ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Prevalence and Sociodemographic Determinants of Domestic Violence Against Elderly People

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ABSTRACT

Background: Domestic violence against elderly persons is an emerging public health and human rights concern, particularly in low- and middle-income countries like India. Abuse in old age adversely affects physical health, mental well-being, functional ability, and overall quality of life, often leading to institutionalization in old age homes. However, data exploring the magnitude and impact of domestic violence among elderly residents of old age homes remain limited, especially in northern India.

Objectives: The study aimed to assess the prevalence of domestic violence among elderly persons residing in old age homes of Bareilly district, Uttar Pradesh. It also sought to analyze socio-demographic, health-related, and psychosocial factors associated with domestic violence.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted over one year among 100 elderly residents aged 60 years and above living in old age homes of Bareilly district. Data were collected using a pre-tested semi-structured interview schedule. Standardized tools were used to assess depression (GDS-15), cognitive status (MMSE), nutritional status (MNA-SF), functional ability (ADL), and psychological distress (GHQ-12). Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 23.0, employing descriptive statistics, chi-square test, and independent t-test, with a p-value <0.05 considered statistically significant.

Results: Overall, 64.0% of elderly participants reported experiencing at least one form of domestic violence prior to admission. Psychological abuse (55.0%) was the most common, followed by financial abuse (48.0%), neglect (41.0%), and physical abuse (19.0%). Female gender, age ≥70 years, illiteracy, and financial dependency were significantly associated with experience of violence. Elderly individuals exposed to domestic violence had significantly higher levels of depression and psychological distress compared to those without such experience (p <0.001).

Conclusion: The study demonstrates a high burden of domestic violence among elderly residents of old age homes and highlights its profound negative impact on mental health. Early identification of abuse, strengthening social support systems, and implementation of targeted geriatric and psychosocial interventions are essential to protect the dignity and well-being of the elderly population.

Keywords: Elder abuse, Domestic violence, Old age homes, Geriatric depression, India

INTRODUCTION

Population ageing is emerging as a major demographic and public health challenge worldwide. According to the World Health Organization, the proportion of the global population aged 60 years and above is increasing rapidly, and it is projected to double from 12% in 2015 to nearly 22% by 2050.[1] Ageing is often accompanied by declining physical health, reduced economic independence, social isolation, and increased dependency, all of which can heighten vulnerability to abuse and neglect. Elder abuse, particularly domestic violence against elderly persons, has increasingly been recognized as a serious but underreported public health and human rights issue.[2]

Domestic violence against the elderly encompasses physical, psychological, financial abuse, neglect, and exploitation, most often perpetrated by family members or caregivers. Globally, it is estimated that nearly one in six elderly individuals experiences some form of abuse each year, with psychological and financial abuse being the most common forms.[3] Such abuse not only violates basic human rights but also has profound consequences on the physical health, mental well-being, nutritional status and functional ability, of older adults.[4]

India is undergoing a rapid demographic transition, with a steadily rising elderly population. As per Census 2011, elderly persons (≥60 years) constituted 8.6% of

the Indian population, a figure projected to increase to nearly 20% by 2050.[5] Recent National Sample Survey and Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI) data indicate that approximately 5–10% of elderly individuals in India have experienced some form of abuse, with higher prevalence reported among females, widowed individuals, the financially dependent, and those with chronic illnesses or disabilities.[6] Despite strong cultural emphasis on family-based elder care, social changes such as nuclear family structures, urbanization, migration, and economic stress have weakened traditional support systems, increasing the risk of elder abuse.[7]

In Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state in India, the magnitude of elder abuse is particularly concerning due to a large ageing population, socioeconomic disparities, and limited institutional support systems. LASI wave-1 data suggest that elder abuse prevalence in Uttar Pradesh is higher than the national average, with financial exploitation, neglect, and verbal abuse being frequently reported.[8] Studies from northern India have consistently shown that elderly persons who are financially dependent, cognitively impaired, or suffering from chronic illnesses are at significantly greater risk of domestic violence and neglect.[9] These adverse experiences often compel elderly individuals to seek refuge in old age homes, highlighting breakdowns in family support mechanisms.

In this context, the present cross-sectional study was undertaken to assess the impact of domestic violence on the quality of life of elderly persons residing in old age homes of Bareilly district, Uttar Pradesh. Understanding the prevalence, associated factors, and consequences of elder abuse in this vulnerable population is crucial for designing targeted interventions, strengthening social support systems, and informing policies aimed at safeguarding the dignity and well-being of older adults.

The present study aims to evaluate the impact of domestic violence against elderly persons on their quality of life among residents of old age homes in Bareilly district, Uttar Pradesh. The objectives are to determine the prevalence and types of domestic violence experienced by elderly individuals prior to admission to old age homes and to analyze the socio-demographic, health-related, psychosocial, and economic factors associated with such violence.

AIM

Prevelance and Sociodemographic determinants of Domestic Violence against Elderly People.

Objective

The study aimed to assess the prevalence of domestic violence among elderly people residing in old age homes of Bareilly district, Uttar Pradesh.

