

**A Guide for a  
Geriatric Social Worker  
(Caregiver)**



**Chief Editor  
Dr.O.P.Sharma**

Dr A P Ambali

# **A GUIDE FOR A GERIATRIC SOCIAL WORKER (Caregiver)**

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Self-published by author.

First edition 2022

ISBN : 978-93-5627-049-7

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Mode of Payment : 9433889458@GooglePay

Price : 350/=

Printed by- **SNEHART**, College Pally, Barrackpore; Kolkata-700121, West Bengal.

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## ELDER ABUSE

*\*Dr. Anand P Ambali*

### DEFINITION

The WHO-CIG adopted the definition developed by Action on Elder Abuse in 1995: "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."

### INTRODUCTION

Elderly in India are Happiest in world. The cultural background is strong in providing care for the older people in family. The adage "Matrudevobhava, Pitrudevobhava" has strong positive effect on the family values wherein we see god in our parents, hence we respect and care for them. It is observed that not all the older people are abused. Many older people though are abused, take it lightly/friendly. Very few take it seriously and for few its inevitable. They have to live with it.

### WHY WE SHOULD KNOW ELDER ABUSE?

1. It is medico -social issue
2. It has negative impact of Quality of Life
3. It leads to exacerbations of existing diseases
4. It leads to delay in recovery from illness
5. It leads to attempted suicide/suicide

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6. life span is reduced by 2 years in those who are abused
7. It is human right violation
8. The abuser unfortunately is our close relative!
9. Not in the syllabus of MBBS
10. It has ill effects on health.

### **WHY THE OLDER PEOPLE DO NOT REPORT ABUSE?**

The victim avoids informing the clinician or family friends as they fear

- 1) Retaliation
- 2) A worsening of existing situation in home
- 3) Abandonment
- 4) Institutionalization

### **WHO ABUSES MOST?**

It is abundantly clear that the son abuses the parents most apart from other family members like daughter in law, spouse, daughter.

### **WHO ARE THE OLDER PEOPLE AT RISK?**

Not all the older people are at risk of abuse. The older people having following conditions are at high risk of being abused.

1. Mental illness either in abuser and older people
2. Alcohol Abuse in either abuser or older people
3. Lack of social support for the older people
4. Bed ridden
5. High expectation –Financial/ Emotional
6. Being widow/widower
7. Has nothing to support family



## FEATURES OF ABUSER

The abuser is a family member and may have following issues

1. Often under 30 or over 60 years (M/F)
2. Living with abused elder
3. Psychologically stressed or depressed
4. Substance abuse history
5. Financial problems
6. Dependent on the older people property or finance

## TYPES OF ELDER ABUSE

There are five types of elder abuse. (Figure 1)

