

# Situation, Risks and Prevention Strategies of Elder Abuse: A Lesson for Nepal

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this paper is to identify and summarize the body of research on elder abuse in order to offer a more thorough understanding of the topic. Specifically, the goal is to identify and discuss the situation, risks and preventive measures related to elder abuse in light of Nepal's aging population. This narrative review was conducted after searching the article databases including Google Scholar, PubMed and Nepjol. A total of twenty seven journal articles, four systematic review articles, five books, five reports, one dissertation, two national acts of Nepal, four webpage articles and one methodological journal article were reviewed during a period from September 2022 to June 2023. The narrative review in the area of elder abuse is reflected in this article. Studies have shown that several misuse hazards are higher for senior citizens. Elder abuse is any single or recurrent act that hurts or distresses an older person and takes place in any relationship where there is an expectation of trust. The aging populations of many nations, including Nepal, are growing quickly, as are the number of senior abuse incidents. There are numerous government organizations, international and national non-governmental organizations, and local bodies doing admirable work concerning the investigation of elder abuse and the provision of assistance to elder abuse victims through the sharing of research experiences and the practical implementation of various prevention strategies. However, much more needs to be done for this at-risk population group in our society. In addition to raising social security for all seniors, it is recommended that each municipality in Nepal build an Elderly Service Center.*

**Keywords:** elder abuse, elderly people, older people, prevention of elder abuse, violence against elderly

## Introduction

Older persons can be harmed or distressed by a single or recurrent act of abuse or violence that happens in a relationship where there is a trusting expectation. These damaging acts, which include rejection, abandonment, and severe loss of self-worth and respect, as well as physical, psychological, emotional, financial and material, and sexual abuse, are considered violations of human rights (WHO, 2002). Violence against the

elderly is a reality that has been increasing in awareness and concern over the past several decades all over the world, even though it is still mostly concealed in our cultures. In 1975, Burston published his "Granny Battering" research, which was the first study on violence towards the elderly, in the *British Medical Journal* (Jackson, 2016). Since that time, scholars, academics, and industry experts have started to become interested in this societal problem (Heisler, 2000; Machado & Queiroz, 2006).

The issue of violence toward the elderly people is brought up in a variety of health and science disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and criminology. According to study protocols created in the 1990s, abuse of the elderly people is typically classified as familial violence and is frequently committed by family members or other close friends (Jackson, 2016). Elder abuse is increasingly understood to be a type of health condition that affects social, familial, and individual problems. According to Hall et al. (2016), this violence is defined by the International Network for Prevention of Elderly Abuse (INPEA) in 1995 as a wilful act or omission of action by a caregiver or other person in a relationship, including the expectation of trust causing or posing a problem or risk to the elderly.

There is currently a lack of information on the elderly population in Nepal (Chalise et al., 2007; HelpAge Nepal, 2014). According to Joshi et al. (2018) and the Central Bureau of Statistics (2012), the proportion of senior residents in Nepal increased consistently during 1951 (5.0%), 1991 (5.8%), 2001 (6.5%), and 2011 (8.1%), however this was adequately changed in 2022. As per the National Statistics Office (NSO) (2023), Nepal's population aged 65 and over has grown from 3.3% in 1973 to 6.1% in 2022, with an average annual growth rate of 1.26%, and in 2022, the population aged 65 and over in Nepal has become 6.1%. It is greater than the country's overall growth rate. This illustrates how the number of elderly people growing may risk of the rise in elder abuse incidents.

### Methods

The goal of this study, a desk review that incorporates a narrative review technique, is to identify and synthesize the existing literature on elder abuse to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the subject. Since a narrative review aims to summarize and characterize the body of knowledge on a subject and draws a conclusion based on this data, we have also searched pertinent references in this study manually for the purpose of summarization and synthesis of elder mistreatment. The data utilized to write this paper was gathered from databases including Google Scholar, PubMed, and Nepjol. A total of twenty seven journal articles, four systematic review articles, five books, five reports, one dissertation, two national acts of Nepal, four webpage articles and one methodological journal article were reviewed during a period from September 2022 to June 2023. All these literature are duly cited and included in the reference section. Likewise, elder abuse,

elderly people, older people, Nepal, and keyword combinations where appropriate were utilized as a search term. This paper is also prepared to present the state of knowledge on a subject objectively, drawing from the overview of previously published studies (Green et al., 2006).

