

# Comparative Study on Elder Abuse and Neglect Among Geriatric Population in the Rural and Urban Field Practice Areas of a Medical College

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## Abstract

**Background:** Elder abuse is a multidimensional problem of public importance. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 16% of older people were victims of elder abuse. A study conducted by HelpAge India in 2018 showed that Mangaluru ranks the highest in elder abuse (47%). Given the scarce literature, this study sought to determine the prevalence of elder abuse and its associated sociodemographic factors. **Material and Methods:** A community-based cross-sectional study was conducted among the senior population in the rural and urban field practice a medical college in Mangaluru for one and a half years. The sample size was 280. **Results:** Most of the study population was in the age group of fewer than 75 years (75.4%), with 50.4% females, 60% Hindus, 56.4% married, 39.3% illiterate, and 88.9% of them retired. The prevalence of elder abuse was 44.6% (rural = 50.7% and urban = 38.6%). Binary logistic regression showed that elder abuse was statistically significant among the unemployed, extended family members, and staying with children. **Conclusions:** The study brings to light the sociodemographic factors that play a role in detecting elder abuse. It also shows the importance of awareness of elder mistreatment among older people. These elements must be considered for implementing and enforcing laws and legislation to help curb elder abuse.

**Keywords:** Dependency, depression, elder abuse, geriatric, nongovernmental organization (NGO)

## INTRODUCTION

The number of people aged 60 years or over will grow by 56 percent, from 901 million to 1.4 billion by 20230. The elderly are projected to more than double its size, reaching nearly 2.1 billion by 2050. Only 30% of older people worldwide are covered by pension schemes.<sup>[1]</sup>

The percentage of elderly will increase from 8% in 2015 to 19% in 2050. The country now faces the major challenge of caring for such a large population, whose number is likely to grow to 300 million by 2050.<sup>[2]</sup>

In the past 40 years, elder abuse has been gaining public, state, and scientific attention. Studies reveal a wide variation in elder abuse prevalence globally, ranging from 2.2% in high-income countries to 14% in middle- or low-income countries.<sup>[3]</sup>

A survey conducted by the nongovernmental organization (NGO) HelpAge India, titled “Elder Abuse in India-2018,”

has shown that elderly people in India faced abuse maximum in Mangaluru (47%), followed by Ahmedabad (46%), Bhopal (39%), Amritsar (35%), Delhi (33%), and Kanpur (30%). Three forms of elderly abuse are common in Indian families: disrespect (56%), verbal abuse (49%), and neglect (33%).<sup>[4]</sup>

With an increasing elderly population, we can anticipate more incidents of abuse of older people in the coming years. Although Mangalore is one of the top cities with the highest cases of elder abuse in India,<sup>[4]</sup> there are limited studies regarding it. Because of the above, this study aimed

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to determine the prevalence of abuse and find an association between elder abuse and selected sociodemographic factors among the rural and urban elderly population.

## SUBJECTS AND METHODS

The study was conducted from June 1, 2019, to May 31, 2020, among the elderly population residing in the rural and urban field practice areas of AJ Institute of Medical Sciences and Research Centre, Mangalore, aged 60 years and above. After considering the following reference study,<sup>[5]</sup> 140 elderly subjects were taken from rural and urban areas for the study, making a total sample size of 280.

A house-to-house survey was conducted to select and interview family members aged 60 years and above. The purpose and procedure were briefed to the respondents in the local language. Informed and written consent was obtained. Individuals unable to comprehend, those unwilling to cooperate, and participants not available even after two visits were excluded. The study's proposal was submitted to the concerned authorities in September 2017 after obtaining the requisite permission from the Institutional Ethics Committee. Informed consent was obtained from each participant. A pretested semi-structured validated questionnaire was used to collect information by interview method. The questionnaire was prepared in English, translated to Kannada, and then back-translated.

