

## Elderly Abuse: A Silent Epidemic in India

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### ABSTRACT

Elderly abuse is a pervasive social issue with significant implications for the well-being and dignity of older individuals. The aging population is increasing worldwide, and with it comes an increased risk of abuse and neglect of older adults. Elderly abuse is a complex issue with multiple causes such as social, economic, and cultural dynamics. The present research highlights the underlying factors, indicators, status of elderly abuse in India. It can occur in various settings, including within families, care facilities, or community environments. It encompasses various types of abuse, including physical, emotional, sexual, and financial abuse, as well as neglect and abandonment. Addressing elderly abuse requires a multi-pronged approach involving individuals, communities, governments, and organizations to create a society that respects and safeguards the rights and dignity of older individuals.

**Keywords:** *Social Issue, Elderly Abuse, Indicators, Care Facilities*

**S**ocial issues are challenges and problems that affect society and its members. These issues arise from various factors such as inequality, discrimination, and limited access to resources. They encompass a wide range of concerns, including poverty, education disparities, discrimination, healthcare access, environmental sustainability, and more.

Social issues have significant impacts on individuals, communities, and the overall well-being of society. They can perpetuate inequalities, hinder social progress, and contribute to social unrest. Addressing these issues requires collective action, involving governments, organisations, communities, and individuals working together to promote equality, justice, and positive change.

Efforts to tackle social issues involve raising awareness, advocating for policy changes, implementing interventions and programs, promoting inclusivity and diversity, providing support services, and working towards systemic transformations. By addressing social issues, societies can strive for a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable future for all.

### *Social issues in India*

India, like any other country, faces several social issues that impact different aspects of society. While this list is not exhaustive, here are some prominent social issues in India:

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*Fig.1: Showing major social issues of India*

- **Gender Inequality:** Despite progress, gender inequality exists in various layouts, including violence due to gender, unequal access to basic necessities, education, healthcare, work, economic opportunities, and discriminatory cultural practices. Gender inequality in India is caused by culture. Parents tend to their male newborns more than their female newborns. As a result, female children have a higher risk of contracting diseases and infections, which leads to poor nutrition and a shorter lifespan (Kalyankar and Corton, 2023).
- **Poverty and Income Inequality:** India has a significant population living below the poverty line, with limited access to basic amenities, education, and healthcare. Income inequality is a concern with a wide division between the rich and the poor class of society. The community's unemployment rates are rising, which affects the quality of income in society. A family who lacks with enough income to fulfil the needs and the society's minimum standards of living is considered as poor (Manshora, Abdullah & Hamedc, 2020).
- **Caste Discrimination:** The caste system continues to affect millions of people, especially those belonging to lower castes or scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. education, employment, social opportunities are impacted due to caste.
- **Religious and Communal Tensions:** India is a home of various religions and communities. However, incidents of religious tensions, communal violence, and religious intolerance occasionally occur, posing challenges to social harmony.
- **Child Labor:** It remains a persistent issue in India, despite legal provisions against it. Many children are engaged in hazardous and exploitative work, denying them their right to education and a healthy childhood.
- **Education Disparities:** The education is an important tool for personal and social development. The various efforts have been done by Government and Private organizations with the aim to bring more opportunities of education, there are still disparities in quality education, mainly in marginalized communities. Lack of infrastructure, trained teachers, and gender biases contribute to these disparities.
- **Environmental Issue:** Rapid industrialization and urbanization have led to environmental challenges, including air and water pollution, deforestation, and improper waste management. The major environmental issue is climate change that exacerbates these issues, posing risks to public health and natural resources (Aldeia and Alves, 2019).
- **Access to Healthcare:** While India has made strides in healthcare, access to quality healthcare remains a challenge, especially in rural areas. Limited healthcare infrastructure, inadequate funding, and high out-of-pocket expenses impact healthcare delivery, particularly for marginalized populations.
- **LGBTQ+ Rights:** The LGBTQ+ community faces discrimination, stigmatization, and limited legal protections in India. Although progress has been made with the decriminalization of homosexuality, there is a need for comprehensive anti-discrimination laws and social acceptance.

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- **Urbanization Challenges:** Rapid urbanization brings its own set of challenges, including inadequate housing, overcrowding, slums, traffic congestion, and strained urban infrastructure and services.

### *Elderly Abuse as a Social Issue*

The elderly are an essential component of any nation's population and deserve the same respect and care as the other demographic groups. However, because of modernization and changing family structures, it has become more difficult for the senior population to live a decent existence. The most dangerous situations that the elderly face are loneliness, carelessness, and a lack of importance. They also face illnesses brought on by ageing and lack of treatment (Kumar and Bhargava, 2014). Elderly abuse is a significant social issue that deserves attention and action. It refers to mistreatment or harmful action inflicted upon elderly individuals aged 60 and above. This abuse can occur in various settings that include homes, workplaces, nursing setups, hospitals, social gatherings, etc. It can take several forms, including physical, emotional, sexual, financial abuse, neglect, abandonment. Abuse of the elderly is a complex phenomena that has many causes and frequently stems from a number of circumstances (Sebastian and Sekher, 2011).