## **Results and Discussion**

The literature review has reached out to the following mistreatments with supportive discussions.

### **A World Scenario of Abuse of Elderly People**

Physical, psychological or emotional, financial, and sexual, as well as the purposeful or unintended forms of neglect are the five types of elder abuse recognized to date (WHO, 2002). Due to greater physiological changes, a rise in the frequency and severity of psychiatric diseases, and social isolation brought on by becoming estranged from friends and companions, older individuals report feeling lonelier than those of other age groups. Additionally, they have fewer opportunities for social interaction, fewer sources of money, and frequently have to avoid children (Acharya et al. 2021; Beard et al., 2016; Peshevska et al., 2014).

According to predictions made by Beard et al. (2016), the number of people over 60 years old would increase from 900 million in 2015 to two billion by the year 2050. Even though affluent countries have a sizable senior population, Beard et al. (2016) assert that population expansion is mostly thought to occur in emerging nations. According to projections, the global senior population will reach 10.5% in 2025 and 21.7% in 2050.

Elder abuse and neglect are projected to affect 27.5% of people worldwide (Cooper et al., 2008). Estimates of elder abuse rates in the Asian region vary widely, from 0.22 per 1000 to 62% (Yan et al., 2015). Elder abuse is an important public health problem. According to a review of 52 studies conducted in 28 countries from a variety of locations, one in six adults (or 15.7%) aged 60 and over reported having experienced abuse in the last year (Yon et al. 2017). Similarly, Yon et al. (2019) says that 64.2% of employees admitted to having abused elderly people in the previous year in the institutional setting. The table below gives a general idea of the prevalence of older persons who are subject to various sorts of abuse, even though the data available from these researches are not reliable.

**Table 1***Systematic reviews and meta-analyses (Yon, 2017; Yon, 2019)*

Type of abuse	Elder abuse in the community	Elder abuse in institutional settings	
	Reported by older adults	Reported by older adults and their proxies	Reported by staff
Overall prevalence	15.7%	Not enough data	64.2% or 2 in 3 staff
Psychological abuse	11.6%	33.4%	32.5%
Physical abuse	2.6%	14.1%	9.3%
Financial abuse	6.8%	13.8%	Not enough data
Neglect	4.2%	11.6%	12.0%
Sexual abuse	0.9%	1.9%	0.7%

The COVID-19 epidemic has increased the frequency of elder maltreatment in the community and institutional settings. The COVID-19 pandemic may have resulted in an 84% rise in the rate of elder abuse in the United States (Chang, 2021). The senior population is aging at a faster rate among the so-called oldest old (those who are 80 years or older). Similarly, according to Fraga et al. (2014), 30.8% of elderly men and women in Sweden experienced some form of abuse previously.

Older persons in wealthy nations are particularly at danger from family members. In the 1996 US National Elder Abuse Incidence Study, adult children or spouses made up two-thirds of the abusers (Nelson, 2002). Hospitals, nursing homes, and other institutions all mistreat elderly people; and 36% of nursing home personnel claimed to have seen at least one instance of physical abuse of an elderly patient in the preceding year, and 10% acknowledged having physically abused an elderly patient at least once themselves (Nelson, 2002).

### ***Abuse of elderly people in developing countries***

Although there is no systematic collection of statistics, there is evidence that elder abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation are much more common than societies acknowledge in developing countries (Hall et al., 2016). Elder abuse statistics are few in the developing world, according to HelpAge International, which relies primarily on case studies, news articles, and a few regional prevalence estimates. There have been many cases of elderly women being accused of witchcraft in rural Tanzania to justify their being evicted from their homes and even killing them for property (HelpAge International, 2022)

Rape and familial violence against senior relatives had grown frighteningly widespread in various areas of other portions of Africa. For example, in certain places where the notion that having sex with elderly people will cure HIV and AIDS has allegedly emerged, reports of sexual assault have also grown (HelpAge International, 2022). In addition to

this, increasing crime and drug-related violence throughout Latin America, as well as pressures on family and community structures are all contributing to an increase in offensive behavior toward elderly people. There are several risk factors such as strained family ties brought on by elderly people's greater need, carers' dependence on housing or financial assistance, social isolation, and young couples' outward movement (WHO, 2022).