The questionnaire contains three sections. The first section was used to obtain the sociodemographic information of the respondents: age, sex, education, occupation, per capita income, etc., The second section was on older people's health status, morbidities, and dependency. Dependence is assessed using the General Activities of Daily Living Scale.<sup>[6]</sup> Depression was evaluated among the elderly by the Geriatric Depression Scale.<sup>[7]</sup> The third section contained questions about the family members and the type of abuse and neglect faced by older people. Abuse will be assessed using the Geriatric Mistreatment Scale.<sup>[8]</sup> Microsoft Excel version 2010 and IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software 25 trial version were used for data entry and data analysis. The frequency and percentages of each variable were found. The association between elder abuse and various sociodemographic factors was determined using the Pearson Chi-square and Fisher exact tests. The statistical association of the significant variables was interpreted by binary logistic regression.

## RESULTS

The study has 280 elderly, of whom 140 are in rural areas and 140 are in the urban area. Most of the study population was in the age group of fewer than 75 years (75.4%), and the mean age was  $67.371 \pm 7.1721$  years. Among the population, 50.4% were females, 60% were Hindus, 56.4% were married, 39.3% were illiterate, and 88.9% were retired [Table 1].

The overall prevalence of elder abuse was found to be 44.6% (rural = 50.7% and urban = 38.6%), of which the

proportion of older people who had faced abuse was more in the rural population (71 (56.8%)) in comparison with the urban population (54 (43.2%)). This association was statistically significant ( $P$  value = 0.041). Most elderly in rural and urban areas faced multiple kinds of abuse, and this association was statistically significant ( $P < 0.001$ )\*. The prevalence of psychological abuse among the elderly was higher in rural areas. The proportion of individuals who had faced psychological abuse was higher in the rural population [59 (60.2%)] compared with the urban population [39 (39.8%)]. This association was statistically significant ( $P$  value = 0.012)\*. The proportion of individuals who had faced neglect was higher in the rural population (65 (70.6%)) in comparison with the urban population (27 (29.4%)). This association was statistically significant ( $P$  value < 0.001) [Table 2].

In the study, the binary logistic regression showed that older people staying in a rural area had 1.7 times higher odds of facing elder abuse than more senior people in the urban area and was statistically significant. More aged people staying with extended family members had three times higher odds of facing elder abuse than those staying with immediate family members, which was statistically significant. Older people who were employed had 0.492 times fewer odds of facing elder abuse, and this association was statistically significant. Older people who stayed with their children had 9.092 times higher odds of facing elder abuse than those elderly who did not remain with their children, which was statistically significant [Table 3].

## DISCUSSION

In our study, the prevalence of elder abuse was 44.6%, 50.7% in the rural area and 38.6% in the urban area. HelpAge India's (2018) study showed that elder abuse is 47% in Mangaluru.<sup>[4]</sup> Oluoha *et al.*'s (2017) study showed that 78.8% of the elders faced abuse, 88.7% and 67.2% in the rural and urban communities. Our study showed that 35.2% faced single abuse, and 64.8% faced multiple waves of abuse. Another study reveals that 24.3% of elders experienced at least one type of abuse. Almost one-fifth of abused elders experienced more than one kind of abuse.<sup>[9]</sup>

Among all kinds of abuse, the maximum was psychological (35%), followed by neglect (32.9%), financial (13.9%), and physical abuse (0.7%) in our study. Kaur *et al.* reported similar findings, where most older people had psychological abuse (71%), followed by neglect (74%), financial abuse (37%), and physical abuse (25%).<sup>[5]</sup> Oluha *et al.* (2017) study showed that psychological abuse (86.5%) was the most common type of abuse suffered by the elders, followed by neglect (26.1%), physical abuse (17.9%), and financial abuse (12.0%), respectively.<sup>[10]</sup>

The study's main strength is that it explores a sensitive issue among the more neglected and vulnerable population of society. The study's cross-sectional nature cannot help infer meaningful causal relationships. A small sample size limits generalizability, so larger-scale studies are needed for a better picture of elder abuse in rural and urban older adults

