Abuse Faced by Elderly Women: A Case Study of Kolkata

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Abstract:

Negligence of family members and their dependence on the helpers makes the elderly more vulnerable to face abuse in their own homes. The condition is worse among women who are not only physically weak but also financially having lost their husbands in most cases and dependent on their children and or family members. The present study aims to assess the magnitude, types and also the reasons for abuse among elderly women residing inown homes with their family in the city. The study involved 542 elderly persons (males and females) as sample residing in different parts of Kolkata. Data gathering tool included questionnaires on social, economic, health conditions of the elderly along with general information schedule. Findings show that sex wise abuse is mostly faced by women compared to men. Elderly face abuse mostly from their sons and daughter in laws. The main important reason for abuse faced has been due to poor financial conditions and economic dependency on family members. Use of harsh languages by the governesses and family members in many situations has deteriorated the mental conditions of the elderly. They feel neglected, burden for others and lack motive for living. Thus, it can be said that the conditions of women elderly in the city of Kolkata are quite helpless, insecure, lonely and vulnerable.

Key Words: *Abuse, Elderly, Old Age Homes, Health Conditions, Women*

1. Introduction

Rapid rate of westernization, urbanization and globalization has left their impact in the city. Disappearance of joint family system, erosion of social values and culture in Kolkata is a common scenario. Elderly living in their own homes with children are often considered burden in the family and are often subjected to neglect, disrespect from the young generation because of their poor economic, social and health conditions. The situation is worse among women elderly who are financially weaker than men elderly and in most cases have lost their partners.

The negligence of family members on one hand and the vulnerability and dependence of the elderly on the helpers or governesses on the other hand exposes them to abuse. This problem of elder abuse silently affects their life, health, dignity, safety, emotional feelings and also violates the human rights of older person (Achappa, S. et al., 2016).

2. Objectives
The main objectives of the study have been:
- To identify the magnitude and pattern of abuse faced by the men and women elderly residing in their own homes with or without family in Kolkata.
- To find out the reasons for abuse faced by the women elderly in Kolkata.
- To make a comparative analysis of the conditions between the men and women elderly respondents residing with or without their family in terms of abuse faced.

3. Methodology and Database
0.001 per cent of the respondents above 60 years of age from each assembly constituencies of Kolkata Municipal Corporation Area have been randomly selected to get a sample size of 542 respondents (310 Males and 232 Females)residing in their own homes with or without children and family in the study area. The details of the sample selected location-wise are given in Table 1.