Similarly, 88% of elderly persons in Bangladesh experienced mental abuse, 83% were ignored, 54% were subjected to economic exploitation, and 40% were physically mistreated. 54% of those who experienced physical abuse were women, and 45% were males (WHO, 2022). In Mozambique, 20% of older males and 17% of older women reported having been physically abused, whereas, theft, fraud, eviction, or other activities affecting money or property were reported by 76% of older males and 61% of older women in Peru (HelpAge International, 2022).

In India and Thailand, study data indicate that 50% and 60% of elderly people, respectively, have experienced abuse (Sebastian & Sekher, 2010; Chintanawat, 2003). In a similar vein, research from Africa found that more than 60% of elderly people are reportedly the victims of abuse (Bigala & Ayiga, 2014). In addition, mostly emotional abuse (30.5%) followed by financial abuse (8.2%), neglect (5.1%), physical abuse (3.5%), and sexual abuse (1.2%) were found in a study of older Mexican women (Vilar-Compte & Gaitan-Rossi, 2018).

### ***Abuse of elderly people in Nepal***

With the youngsters working outside of their villages, cities, and the nation and the seniors being left in their houses, the family structure in Nepal is also changing. As a result of these circumstances, many senior populations are dealing with social and health concerns. Seniors who experienced elder abuse experienced a variety of detrimental health outcomes, such as mental diseases, suicidal thoughts, trauma, and even death (Joshi et al., 2018; Bista & Joshi, 2015).

A sizable portion of young people in Nepal leave the country in search of employment. Many senior citizens are either living alone or with their daughters-in-law and grandkids as a result. In addition, a large number of elderly people were divorced or widowed, which may further contribute to elder abuse (Chalise & Paudel, 2020). In Syangja district of Nepal, there was a 54.5% frequency of elder maltreatment (Acharya et al., 2021). It was found that neglecting an older was the most common type of abuse (23.1%), followed by psychological abuse (20.6%), physical abuse (6.5%), financial abuse (2.4%), and sexual abuse (1.9%). Similarly, there is a significant frequency of abuse (65.6%) among senior people living in Pokhara of Nepal (Bhandari & Adhikari, 2020). The

likelihood of elder maltreatment increases when elderly people are unwell (Chalise & Paudel, 2020; Choo et al., 2016).

### **Risk Factors of Abuse and Violence to Elderly People**

Elderly individuals are victims of a variety of mistreatment. The most frequent kind of abuse experienced by elderly people is verbal (41%), subsequently contempt (33%) and neglect (29%). The three most communal forms of abuse in society were reported to be economic exploitation (53%), beating (39%), and unwanted sexual contact (3.11%) (Help Age India, 2014). Abuse, especially physical abuse, causes injury, disability, disfigurement, and even death, permanently altering the life status of the elderly people and causing fear and anxiety for their well-being, their safety, reduced quality of life, confidence, and trust in others.

Violence against the elderly people is influenced by a variety of variables, such as the environment in which it occurs, the distance between the victim and the offender, and the type of aggressiveness used. 'Maltreatment', 'violence', or 'abuse' are some other words that have been employed for this purpose (Anthony et al., 2009; Dyer & Rowe, 1999). Sex, lack of social support, social isolation, addiction due to physical or mental factors, the environment in which the incident occurred, physical health and poor morale, cognitive impairment, and low income are all significant risk factors for victims (Lopes & Gemito, 2016).

There are many types of violence among elderly people:

*Physical violence*, such as shoving, striking, inflicting pain, shaking, tying someone to prevent them from moving, forcing them to eat or drink, pulling their hair, burning them with cigarettes or liquids, or making them adopt an unnatural position. *Psychological or Emotional Violence* (e.g., intimidating, making unfounded accusations, harassing, physically or verbally abusing, infantilizing them, limiting their right to secrecy, making all decisions regarding their medical information, voting, receiving mail, and communicating with others). *Economic or financial violence*, such as using elderly people's financial resources or coercing people into signing legal papers like wills or transfers of assets.