Elder abuse is any intentional, careless behaviour that puts an elderly person in danger or poses a substantial risk of injury from a family member, carer, or other person (Deswal, 2011). Elderly abuse has appealing outcomes on the lives and impacts life satisfaction, well-being, and quality of life of older individuals. It violates their fundamental human rights and can lead to physical injuries, psychological trauma, and even death. Elderly with dementia are at high risk than other older people, and women are at higher risk as compared to men (Boren, 2020).

### *Types of Elderly Abuse*

- **Physical Abuse:** It includes the use of physical force or violence that causes pain, damage or impairment. It involves harmful actions such as beating, pushing, restraining, or intentionally withholding medications or treatment.
- **Emotional Abuse:** It involves inflicting emotional pain, distress, or anguish through verbal or non-verbal actions. Examples include yelling, insulting, threatening, intimidating, isolating, or humiliating the elderly person.
- **Sexual Abuse:** It involves any kind of non-consensual sexual activity or exploitation of an elderly. This can include forceful sexual contact, forced nudity, or any form of sexual coercion.
- **Financial Abuse:** It involves the unapproved misuse of a senior citizen's finances, property, or resources. This can involve thievery, artifice, forgery, coercion, or undue influence for personal gain.
- **Neglect:** It involves the failure to access the basic care, support, or attention to meet an elderly person's basic needs. This can involve ignorance of hygiene, nutrition, medical care, or failing to address their emotional or social needs.

### *Elderly Abuse in India*

As per the reports of Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (Pihal and Kundu, 2021):

- Physical mistreatment victims were most prevalent in Arunachal Pradesh (45%), Uttar Pradesh (43%), Tamil Nadu (40%) and Puducherry (41%), among those who reported experiencing mistreatment.

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- The percentage of elderly who reported verbal or emotional abuse was highest in the states of Uttarakhand (100%) Chhattisgarh (97%) Tripura (94%) Tamil Nadu (89%) and Andhra Pradesh (85%) at the same time.
- In Chhattisgarh (53%), Delhi (52%), and Uttar Pradesh (48%), elderly suffered economic exploitation more frequently. In southern states like Andhra Pradesh (87%), Telangana (68%) and Tamil Nadu (69%) they were neglected more frequently.
- Elder abuse was reported by 21% of daughters-in-law and 35% of elders who were abused by their sons. A non-family member housekeeper abused about 2% of elderly people. The claimed forms of abuse included "disrespect," "verbal abuse," "neglect," and "physical violence."

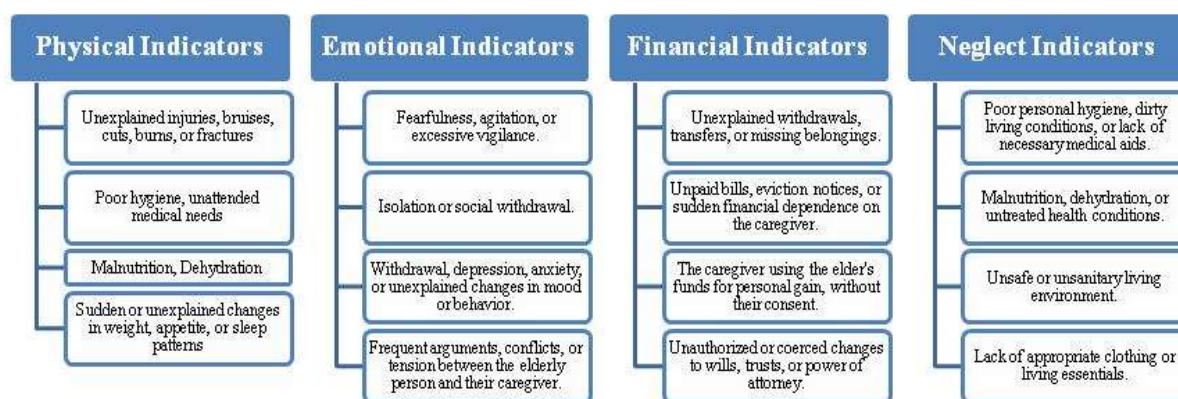
Considering that 82% of older adults in India live with family, the family is the main offender of abuse against them (Vats, 2022).

