

## **Elderly abuse - A challenge**

To begin with a short story which is relevant to our topic. It very aptly conveys the pathetic situation of the elderly in today's society:

"Hello Sir, calling from Oldage Home. We saw your advertisement of the missing dog. It has come here and is happily playing with your parents. "

While it is true in the Indian context, it must be relevant to the rest of the world. Old age was never a problem in India where a value based joint family backed by Socio- religious preachings existed. Indian culture is automatically respectful and supportive of the elders. So why has abuse of the elders become a daunting challenge in India? How far is it similar or different from the rest of the world? We need to look at the problem as urban and rural context. The problem is more acute in the urban area where the urban population feels insulated from social and religious pressure. In urban areas due to materialistic lifestyle and intervention of modern technology in day to day life, traditional socio-cultural values have become a burden hard to carry. Joint family system is breaking and being replaced by nuclear family which results and encourage the abuse and human rights violation of elderly. Elderly are either discarded or practised only as a ritual. In rural India the society remains sensitive to social stigma, responsibility and compulsions.

With life expectancy having increased from 40 years in 1951 to 69 years today, a person has 30 years more to live than would have 50 years back. With this kind of aging scenario, there is pressure on all aspects of oldage care, be it financial, social, health or shelter.

We need to know the magnitude of the problem. India is growing old! The stark reality of aging scenario in India is that there are 130 million older persons and the number is likely to grow to more than 300 million in 2050. This has brought with it suffering for the elderly due to the pressure on the already meager resources resulting in abuse of the elderly. There are several type of abuse of older people such as physical, psychological, emotional, financial, sexual and neglect. In addition to these there are conditions termed as elderly abuse such as abandonment, isolation which results to self neglect. Most of the elders hide their miserable plight due to fear of shame in social circles and emotional attachment to their kith and kin and the fear of worsening of the abuse. Hence, their abuse goes unreported.

It has been observed that common abuser can be spouse, partner, relative, friends, neighbor, volunteer and care giver, practitioner, solicitor or any other individual with the intent to deprive a vulnerable person of their resources. Relatives include adult children their spouse or partners, their offspring and other extended family members. Since the existing laws are obsolete and could be used by family members specially by daughter in law against the elderly person to exploit the situation in their favour. It needs strong political will, empathy and compassion towards the elderly. The civil society has to play proactive role and the government has to formulate effective laws or make necessary amendments in present laws to make them effective which till now has not reached to needy who in sunset years leading a life in abject, neglect and suffering. All the stake holders have to follow a pragmatic approach than rhetoric. More effective government legislation for the protection of the rights and well being of the elderly has to be in place and to be implemented effectively.

The society as a whole has to revisit, reinvent and reestablish our social heritage and cultural values where the elderly get their rightful position in family and society. The govt. of India under the dynamic leadership of Hon'ble Narendra Modi PM of India has mooted the idea of intergenerational solidarity through awareness campaign under Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. A special cell for the protection of elderly has been created under National Institute of Social Defense. NGO sector also has to play a proactive role as Janaseva Foundation, Pune, has been active in the welfare of the elderly and running oldage homes, day care centre and century clubs to keep them involved in creative activity for last 29 years and participating in intergenerational solidarity campaigns in schools and colleges.

The moot question is whether their efforts are effective and sufficient as elderly abuse is not only regional, national challenge but a global problem to be tackled collectively. The subject has to be discussed and debated at right forum to find effective solution.

As quoted in Dnyaneshwari "*VasudhaivaKutumbakam*" meaning 'whole world is one family' and accordingly we must complement and supplement our efforts at a global level.

---

Dr. Vinod Shah, MD  
Chairman  
Janaseva Foundation, Pune, India.  
NGO with Special Consultative Status  
Accredited to UN Open Ended Working Group on Ageing  
M. +91-9823011760  
Email: [jansevafoundationpune@gmail.com](mailto:jansevafoundationpune@gmail.com)