Table 1: General Information about the Respondents Residing in their Own Homes in Kolkata
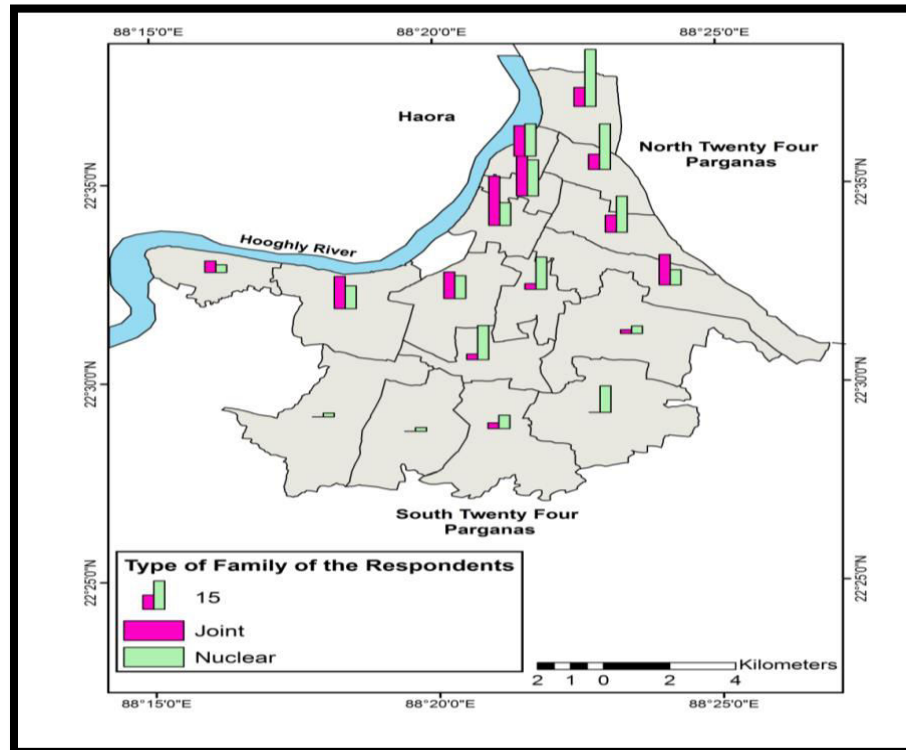
Locations	Gender		Age			Living Status		Marital Status			Educational Level					
	Male	Female	Young Old (60-69)	Old (70-79)	Very Old (80+)	Together	Separated	Married	Unmarried	Widowed	Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Graduation	Above Graduation
Chowringhee	26	15	25	13	3	3	38	35	0	6	18	9	11	3	0	0
Enatally	18	14	20	9	3	8	24	29	0	3	10	11	4	4	3	0
Beleghata	24	20	27	13	4	16	28	29	3	12	6	12	7	4	8	7
Jorasanko	27	18	26	15	4	5	40	32	2	11	8	13	8	4	5	7
Shyampukur	21	17	23	11	4	5	33	23	5	10	7	11	8	5	3	4
Maniktola	22	19	24	13	4	9	32	32	2	7	6	12	5	6	6	6
Kashipur-Belgachia	26	22	28	16	4	8	40	29	3	16	9	11	11	0	8	9
Kolkata Port	17	12	19	8	2	0	29	22	0	7	25	4	0	0	0	0
Bhabanipur	19	18	22	11	4	11	26	25	3	9	11	8	6	1	2	9
Rashbehari	24	21	26	14	5	24	21	27	1	17	2	10	6	8	11	8
Ballygunge	24	19	26	13	4	23	20	29	0	14	3	8	4	7	5	16
Tollygunge	19	13	20	9	3	22	10	25	1	6	3	6	6	4	3	10
Behala Purba	8	3	5	3	3	9	2	8	0	3	1	4	3	1	0	2
Behala Paschim	7	4	5	4	2	9	2	10	0	1	2	1	1	3	3	1
Metiabruz	6	4	5	3	2	0	10	7	0	3	8	2	0	0	0	0
Jadavpur	13	10	13	6	4	9	14	17	0	6	4	10	3	3	2	1
Kasba	9	3	5	4	3	6	6	9	0	3	0	5	2	3	1	1
Total	310	232	319	165	58	167	375	388	20	134	123	137	85	56	60	81

Source: Primary Survey, January-June, 2025

A questionnaire has been framed consisting of questions relating to the social, standard of living and health conditions of the elderly. Emphasis has

been given on different parameters relating to abuse faced by the elderly. Beside survey, observation and discussion method has been used to understand the problem of elderly abuse. This is because in many cases the respondents were hesitant to discuss and reveal the fact that they face abuse form their family members.

Type of Family of the Respondents Residing with:

Figure 1: Type of Family of the Respondents by Location
Source: Primary Survey, January-June, 2025

Figure 1 shows the types of family in which the respondents are staying in the different Assembly Constituencies of the study area. It can be very well said that majority of the respondents are staying in nuclear families. This clearly conveys that the traditional social system of joint families have been disappearing from the city and are getting replaced by nuclear families. However, joint families dominate to still exist mainly in the northern and western part of the city. This is because the oldest northern part of the city of Shyampukur, Jorasanko and Chowringhee which have been the residing places of the natives, respondents are living in these places in their ancestral home following their tradition of living in joint families. On the other hand, the reason for higher share of existence of joint families in the western part of the study area has been different. The locations of Metiabruz and Kolkata Port are