METHODOLOGY

This cross-sectional study was conducted in selected old age homes of Bareilly district, Uttar Pradesh, over a period of one year after obtaining approval from the Institutional Ethics Committee. The study population comprised elderly persons aged 60 years and above residing in old age homes of the district. All eligible geriatric residents who had been living in the old age homes for more than six months and who provided written informed consent were included in the study, thereby adopting a universal sampling approach. Elderly individuals who were unable to communicate effectively in the language used for data collection or those diagnosed with mental illness, dementia, or Alzheimer's disease were excluded to ensure the reliability of responses.

Data were collected using a pre-tested, semi-structured interview schedule containing both open- and close-ended questions. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in a private and comfortable setting within the old age homes to maintain confidentiality and encourage honest responses. The interview schedule was used to collect information on socio-demographic characteristics, previous living arrangements, experience and types of domestic violence prior to admission, and factors associated with abuse such as financial dependency, social support, and family structure.

The collected data were entered into Microsoft Excel and analyzed using SPSS software (licensed version 23.0). Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to summarize the data. Inferential statistical analysis was performed using the chi-square test to assess associations between categorical variables and the independent t-test to compare mean values between groups. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. The findings were presented in the form of tables and were interpreted to assess the impact of domestic violence on various domains of quality of life among elderly residents of old age homes.

RESULTS

A total of 100 elderly residents of old age homes in Bareilly district were included in the study. The majority of participants belonged to the 60–69 years age group (58.0%), followed by those aged 70–79 years (31.0%) and 11.0% aged 80 years and above. Females constituted a slightly higher proportion of the study population (53.0%) compared to males (47.0%). Most participants were widowed (65.0%), while 28.0% were married and 7.0% were unmarried or separated. With respect to education, 42.0% of the elderly were illiterate, 35.0% had primary-level education, and 23.0% had attained high school education or above. Prior to admission to old age homes, 71.0% of participants were living with their son or

daughter, 16.0% lived only with their spouse, and 13.0% were living alone.

The prevalence of domestic violence among the elderly prior to admission to old age homes was found to be high, with 64.0% of participants reporting experience of at least one form of abuse. Psychological abuse was the most commonly reported form, affecting 55.0% of participants, followed by financial abuse in 48.0% and neglect in 41.0%. Physical abuse was reported by 19.0% of the elderly. These findings indicate that emotional and economic forms of abuse were more prevalent than physical abuse among the study population.

Table 1: Depression Severity (GDS- 15) Among Elderly with and without Domestic Violence

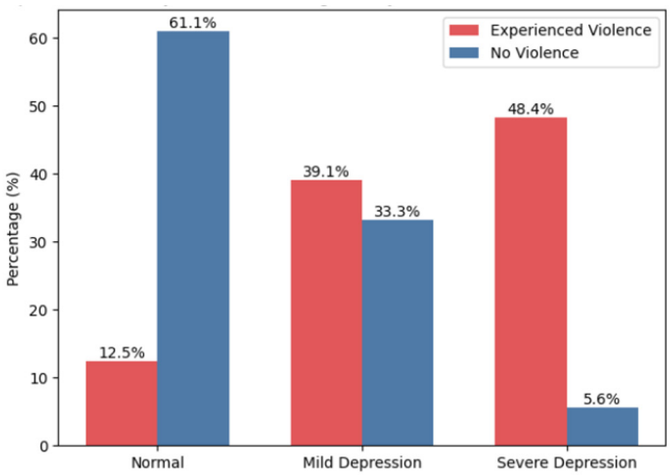

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Profile of the Study Participants (N = 100)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Group (years)	60–69	58	58.0
	70–79	31	31.0
	≥80	11	11.0
Gender	Male	47	47.0
	Female	53	53.0
Marital Status	Married	28	28.0
	Widowed	65	65.0
	Unmarried/ Separated	7	7.0
Education	Illiterate	42	42.0
	Primary School	35	35.0
	High School & Above	23	23.0
Previous Living Arrangement	With Son/ Daughter	71	71.0
	With Spouse Only	16	16.0
	Alone	13	13.0

Analysis of socio-demographic factors revealed significant associations with experience of domestic violence. Female elderly participants reported a higher prevalence of violence (73.6%) compared to males (53.2%), and this difference was statistically significant ($p = 0.031$). Elderly individuals aged 70 years and above experienced violence more frequently (73.8%) than those aged 60–69 years (56.9%) ($p = 0.045$). Illiterate participants were significantly more affected, with 83.3% reporting abuse compared to 50.0% among literate individuals ($p < 0.001$). Financial dependency emerged as a strong determinant, as 78.8% of financially dependent elderly experienced violence compared to only 35.3% among those who were financially independent ($p < 0.001$).

