

PERCEPTION OF ELDER ABUSE BY SOCIETY

The magnitude and extent of abuse of elders, by their own children, and/or by others, is not fully appreciated by society, as such. Only when a newspaper article appears on this subject, because of abuse suffered by an elder, do people realize that such things also happen. They then feel sorry for these elders, say that something needs to be done, that the Government should do something etc, and then forget the whole thing and go about their work. Like so many social issues, we are quick to pay lip service, and stop at that.

The reasons for elders undergoing abuse are many. Most often, it is to do with conflicts with their children or grandchildren. In most cases, such elders have to deal with angry, selfish, disrespectful children, though some part of the blame falls on the elders too. In many families, elders are perceived by the youngsters to be adamant, irritable, non-compromising, and as a burden. Many youngsters are interested in getting their hands on the money that the elders possess, or some other such asset. Elders, on the other hand, are often unwilling to give complete freedom to their children or grandchildren. The ever widening generation gap, where elders cannot understand today's younger generation, and vice versa, is often at the root of all such abuse. Since, physically and mentally the youngsters are stronger, they land up having the upper hand in all such conflicts.

While youngsters are often childish and immature, elders too can be so, at times. As an example, many elders who are hard of hearing refuse to acknowledge their problem, and refuse to wear hearing aids, disregarding all advice. This causes tremendous anxiety and anger to their children, who are forced to suffer the effects of this deafness. While it is easy and normal to put the blame of elders abuse on the perpetrators of this abuse—namely, the youngsters, it does not, and will not solve the problem. To solve any problem, understanding and acceptance are required, not playing the blame game.

In order to prevent or reduce these incidents of abuse, it is necessary that both elders and youngster behave more like friends rather than as seniors and juniors. Having open discussions and seeing the other person's point of view is very important. For example, if I could discuss with my father why he behaves in a particular way, and what are his problems, his anxieties, his worries etc, then I will definitely be in a better position to understand his mindset, and will try to work around the problem, instead of resorting to verbal or physical abuse. It is often when both parties reach a deadlock and when the youngsters see no hope that some of them get frustrated, angry and regress to man's most primitive instinct to

solve any problem, namely violence. Tough legislations too will help, to some extent. But finally, awareness, understanding, consensus and compromise will bring the best results.

493 words

Dr.P.V.Vaidyanathan

vaidyanathan.pv@gmail.com