dominantly the residing places of Muslim community who have been found mostly to be living in big joint families.
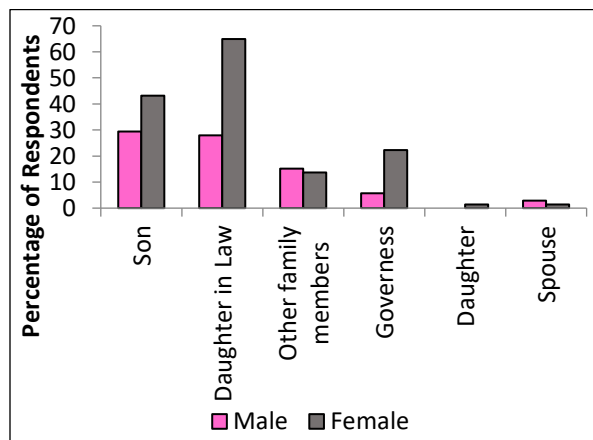
A. Frequency of Abuse Faced
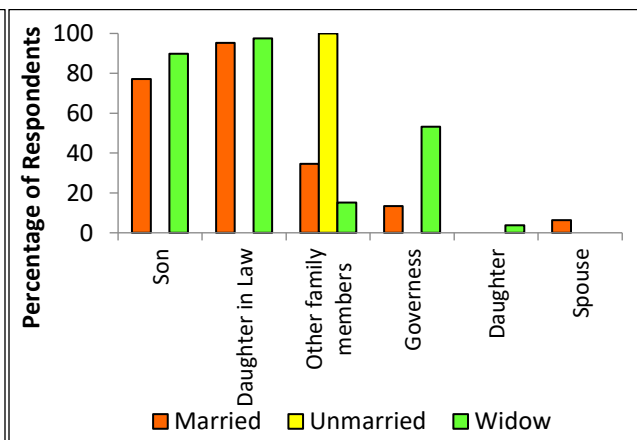
Table 2: Frequency of Abuse Faced by Sex

Sex	Number and Percentage values	Abuse Faced					$x2$	Cramer 's V
		1	2	3	4	Total		
		Most Often	Someti mes	Rarely	Never			
Female	Count	48	70	31	83	232	115.510 a	.462
	% within Sex	20.7%	30.2%	13.4%	35.8%	100.0%		
Male	Count	28	30	4	248	310	P=.000	
	% within Sex	9.0%	9.7%	1.3%	80.0%	100.0%		
Total	Count	76	100	35	331	542		
	% within Sex	14.0%	18.5%	6.5%	61.1%	100.0%		

Source: Primary Survey, January-June, 2025

Table 2 clearly depicts that P value is 0.00 (P<0.05). This means that there is significant difference between men and women elderly in terms of abused faced at home. The frequency of abuse faced by women elderly is more compared to male elderly.

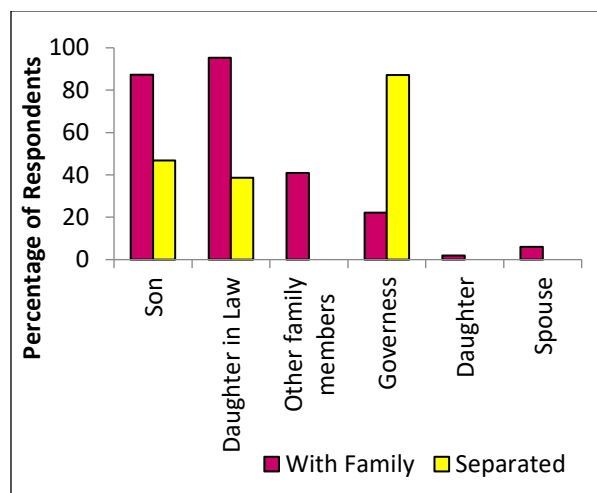**Figure 2: Abuse Faced from Whom by Sex**

Figure 3: Abuse Faced from Whom by Marital Status

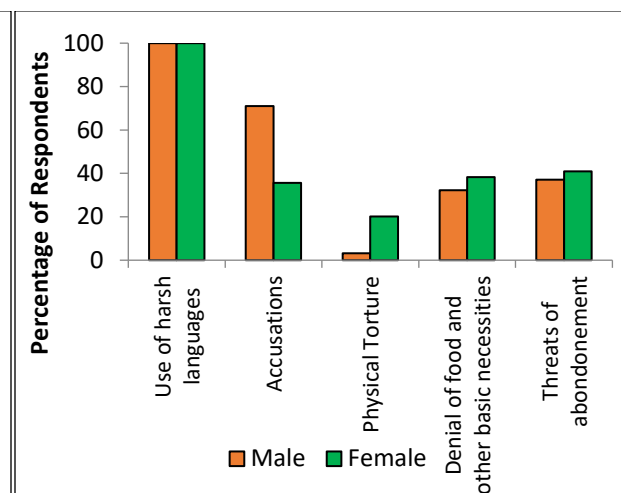**Source: Primary Survey, January-June, 2025**

Figure 2 clearly depicts that female respondents are more abused than male respondents. Mostly the respondents are abused by daughter in laws followed by son, governess, other family members spouse and lastly daughter. Male respondents are more abused by other family members and by their spouse than female respondents while female respondents are more abused by son, daughter in laws, governess and daughter. The obvious reason can be that more percentages of female respondents live in homes where they are more

subjected to abuse. Also, they are financially weak and more dependent on their children and family members and so are more subjected to abuse.