*Carelessness or negligence*, such as failing to provide enough diet, assist with cleanliness, remove them from an unhealthy environment, pay little attention to their hydration, fail to treat wounds or injuries, or leave the elderly in bed, on the street, or in public facilities. Other writers also discuss *sexual violence*, which is an act intended to arouse, engage in sexual activity, or engage in erotic behavior through grooming, physical harm, or threats (Dong, 2015).

Shifting ethos, economic dependency on the abused, and emotional dependence on the abused are the three main causes of the incidence of elder abuse, whereas the primary causes of senior abuse are a lack of adaptability, the abusers' economic reliance, and longer lifespans (Govil & Gupta, 2016).

### ***Aggressor characteristics of the abuse of elderly people***

Aggressive qualities include financial dependence on the victim, mental illness or substance use, and dependency; often financial of the abuser on the victim, are the risk factors of violence against the elderly (Lopes & Gemito, 2016; Soares et al., 2010). At the interpersonal level, the kind of connection (such as a spouse-partner, child-parent, or other) and marital status may be linked to a higher risk of abuse; however, these variables differ by nation and location. Ageism towards elderly people and certain cultural norms (such as the normalization of violence) may be community and society-level issues connected to elder abuse. Living alone and receiving social assistance both lower the risk of elder abuse (Pillemer, 2016).

Govil and Gupta (2016) found that the son comes in second at 59% while the daughter-in-law is the top abuser at 61% in India. Among them, 7% of senior abuse victims named their daughter as the perpetrator, 6% named their son-in-law, 3% named a relative, and 3% named a caregiver or servant. Finding the victim might be challenging since they aren't always aware of certain abusive practices as violent. For instance, elderly people may interpret persistent unmet fundamental requirements (such as food, hygiene, and love) as caregiver unavailability rather than deliberate or harmful conduct (Govil & Gupta, 2016).

The elderly person who is in a position of vulnerability, fragility, or dependency on a caregiver who is violent or abusive should be protected since this phenomenon does occur more frequently than we may imagine (Santos et al., 2013).

### ***Consequences of the abuse on elderly people***

Elder abuse can have major negative effects on their physical and mental health, as well as their financial situation and social status. These effects may include, for example, physical trauma, early death, depression, cognitive decline, financial distress, and nursing home admissions. The effects of abuse can be particularly severe for elderly persons, and rehabilitation may take longer (Lachs, 1998).

### ***Reporting of cases of elder abuse***

Often, elderly people are aware that they are being abused by their caregivers but are afraid to talk about it. Since violence is often perpetrated by close family members – such



as a spouse, child, or grandchild – whom they consider their sole guardian, it is difficult to locate the victim (Anetzberger, 2004).

According to Help Age India (2014), among senior persons who suffered abuse, only 59.47% of people attempted to report the abuse, and 40.53 % of people failed to do so. Mostly, preferred to keep family affairs private, the elders also did not know how to handle the issues, lacked faith in any individual or organization to address the abuse, and did not report for various reasons.

### **Prevention Strategies for the Elder Abuse**

According to Help Age India (2014), 83% of seniors indicated that abuse is commonplace in society, and 50% of elders claimed having personally experienced it, 72% of abused senior persons were between the ages of 60 and 69, 25% were between the ages of 70 and 79, and 3% were 80 years of age or beyond. This type of violence should be prevented and many nations have started actions for it.

In certain nations, the health industry has taken the lead in educating the public about elder abuse, while in other nations; the social welfare industry has done so. Too little is known about elder abuse and how to stop it globally, especially in developing nations. There have been several attempts to stop elder abuse and respond to it, but there is now scant data to support the majority of these treatments. The most effective strategies include caregiver interventions, the provision of services to reduce the burden of care, money management programs for older adults who are vulnerable to financial abuse, and helplines, emergency shelters and assistance, and multidisciplinary teams, as responses are frequently requested across multiple systems, including long-term routine care, adult protective services, criminal justice, health care, and mental health care (Pillemer et al. 2016).

The interventions are divided into three categories: social support (including emergency shelters and helplines), healthcare, and community education and awareness campaigns. Recommendations for prevention are also diverse. Primary health care must come first and if that is not the case, community workers, supported by greater public awareness, in which the media has a key role to play. Establishing a special rapporteur to report on violence suffered by elderly people is also recommended because it underscores the need of recognizing and protecting elderly people's rights (Nelson, 2002).