**Table 1: Sociodemographic profile of subjects residing in rural and urban areas (n=280)**

Sociodemographic variables	Total n (%)	Rural n (%)	Urban n (%)
Age			
<75 years	211 (75.4)	96 (68.6)	115 (82.1)
>75 years	69 (24.6)	44 (31.4)	25 (17.9)
Gender			
Male	139 (49.6)	64 (45.7)	75 (53.6)
Female	141 (50.4)	76 (54.3)	65 (46.4)
Religion			
Hindu	226 (80.7)	93 (66.4)	133 (95)
Muslim	43 (15.3)	41 (29.3)	2 (1.4)
Christian	11 (4)	6 (4.3)	5 (3.6)
Education			
Illiterate	110 (39.3)	62 (44.3)	48 (34.3)
Literate	170 (60.7)	78 (55.7)	92 (65.7)
Employment			
Unemployed	49 (17.5)	23 (16.4)	26 (18.6)
Employed	231 (82.5)	117 (83.6)	114 (81.4)
Marital status			
Married	158 (56.4)	77 (55)	81 (57.9)
Single/separated/divorced widow/widowers	122 (43.6)	63 (45)	59 (42.1)
Staying with children			
Yes	232 (82.9)	116 (82.9)	116 (82.9)
No	48 (17.1)	24 (17.1)	24 (17.1)
Family members			
Immediate family members	256 (91.4)	124 (88.6)	132 (94.3)
Extended family members	7 (2.5)	4 (2.9)	3 (2.1)
Immediate and extended family members	16 (5.7)	12 (8.6)	4 (2.9)
Alone	1 (0.4)	0	

**Table 2: Comparison of different types of abuse profiles among elderly residing in rural and urban areas (n=125)**

Elder abuse types	Total n (%)	Rural n (%)	Urban n (%)
Elder abuse			
Present	125 (44.6)	71 (50.7)	54 (38.6)
Number of abuse			
A single type of abuse	44 (35.2)	15 (21.1)	29 (53.7)
Multiple types of abuse	81 (64.8)	56 (78.9)	25 (46.3)
Types of elder abuse			
Psychological abuse	98 (35)	59 (42.1)	39 (27.9)
Neglect	92 (32.8)	65 (46.4)	27 (19.3)
Financial abuse	39 (13.9)	14 (10)	25 (17.9)
Physical abuse	2 (0.7)	1 (0.7)	1 (0.7)

in India. Data on abuse depend on the participants’ subjective assessments or self-reported, and thus, some respondents may have been unwilling to report abuse episodes. This study did not investigate the characteristics of the perpetrators and caregivers who cared for older people. The elder abuse record is self-reported, which may have some response bias.

### CONCLUSION

India is an aging nation in the third stage of the demographic transition. Psychological abuse was the most common,

followed by neglect and financial abuse. The majority of the population is not aware of the redressal mechanisms. Factors, such as marital status, occupation, staying with children, and immediate family members, were found to be statistically significant in the analysis. All these factors must be considered to introduce methods to combat elder abuse.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need to create awareness about elder abuse through radio, television programs, and community meetings by governments, religious organizations, and nongovernmental organizations. Community developmental associations, local governments, or nongovernmental organizations must establish social clubs. The government should provide social security to the elderly population and reduce the cost of services for older people. Banks, police stations, and the judiciary can play an important role in sensitizing people on elder abuse, such as physical and financial abuse and neglect, and the redressal mechanisms to follow when they become victims of assaults, money fraud, and property disputes.

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**Table 3: Association of sociodemographic variables and elder abuse (n=280)**

Variables	Elder abuse		aOR	95% CI	P
	Present n (%)	Absent n (%)			
Staying with children					
Yes	85 (68)	147 (94.8)	1	3.980-20.744	0.000*
No	40 (32)	8 (5.2)	9.092		
Family members					
Immediate	108 (86.4)	148 (95.5)	3.099	1.173-8.184	0.022*
Extended	17 (13.6)	7 (4.5)	1		
Occupation					
Unemployed	47 (37.6)	63 (40.6)	0.492	0.244-0.992	0.047*
Employed	78 (62.4)	92 (59.4)	1		
Marital status					
Married	58 (46.4)	100 (64.5)	1.546	0.897-2.665	0.117
Separated/divorced/widowed	67 (53.6)	55 (35.5)	1		
Area					
Urban	71 (50.7)		1.711	0.997-2.875	0.000*
Rural	54 (38.6)		1		

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### Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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