Figure 3 reveals that widow respondents are more abused by their son, daughter in laws and governess, while unmarried respondents are mostly abused by other members of the family. Married respondents are abused by their son, daughter in laws, other family members, governess and spouse. Though respondents belonging to all the types of marital statuses are subjected to abuse but the percentage is more among the widows followed by those who are married and lastly unmarried. This is because most of the unmarried respondents surveyed have been found to be educated, financially strong and less dependent on their family members. On the other hand the conditions of the widows are miserable who even does not have their partners to support them and are being abused.

Figure 4: Abuse Faced from Whom by Sex

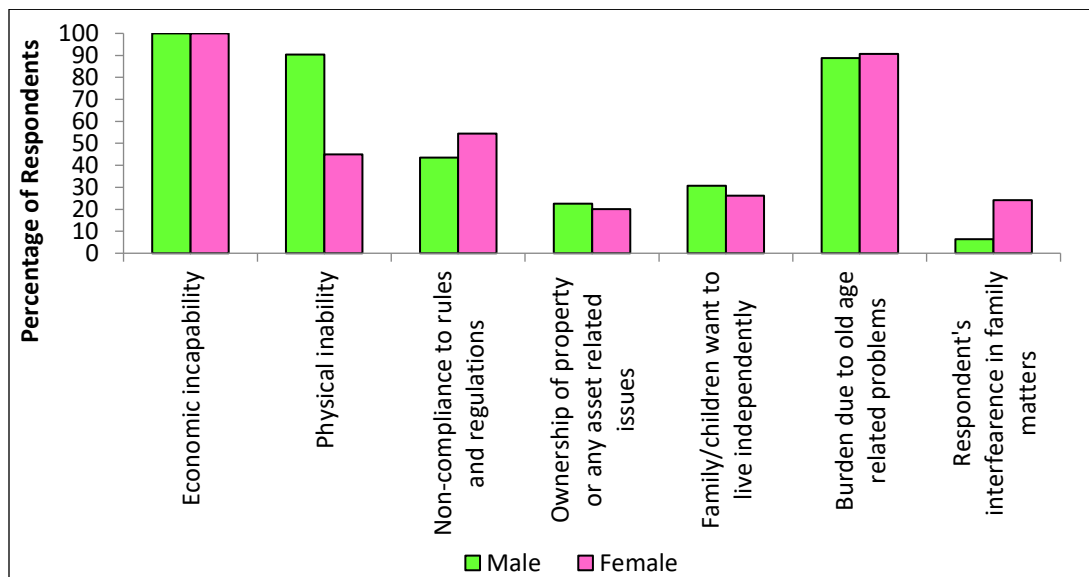**Figure 5: Kinds of Abuse Faced by Living Status**

Source: Primary Survey, January-June, 2025

From Figure 4 it is evident that respondents who are staying separately are less subjected to abuse than those who are staying with family. Respondents living with their family are being mostly abused by their daughter in law (95.30 per cent) followed by son (87.25 per cent). Those respondents staying separately are mostly abused by governess or helper (87.10 per cent). Many respondents who are staying separately said that in spite of staying separately they are harassed and threatened by their son and or daughter in law for many reasons like issuing of property or other kinds of assets, attending family or non-family social events, spending money in day to day activities etc. Many respondents said that they are also often abused by their governess or helpers who have been appointed to look after them. This is

because the respondents are left behind by their family members alone to be looked after by governess or helpers who behave harshly with the respondents, even physically torture them, threaten them not to speak about this to their family members, does not give them adequate food to eat etc. In many cases the respondents are afraid to reveal this to their family members as they that can misunderstand them etc. The conditions are worse for those who are staying separately as they don't have any other choice than staying with governess or helpers or not even have anyone who can help them to come out of this.

