

Abuse and neglect experienced by older women in India – *Extent, Impact on their QOL and its policy Implications*

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Introduction: The proportion of older people (60 years and above) in India is projected to double between 2011 and 2050 from 10 per cent to 20 per cent. In the context of the changing demographic scene and social values, the abuse and neglect of the elderly in the family context is emerging as a significant problem at global as well as national level which is affecting the overall quality of the older people. The issue of abuse and neglect in India, as in many countries, has been associated more with children and women. For older people it is still under recognized and insufficiently acknowledged, though, recent empirical evidence clearly suggests that a very high proportion of older people especially older women experience abuse¹ and neglect. In India, about one-third (31 per cent) of urban elderly have experienced abuse and one-fourth elderly face abuse daily. Frequency and duration of experiencing abuse is higher amongst older women as compared to older men (HelpageIndia, 2012). It has been identified that domestic violence is the most common form of abuse against older women, and many women who suffer at the hands of their partners when they are young continue to be abused in their old age. Due to rapid feminisation² of ageing, it is important to understand the extent, forms of abuse experienced by older women and its impact on their quality of life.

Objectives: The main objective of this study is to explore the prevalence and forms of abuse amongst older women and elicit its influence on quality of life and well-being of older women in India. The paper also attempts to throw light on research, policy and programmatic implications of abuse experienced by older women in India.

Methodology: This study draws data from a cross-sectional survey conducted in suburbs of Mumbai (Navi Mumbai) to understand quality of life of older women across different socio-economic class groups in addition to critical analysis of empirical evidences from India. A sample of 450 older women (60 years and above) was drawn randomly from different socio-

¹ Elder abuse can be defined as any physical, sexual, mental and/or financial abuse and/or neglect of older people.

² i.e. women make up the majority of older adults and the proportion of women to men increases with increase in age

economic classes based on housing criteria. Information about the socio-demographic and economic characteristics was obtained using a questionnaire designed for this study and WHOQOL-BREF was used to assess Quality of life (QOL) of older women. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare Quality of life in older women who have suffered abuse and older women who have never suffered abuse.

Findings: About a quarter (22.4 per cent) of older women reported to have faced some form of abuse. Among those reporting abuse, the proportion of older women reporting abuse was highest amongst poor followed by Middle income group and well-to-do class i.e. 53.9 per cent, 32.4 per cent and 13.7 per cent respectively and this difference was statistically significant. More than ninety per cent of the older women reporting ever faced abuse, faced abused in last one month as well. Majority of those who experience abuse reported multiple forms of abuse and the prime perpetrators were sons and husband in majority of cases. Almost half of the respondents (54.0 per cent) who experienced abuse reported that they faced health problems as a consequence of abuse experienced.

There was a significant difference between means across all domains of QOL (physical, psychological, social and environmental domains) among older women experiencing abuse and those who reported to have never experienced it. In addition, there was a significant difference overall quality of life of older women who have suffered from abuse (M=59.6, SD=10.1) and older women who have never suffered from abuse (M=66.4, SD=7.85) conditions; $t(138.3) = -6.303, p < 0.001$. These results clearly reflect that abuse negatively affects Quality of life of older women i.e. older women who have reported to have never been abused have better or higher quality of life than older women facing abuse.

Conclusion: The findings clearly reflect that a substantial proportion of older women in India reported abuse which varies with class significantly. In addition, there is under reporting of abuse and neglect due to stigma associated with admitting experience of abuse, lack of awareness about rights of older people, and non-accessible services to report and combat abuse. This clearly reflects on the need to promote awareness about abuse and neglect in society, rights of older people to live with dignity, promote strengthening of social and health care for older people, develop community based models to address issue of abuse and encourage a positive social attitude.

Keywords: Abuse experienced by older women in India, Quality of Life, Abuse and QOL, QOL of older women in India.