

Elder Abuse: What Senior Citizens can do?

When senior citizens are abused on account of their defenseless position by younger relatives or others 'Elder Abuse' takes place. Senior Citizens have less capacity to fight for their own rights because of diminishing health, poor health conditions, poverty, loss of memory, lack of money, inability to adjust to the present generation or ignorance. The abuse may be financial, emotional and mental, physical including sexual, verbal or constant threatening etc.

The son pressurizing his old aged father to transfer his property, the daughter neglecting to take care physically when one is bed ridden, not providing food, harassing by hurling verbal abuses and insults, beating, deserting, cheating by taking away the old man's money – all these are examples of elder abuse.

The problem should be addressed all sections of the society like: the senior citizens themselves, abusers, friends and relatives, senior citizens associations, counseling centers, police, government organizations, NGOs etc. Here I shall give a few tips to senior citizens – what they can do by themselves.

1. Senior citizens should empower themselves with facts, information and data required to face and tackle abuse. They should have phone numbers and addresses of lawyers, doctors, police, pressure groups, counseling centers and the like. They should read up and discuss with peers and be knowledgeable. Ignorance of rights and the law in particular is harmful and places the senior citizen in a vulnerable position. Recently a senior citizen wrote a will that his son may not accept fully. The old man thought that he had a lawful duty to read out the contents before sealing and giving it to the lawyer. This is because his father had done so several decades ago.
2. Senior citizens should join several associations and peer groups like walkers clubs, prayer groups Day Care Centers etc. When abuse occurs they should openly discuss it with others without feeling shy or ashamed. One of the greatest hurdles in handling abuse is the non-co-operation by the affected individuals. They most often feel: "How can I complain against my own children?"
3. Senior Citizens must make themselves financially sound and independent. They should never give away their property to their wards or disclose all their assets to everyone. Where feasible they should not hesitate to take Reverse Mortgage Loan and ensure a steady flow on income.
4. Taking recourse to legal provisions should be the last resort. Having anger alone or standing on one's prestige alone is not enough. Civil Suits take years to get decided and lot of time & time are wasted. In my opinion only two people should go to court: the insane and the lawyer, the first because he has nothing to loose and the latter because ha can not afford not to. If one is dragged into a law suit then it is a different matter. A senior citizen known to me is bent upon filing a case because his daughter in law refuses to cook for him!

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