Figure 5 shows the different kinds of abuses faced by the respondents with respect to sex. All the respondents who have been abused said the uses of harsh languages as the most common way of abuse that they have faced followed by accusations, denial of food and other basic necessities of life, threats of abandonment and lastly physical torture. More percentages of female respondents said that they have been subjected to physical torture (20.13 per cent), threatened to be abandoned (40.94 per cent) and denied food and other basic necessities of life (38.26 per cent). More percentage of male respondents said that they have been subjected to accusations (70.97 per cent) compared to female respondents.

B. Reasons for Abuse

Figure 6: Reasons for Abuse by Sex
Source: Primary Survey, January-June, 2025

Figure 6 identifies the main reasons for abuses faced by the respondents with respect to their sex. All the respondents pointed out that their economic incapability is the main reason for being abused followed by the reason that they are a burden due to their old age related problems. Higher percentages of

male than female respondents said that their physical inability (90.32 per cent), disagreement to give ownership rights related to property or other assets (22.58 per cent) and lastly the latent desire children to live independently (30.65 per cent) are the main reasons for abusing them. Greater percentages of female than male respondents highlighted that non-compliance to rules and regulations (54.36 per cent), burden due to old age related problems (90.60 per cent) and her interference in family matters (24.16 per cent) are the main reasons for being abused.

C. Principal Component Analysis of the Reasons for Abuse

Principal Component Matrix (PCA) has been used to identify the main determinants of elder abuse in the study area. Eight variables have been considered for analysis as restricted by PCA. The variables are age of the respondents, relation with family, contact with friends, interaction with family, income level, adequacy of income, ability to perform day to day activities and self-assessed health conditions. KMO value for the analysis has been .751 which means can be considered good i.e. an indication that components or factor analysis will be useful for the earlier mentioned variables as depicted in Table 7.

Table 7: KMO and Bartlett's Test

	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	.751
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2917.393
	df	28
	Sig.	.000

The communalities of all the variables are high ranging from .723 to .927. The total of the communality is 6.759 explaining 84.48 per cent of the variance. Hence, the assumption can be made that all the variables are significant and useful for the study. The outputs obtained from the SPSS program are used to determine which variables or principle components are needed for the complete explanation of the difference in the data. The principal components obtained from the rotated component matrix are used as they are easy to interpret. The components with eigenvalues greater than 1 have been used to explain the variance. The principal components analysis produced

three components with eigenvalues greater than 1. Component 1 with an eigenvalue of 2.615 explains 32.687 per cent of the variation. Component 2 with an eigenvalue of 2.324 explains 29.054 per cent of the variation and component 3 with an eigenvalue of 1.820 explains 22.749 per cent of the variation. Cumulatively these three components explain 84.490 per cent of the variation as depicted in Table 8.

Table 8: Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.988	49.845	49.845	2.615	32.687	32.687
2	1.582	19.771	69.617	2.324	29.054	61.741
3	1.190	14.874	84.490	1.820	22.749	84.490
4	.466	5.823	90.313			
5	.261	3.268	93.581			
6	.208	2.599	96.180			
7	.168	2.099	98.279			
8	.138	1.721	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

The attributes of the three principal components have been shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Attributes of Principal Components

Principal Components	Variables	Dimensions
Component 1	• Income level • Adequacy of Income	Standard of Living
Component 2	• Perform day to day activities • Self-assessed health conditions • Age	Health Social
Component 3	• Interaction with Family • Relation with Family • Contact with friends	Social

From Table 9 it is evident that in component 1 economic factor mostly dominated while in component 2 health factor manly dominated followed by age of the respondents. In the third component social factor dominated. Thus it

can be said that income level and adequacy of income which determine the standard of living of the respondents are the dominant factors determining abuse faced by the elderly respondents. This resembles the perception of the respondents stating the main reasons for being abused.

Conclusion:

Elder abuse is a violation of human rights. It has disturbing consequences on elderly persons such as poor quality of life, psychological distress, loss of property and security. It is also associated with increased mortality and morbidity (Achappa, S. et al., 2016).

From the present study it is evident that the magnitude of elder abuse is on the higher side. Abuse is mostly faced by women compared to men. With respect to marital status widows face more abuse than those who are married or unmarried. Abuse is faced from son and daughter in law. The main reason for abuse faced by the elderly has been due to their poor financial condition and economic dependency.

References

Achappa, S, Varadaraja Rao, B. A, and Holyachi, S. *2016. Bringing elder abuse out of the shadows: a study from the old age homes of Davangere district, Karnataka, India. International Journal of Community Medicine and Public Health. 3:6-1617.*