An exploratory study on prevalence of mistreatment of older persons and associated psychological distress

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Elder mistreatment is an important public health problem that exists in both developing and developed countries yet is typically under-reported globally. Mistreatment refers to abuse, neglect, exploitation and abandonment of elderly by family members, spouse, relatives or any other formal or informal caregivers.

Aim and objectives: To determine the prevalence of mistreatment among older persons and find out association between mistreatment and psychological distress.

Materials and methods: Quantitative approach, cross-sectional survey design was used for the study of older persons selected from seven villages of Haldwani rural block of Uttarakhand state by convenient sampling technique. Total of 381 subjects who fulfilled inclusion criteria were enrolled in the study using total enumeration sampling method out of total population of 7405 living in the selected area. Proforma for socio-demographic and selected variables, The MOS Social Support Survey (MOS-SSS), Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10), Geriatric Anxiety Inventory (GAI)-Hindi Version, Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS)-Hindi Version, Hwalek-Sengstock Elder Abuse Screening Test (H-S/EAST) and Elder Assessment Instrument (EAI) were used for collecting data from older persons. Seven villages were selected using convenient sampling method for selection of setting. All houses in each village were visited and examined for presence of older persons (subjects) and 383 enrolled. The complete data could be collected from 381 subjects only as two subjects were non-available on second day of data collection.

Results: The mean age of the study subjects is 68.17 years (SD±7.64), ranging between 60 and 98 years. Out of 381 subjects, 54.9% are female, 78.2% are married and 20% of them are widowed.
Sixty out of 381 older persons reported at least any one sub-type of mistreatment and the prevalence of elder mistreatment is 15.7% (95% CI, 12.05%-19.35%). Nineteen subjects reported abuse and the prevalence of elder abuse is 5.0% (95% CI, 2.81%-7.19%). Forty eight subjects reported neglect and the prevalence of neglect is 12.6% (95% CI, 9.27%-15.93%). Twenty two subjects reported exploitation and the prevalence of exploitation is 5.8% (95% CI, 3.45%-8.15%). Fourteen subjects reported abandonment and the prevalence of abandonment of subjects is 3.7% (95% CI, 1.80%-5.60%). Nearly one third (31.8%) of the subjects have mild, moderate or severe psychological distress and 59.6% of the subjects showed depressive symptoms. More than one third (36.7%) of the subjects have symptoms of anxiety. Overall social support score of subjects is 64.3 (SD±21.6) which is nearly two third of the maximum possible score (100) of social support scale. Mistreated older persons were more likely to have psychological distress, depression and anxiety than that of those who did not experience mistreatment. Older persons who are aged 80 years and above are more likely to be mistreated than those who are younger than 80 years. Those living with relatives or alone are more likely to be mistreated than those who live with their son, daughter or together (jointly living).

**Conclusion:** Mistreatment of older persons is most neglected area in health sector. Prevalence of mistreatment is very high even though rural population was studied. There is a need to develop a screening and reporting protocol for primary healthcare personnel. Interventions focusing self-development of older persons, family, community, healthcare personnel is essential to tackle problem of abuse and mistreatment. Nurses can be better utilized for this cause with proper training in prevention of mistreatment of older persons.

**Key words:** Mistreatment of older persons, Abuse, Neglect, Exploitation, Abandonment, Psychological distress, Anxiety, Depression, Social Support.