Table 3: Prevalence and Types of Domestic Violence Experienced Prior to Admission (Outcome Table) (N = 100)

Type of Abuse Experienced	Abuse (n)	Prevalence (%)
Any Form of Abuse	64	64.0
Psychological Abuse (verbal abuse, threats, neglect, humiliation)	55	55.0
Financial Abuse (withholding pension, economic exploitation)	48	48.0
Neglect (denial of basic needs, healthcare)	41	41.0
Physical Abuse (slapping, beating, confinement)	19	19.0

Table 4: Association Between Socio-Demographic Factors and Experience of Any Domestic Violence (Test of Significance I)

Variable	Category	Experienced Violence (n=64)	No Violence (n=36)	p-value
Gender	Male	25 (53.2%)	22 (46.8%)	0.031*
	Female	39 (73.6%)	14 (26.4%)	
Age Group	60–69 years	33 (56.9%)	25 (43.1%)	0.045*
	≥70 years	31 (73.8%)	11 (26.2%)	
Education	Illiterate	35 (83.3%)	7 (16.7%)	<0.001*
	Literate	29 (50.0%)	29 (50.0%)	
Financial Dependency	Dependent	52 (78.8%)	14 (21.2%)	<0.001*
	Independent	12 (35.3%)	22 (64.7%)	

*Statistically significant ($p < 0.05$)

DISCUSSION

The present study highlights a high burden of domestic violence among elderly residents of old age homes in Bareilly district, with 64.0% of participants reporting exposure to at least one form of abuse prior to admission. This prevalence is considerably higher than that reported in community-based Indian studies, reflecting the vulnerability of institutionalized elderly populations.

Data from the Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI) reported an overall elder abuse prevalence of around 5–10% at the community level,[11] while a multicentric study by Skirbekk and James (2014) reported a prevalence of 11.0% among elderly in selected Indian states.[12] The substantially higher prevalence observed in this study can be explained by the fact that elderly individuals experiencing abuse are more likely to seek refuge in old age homes, thereby concentrating cases of violence in such settings.

Psychological abuse emerged as the most common form of violence in this study (55.0%), followed by financial abuse (48.0%) and neglect (41.0%), whereas physical abuse was reported by 19.0% of participants. Similar patterns have been documented in other Indian studies, where non-physical forms of abuse predominate. A study by HelpAge India (2018) reported psychological abuse in 59% and financial abuse in 46% of elderly respondents, closely mirroring the findings of the present study.[13] In contrast, studies from Western countries have reported lower rates of financial abuse but comparable levels of psychological abuse, suggesting cultural and economic factors play a significant role in shaping abuse patterns.[14]

The present study demonstrated a significantly higher prevalence of domestic violence among females (73.6%) compared to males (53.2%, $p = 0.031$). This finding is consistent with observations from Dong et al., who reported that elderly women are at greater risk of abuse due to widowhood, financial dependency, and longer life expectancy.[15] Similarly, Chokkanathan and Lee (2005) in a study from India reported higher emotional and financial abuse among elderly women, supporting the gender-based vulnerability observed in this study.[16]

Age and educational status were also significant determinants of abuse. Elderly individuals aged 70 years and above experienced higher abuse (73.8%) compared to those aged 60–69 years (56.9%, $p = 0.045$). Illiterate participants showed a markedly higher prevalence of abuse (83.3%) compared to literate individuals (50.0%, $p < 0.001$). These findings are in line with a study by Skirbekk et al., which reported that lack of education significantly increases dependency and vulnerability to exploitation in old age.[12] Financial dependency was another strong predictor, with 78.8% of dependent elderly reporting abuse compared to 35.3% among financially independent individuals ($p < 0.001$), corroborating findings from LASI, which identified financial dependence as one of the strongest predictors of elder abuse in India.[11]

Overall, when compared with national and international studies, the present study demonstrates a markedly higher burden of domestic violence and its severe negative impact on quality of life and mental health among elderly residents of old age homes. These findings underscore the urgent need for early identification of abuse, strengthening family and social support systems, and implementing comprehensive geriatric and psychosocial interventions to protect elderly individuals from violence and neglect.

CONCLUSION

The present cross-sectional study conducted among elderly residents of old age homes in Bareilly district revealed a high prevalence of domestic violence (64.0%), indicating that abuse is a major underlying factor contributing to institutionalization of older adults. Psychological abuse, financial exploitation, and neglect were the most frequently reported forms, while physical abuse was comparatively less common. Female gender, advanced age, illiteracy, and financial dependency were significantly associated with higher risk of abuse. Elderly individuals who experienced domestic violence demonstrated markedly poorer quality of life across all WHOQOL-BREF domains, along with significantly higher levels of depression and psychological distress. These findings underscore that domestic violence is not only a social and legal concern but also a critical determinant of physical, psychological, and social well-being in old age.

Limitations

This study has certain limitations that should be considered while interpreting the findings. Information on abuse was based on self-reporting, which may be affected by recall bias, under-reporting, or social desirability bias. The study was confined to elderly residents of old age homes in Bareilly district; therefore, the results may not be generalizable to community-dwelling elderly or other geographic regions.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, it is recommended that routine screening for domestic violence and mental health issues be integrated into geriatric health services. Training healthcare workers, social workers, and caregivers to identify early signs of elder abuse and psychological distress is essential. Further large-scale longitudinal and community-based studies are recommended to better understand causal pathways and to develop targeted preventive and rehabilitative strategies for elder abuse.

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