### *Causes of Elderly Abuse*

- Social isolation
- Power Control
- Caregiver stress and Burnout
- Financial exploitation
- Substance abuse
- Mental health issues
- Family Dynamics and Conflicts

### *Indicators of Elderly Abuse*

Identifying the indicators of elderly abuse is crucial for early detection and intervention. These following indicators are not the evidence of abuse but can serve as warning signs that further investigation is needed:



**Fig. 2: Showing Indicators of Elderly Abuse**

### *Govt Initiatives to Prevent Elderly Abuse*

The various programmes and schemes have been initiated by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment with the objective of enhancing the status of elderly people with the coordination of other government departments. Efforts should focus on raising awareness, empowering older adults to assert their rights, and creating a supportive environment that values and protects their dignity.

- **Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Scheme**

For Indian residents over 60, the Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Scheme is a groundbreaking senior citizen welfare programme. The goal of this Pradhan Mantri

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Yojana for Senior Citizens is to give India's senior citizens financial security and certainty. With this programme, the government guarantees that older folks' futures are safe and that they can lead respectable lives.

- **Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme**  
In India, the government-sponsored Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS) offers financial assistance to senior individuals. One of the most well-liked senior programmes in the nation is this one. It is specifically intended for seniors 60 and older who, according to government standards, are below the poverty threshold. Senior citizens can get a pension under this programme worth up to Rs. 200 per month if they are 60 to 79 years old and up to Rs. 500 per month if they are 80 years old or beyond.
- **Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana**  
Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana, a government programme for seniors over 60, was just introduced by the Indian government. Through the provision of physical assistance and assisted-living tools, this project aims to improve the comfort and independence of senior adults who are living in poverty. This programme focuses primarily on people who fall under the BPL (Below Poverty Line) classification especially elderly, giving them much-needed access to the services and goods that can improve their daily life.
- **Vayoshreshtha Samman**  
The Vayoshreshtha Samman is a prestigious government senior citizen award program in India that was established in 2012 to recognize and reward senior citizens for their significant contributions to their respective fields.
- **Reverse Mortgage Scheme**  
The Indian Ministry of Finance introduced the Reverse Mortgage Scheme in 2007 as an innovative programme to assist senior folks in India. It's a financing programme that enables older citizens to mortgage their primary residence in order to receive a loan up to 60% of the home's worth. The loan must be kept open for at least ten years. With the help of this programme, senior folks can obtain funds from their homes without having to sell their property, which is a big financial help to them.
- **Senior Citizens' Welfare Fund**  
To protect the wellbeing of its senior residents, the Indian government has established the Senior residents' wellbeing Fund under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. By using the unclaimed money from small savings and savings accounts in government programmes, this fund aims to help senior individuals financially. The goal is to ensure that seniors have the resources they need to maintain their physical and emotional wellbeing.
- **National Programme for Health Care of Elderly**  
In order to provide elderly persons with the benefits of preventative and promotional health care services, the National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE) was founded in 2010. This programme gives senior folks access to health and wellness resources so they can continue to feel physically and mentally healthy.
- **Varistha Mediclaim Policy**  
One of the best government health systems in India gives complete health care for senior citizens through the Varistha Mediclaim Policy. This strategy is specifically designed to give senior individuals between the ages of 60 and 80 years old expert medical care. Medication, blood transfusions, ambulance services, and other diagnosis-related expenses are all covered by it.



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- **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana**

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare introduced the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) in year 2018, and it is an ambitious programme that has transformed the Indian healthcare sector. It has given 10 crore people from poor and vulnerable families coverage of up to Rs. 5 lakhs per family for the treatment and hospitalisation. With this programme, the government has made a significant contribution to the accessibility and affordability of healthcare. The Indian government has introduced a number of additional programmes in addition to PMJAY that have been very beneficial to the aged people.

- **The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act**

The Indian Parliament passed the Act in year 2007. The goal of this statute was to improve the efficiency of providing maintenance and welfare to elderly people and parents. By virtue of this Act, adult children and heirs are legally required to support their parents by way of a monthly stipend.

- **National Policy for Senior Citizens 2011**

A new policy called the "National Policy for Senior Citizens 2011" is built upon an array of factors. The elderly rural poor are suffering significantly (51 million older people live below the poverty line), the old population is expanding quickly, social and economic circumstances are evolving, science and technology are progressing, and all of these factors are affecting ageing society. Compared to older men, older women are more likely to depend on their children and to feel lonely. The commercialisation of health care, social marginalisation, and changing patterns of morbidity have an influence on the elderly. Anyone over the age of 60 is considered a senior citizen.

### CONCLUSION

Elderly abuse has severe consequences on the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of older adults. It can lead to physical injuries, emotional trauma, social isolation, financial loss, and deteriorating health. Moreover, elderly abuse goes largely underreported due to factors such as fear, shame, dependence on caregivers, and limited awareness of available support and reporting mechanisms. Addressing and preventing elderly abuse require a comprehensive approach involving awareness, education, support systems, and legal protections. Society must work collectively to promote respectful and caring treatment of older adults, provide resources and support for caregivers, and establish safeguards to secure the safety and well-being of older individuals.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

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