### **WHO Response to Elder Abuse**

On 15 June 2022, World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, WHO and its partners published “Tackling Abuse of elderly people: five priorities for the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030)”. These five priorities are: (i) Combating age discrimination, as it is one of the main reasons why elder abuse has received little attention, (ii) Creating more and



better data to raise awareness of the issue, (iii) Developing and scale up cost-effective solutions to end elder abuse, (iv) Presenting an investment case focused on solving the problem with money spent reasonable, (v) Fundraising when more resources are needed to solve the problem (WHO, 2022). HelpAge International (2022) says on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, elder abuse is a global problem, as activists from 40 countries call for a United Nations convention on human rights to protect them and bring perpetrators to justice.

A review of 18 researches covering 15 countries over the past seven years found that between 11 and 83% of older adults reported experiencing various forms of abuse. Men and women reported similar levels of violence and abuse in the four studies in which data were disaggregated by sex, but more research data is needed on this issue (HelpAge International, 2022). In the current context, special attention should be paid to the welfare of the elderly, especially their socio-economic, financial, health, housing, and emotional needs. Increased life expectancy, physical functional disability creating the need for support, generation gap, etc. are some of the issues that challenge the survival of the elderly in the country.

### **Awareness of Redress Mechanism against Elder Abuse**

A significant problem is the general lack of knowledge regarding legal remedies for elder abuse incidents. The care of the elderly people is mostly seen as a private family concern, even though the government of Nepal has been offering old-age allowances (Jestha Nagarik Sambandhi Ain, 2063). There aren't many clear-cut plans for building programs and facilities to improve the well-being and quality of life of the elderly in developing nations like Nepal (Chalise & Paudel, 2020).

The majority of Nepal's elderly population, who make up a sizably underserved segment of society, reside in rural areas. The Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC) has identified aged care as one of its top priorities. As part of the ninth and tenth long-term plans, the Government of Nepal established the National Aging Policy in 2014 (Disability and Senior Citizen Related Act, Law Action, 2005).

### **Legal Provisions for the Adults against Elder Abuse**

Dealing with the issue requires more than just providing the information and altering the roles. Members of the community must actively participate. Sensitization of young people is essential. Even the elderly populations themselves must be educated about the legal protections available to them and encouraged to exercise prudence. In every district of Nepal, senior citizen cells need to be built. Helplines for the elderly people should be improved. The safety of people who live alone in our neighborhood should also be a top priority for the police. Future research and development should focus on improving the

interactions between family members. The aged must have access to a quick, effective, and efficient remedy system to live a safe and fulfilling life for elderly people (Acharya, 2021).

### **Conclusion and Implications**

From 900 million in 2015 to nearly 2 billion in 2050, the world's population of people aged 60 and over will more than double. In the past year, nearly 1 in 6 people aged 60 and over experienced abuse in the community. Two-thirds of staff at facilities such as nursing homes and long-term care facilities said they had abused older adults at some point in the past year. The COVID-19 outbreak has seen an increase in elder abuse rates. Abuse of senior citizens can result in severe bodily harm as well as long-term psychological effects. According to predictions, elder abuse will rise as populations in many nations age quickly.

Even though the WHO is doing commendable work to study elder abuse and provide assistance to its member nations through the sharing of research experiences and prevention strategies, much more needs to be done for this at-risk segment of our society. Millions of elderly people around the world are abused; a social issue that requires international attention because of its impact on their health and human rights. June 15 every year is recognized as World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. It symbolizes the day each year when people speak out against the abuse and suffering caused to some of our older generations.

Many organizations in various nations have also made ground-breaking contributions to the study of senior maltreatment and its prevention. To live a dignified, secure, active, and healthy life, elderly people are supported by HelpAge International (2022) in claiming their rights, combating prejudice, and overcoming poverty.

In Nepal, the study on senior citizens has justly started. Even though several groups of academics have conducted some studies in Nepal, more has to be done. The main purpose of the government of Nepal's initiatives up to this point has been to attempt to safeguard the rights of senior persons to security and dignity. The Nepali government should launch a national project to set up an "Elder Service Center" in each municipality to ensure the long-term well-being of the elderly. The concept of aging as a natural phenomenon needs to be included in the school-level curricula. Given that the number of senior people in Nepal is steadily rising, the government ought to be considerate enough to provide for them in the future.

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