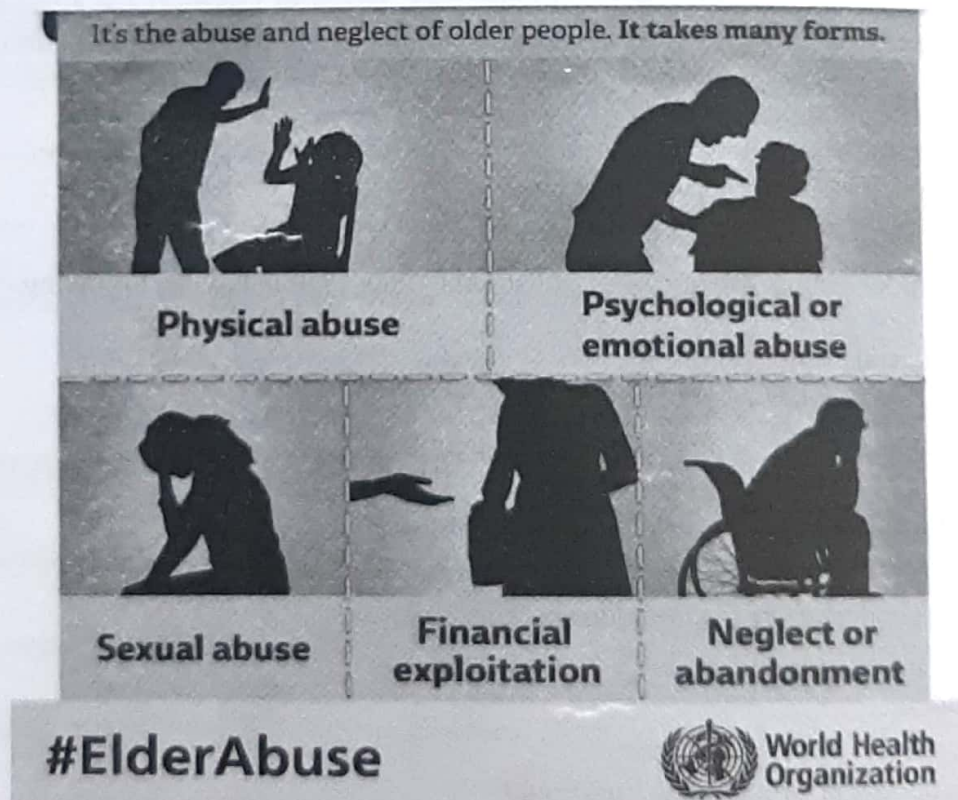


Figure -1

## HOW TO IDENTIFY ELDER ABUSE BY CLINICIAN

- a) Delays between injuries or illness and seeking medical attention
- b) Implausible or vague explanations for injuries or ill-health, from either patient or caregiver
- c) Differing case histories from patient and caregiver
- d) Frequent visits to emergency departments
- e) Functionally-impaired older patients who arrive without their main caregiver
- f) laboratory findings that are inconsistent with the history provided

### 1) *Physical Abuse signs*

a) Unexplained signs of injury such as bruises, welts, or scars, especially if they appear symmetrically on two side of the body.

b) Broken bones, sprains, or dislocations

c) Broken eyeglasses or frames

d) Signs of being restrained, such as rope marks on wrists

e) Caregiver's refusal to allow you to see the elder alone

f) Pattern of Bruising - Bilateral pattern of bruising on upper arms indicates holding and shaking. Multiple bruises clustered on the trunk indicate repeated striking with an object. The shape of the bruises may be similar to an object such as a belt or other readily available item. Bruises around the wrists or ankles are consistent with past use of restraints. Bruising of the ulnar surfaces of the forearms are commonly defensive in nature.

### 2) *Psychological elder abuse signs*

a) Ignoring the elderly person

b) Isolating an elder from friends or activities

c) Terrorizing or menacing the elderly person

**3) Financial Abuse signs**

- a) This involves unauthorized use of an elderly person's funds or property, either by a caregiver or an outside scam artist.
- b) The misuse an elder's personal cheque, credit cards, or accounts
- c) The care giver steals the cash, or household goods and forge the elder's signature.
- d) Significant withdrawals from the elder's accounts
- e) Sudden changes in the elder's financial condition
- f) Items or cash missing from the senior's household
- g) Suspicious changes in wills, power of attorney, titles, and policies
- h) Addition of names to the senior's signature card
- i) Unpaid bills or lack of medical care, although the elder has enough money to pay for them

**4) Sexual abuse signs**

- a) Sexual elder abuse is contact with an elderly person without the elder's consent.
- b) Showing an elderly person pornographic material
- c) Forcing the person to watch sex acts
- d) Forcing the elder to undress
- e) Unexplained vaginal or anal bleed, torn underwear, bruised breasts.

**WHAT IS OUR ROLE?**

The role of the social care giver is to

1. Suspect abuse
2. Listen to the history given by the older person!
3. Allow them to open up
4. Try confidence building measures
5. The older person will cry often, allow them to do so.
6. Keep the issue confidential and share with relatives who are in good relations
7. Do not share with abuser / his friends

**APPROACH**

- a) Counselling the abuser too!
- b) Consult a physician and psychiatrist
- c) Ask for suicidal thoughts
- d) H/o Substance abuse in both abuser and older person
- e) Communicate with relatives at home / neighbours. If elderly has mental illness/extreme suffering, shift him to hospital.
- f) The older people should keep their mind engaged by rediscovering old hobbies like painting, listening to music, reading.
- g) Avoid instigating change in caregiver unless serious nature of abuse is noted and confirmed.

- h) If elderly has mental illness, shift him to hospital
- i) In best interest of elderly move him to a different safer setting – Hospital
- j) Have empathy and not sympathy

### IMPACT OF ABUSE ON HEALTH

The quality of life in victims of abuse will be all time low. Family violence directly affects QOL. The older people do not disclose about abuse on them due to which the ill effects of it remains for long time. The negative sequelae extend beyond traumatic injury and pain in them. This leads to increased risk of attempted suicide, depression and repeated hospitalization.

