to rudely or in an abusive language very frequently, however in the survey 75.5% felt the same. The study indicates that 14.6% felt that the elderly experience physical abuse or being beat up very frequently, the survey indicates that 11% felt the same. According to our study, 38.1% felt that the elderly undergo being isolated, given silent treatment or emotional abuse very frequently, whereas in the survey 53% felt the same. 30.8% of the respondents felt that the elderly experience financial abuse or improper use of their financial assets by their abusers, whereas in the study 56% felt the same.

There are various factors which contribute to elderly abuse. The majority (23.2%) felt that the primary factor contributing to elderly abuse is lack of patience among the younger generation whereas in the survey the majority (38%) felt that the primary factor contributing to elderly abuse is the need to financially support the elders. With regards to the measures which can be taken by family members to prevent elderly abuse, the majority (53.3%) of the respondents as well as the majority (34.5%) of the respondents of the survey felt that the most important measure would be for the family to spend adequate time with their elders.



The majority (38.4%) of the respondents of our study as well as the majority (28.5%) of the respondents of the survey agree that the second most important measure which can be taken by family members to prevent elderly abuse is for the family to give due importance to the opinions of the elderly. According to our study, the majority (53.6%) felt that the most important measure the elderly can take to prevent being abused is to stay social and active which is similar to the survey wherein 54.5% felt the same. 55.3% of the respondents of our study felt that staying in a joint family prevents elderly abuse whereas in the survey 97.5% felt the same.

### **Experience**

In our study, the majority (47.7%) of the respondents felt that elderly abuse takes place among all households equally irrespective of income which is in stark contrast to the survey wherein 66.7% believe that elderly abuse occurs more among high income households.

Our study indicates that 65.6% of the respondents felt that elderly abuse is carried out by people irrespective of their education level which once more stands in stark contrast to the survey wherein 80.2% felt that elderly abuse is carried out by those of graduate level or above in terms of education. However, it is seen that the study by K Visweswara Rao et al <sup>[10]</sup> also found that education has little association with favourable attitudes towards the elderly.

68.5% of the respondents of our study have not come across elderly abuse. Majority (39.7%) responded that if they were to come across elderly abuse, they would speak to the abuser and ask them to change their behaviour which is similar to the survey wherein 41.3% felt the same.

### **CONCLUSION**

It can be observed from this study that most adults are well aware of the cruel realities of elderly abuse, though they tend to be very naïve in their beliefs regarding the severity of it. The majority of them believe that socioeconomic status is in no way associated with elderly abuse. It is necessary for knowledge regarding the specificities of elderly abuse to be made more a part of mainstream awareness to ensure a better outcome for the elderly. The formulation of better programmes and laws to aid the elderly would also be highly beneficial to them.

**Conflict of interest:** None declared

**Source of Funding:** Nil

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