1. The parameters of Hypertension, Diabetes fail to reach normal values.
2. This acts as a hidden Comorbid condition in them and leads to complications in existing diseases.
3. It leads to depression, suicide & poor quality of life.
4. Most of times abuser is also with the patient, which leads to poor communication among a doctor, patient and caregiver. This leads to delay in recovery, decreased Quality of Life and increased cost of treatment in Elderly.
5. Significant decreased survival.
6. Frequent visits to emergency departments
7. Malnutrition
8. Dehydration
9. Pressure ulcers
10. Poor hygiene

### WHAT ARE THE PROTECTIVE FACTORS AGAINST ABUSE IN OLDER PEOPLE?

1. Strong relation with people with varying social status
2. Coordination of resources and services
3. Regular visitors to house
4. Being physically and mentally active
5. Being independent – Physically and Financially
6. Power of attorney.
7. Will of a person kept secret



### PREVENTION OF ABUSE

Health professionals have an ethical and legal responsibility to both report and work to prevent suspected abuse. The interdisciplinary team can make a significant impact on elder abuse, a major detriment on quality of life. Public education and awareness raising are important elements in preventing

abuse and neglect. The aim of such efforts is to inform practitioners and the general public about the various types of abuse, how to identify the signs and symptoms of abuse and where help can be obtained

### WHAT ABUSE MEANS TO ELDERLY?

1. After listening to my talk on Abuse, many of elderly expressed that they came to know what abuse means and it is their right not being abused.
2. Many were of opinion that only being hit by son is known as abuse. Financial, Psychological and Neglect are often not heard and they consider it as part of the old age.
3. Elderly Women are silent sufferer of abuse and knowingly or unknowingly they continue to accept it as they are highly dependent on their son for survival.
4. Many learned seniors are aware of Welfare of Senior Citizen Act 2010. But none wish to complain to police. As saying goes "very few people will want to wash their problems in public".

### MANAGEMENT

Elder abuse is morbid and mortal. It is multidisciplinary intervention, specifically tailored to the situation, involving multiple team members like physician, psychiatrist, caregivers and social support group. There need to be an amicable settlement between elder and their abuser because the abuser is most often the primary care giver. In case the settlement doesn't work, the abuser should undergo counselling and treated, if he or she has psychological disorders. In case of care giver stress and burnt out, the elderly should be shifted to respite care centre. The issues like substance abuse, financial stress in abuser should be addressed. In case all these efforts don't work, elderly can be referred to day care centre. If financial abuse is present, legal aid should be sought. Marital counselling, if spouse is abuser.

### NEED OF THE HOUR

1. Public education and awareness are important elements in preventing abuse and neglect.
2. No law will prevent abuse in elderly, unless the abuser understands what relation and sharing love with elders.



**AWARENESS**

At international level the United Nations, WorldHealth Organisation, International Network for Prevention of Elder Abuse and National level the Geriatric Society of India are organising various programs to create awareness regarding elder abuse for medical students, nurses and general public. Purple colour ribbon represents Elder Abuse Awareness. The purple colour ribbon is used to show solidarity and support to the elderly who are abused.

June 15 is Elder Abuse Awareness Day

## **ELDER-TO-ELDER ABUSE**

This issue demands more attention.

It is negative behaviour between long term care residents and among spouse. It is commonly seen in our wards where the wife will be scolding her husband for various reasons like delay in providing food and medicines.

## **LAWS FOR PREVENTION OF ABUSE IN INDIA**

1. Hindu adoption and Maintenance act 1956.
2. CPC 1973, Section 125
3. Maintenance and welfare of parents and senior citizen act 2007.

## **CONCLUSION**

The caregivers should know that, when an elder is abused by own family members, it is hard for them to trust an outsider.

It is a very sensitive issue and needs experience in handling such situations.

Abuse in elderly is also silent in two aspects. 1) The elderly silently accepts abuse, and 2) the abuse in elderly has silent negative impact on health and surfaces when admitted for emergencies.

Some elderly takes extreme steps to end life so as to get rid of Abuse.

As there are hurdles in identifying abuse by clinician, it can be taken as a comorbid condition and not the diagnosis