

Online Petition to STOP Elder Abuse in India

To mark World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on 15th June 2008, we as organisation working for Senior Citizens have taken the responsibility to address the issue of Elder Abuse by various programmes and this **On Line Petition** is one of the medium to create Awareness and Petition the Central and State Government and the Society at Large with the problem and recommendation.

Among the most prominent problem faced by the elderly is the abuse by the family members and also by the people of the society. **According to a rough estimate, nearly 40 % of older people living with their families are reportedly facing abuse of one kind or another, but only 1 in 6 cases actually comes to light** (Helpage India website). But first it is necessary to understand what comes elder abuse and its definitions. Various authors have defined elder abuse but a comprehensive definition is given by Council of Europe (1992). They define elder abuse as **“A non-accidental act or omission, which undermines the life, the physical and psychological integrity of an older person or harms the development of his or her personality and or undermines or damages his or her financial security”**.

Abuse has been broadly classified into six categories:

- **Physical abuse:** This includes like beating, pushing, slapping, and sexual abuse.
- **Psychological abuse:** This includes verbal threatening to abuse the older person, isolation, moral blackmail, threat of admitting them to admitting them in old age homes, insulting, ignoring, withholding affection.
- **Financial abuse:** which is misappropriating of property through fair or foul means
- **Denial of rights:** like isolation, preventing one from practicing one's religion, denying the right to vote.
- **Active neglect:** in the form of refusal or failure to undertake a care taking obligation.
- **Passive neglect:** This is refusal or failure to fulfill a care taking obligation.

In real life cases in most of the cases there is a combination of all types of abuse.

Elder abuse as a social concern remains hidden within the domain of family problem.

Elder people who are victims of abuse are not likely to discuss it with those outside the family as they are very often dependent on those who abuse them for physical and financial support. Moreover a study done by Helpage India shows that **the elderly who face such abuse try and justify it themselves due to their dependency**. The perpetrators of abuse are not likely to talk about it as society at large does not sanction such behavior. **Those who witness such acts of abuse are reluctant to bring it out in the open as they may feel that it is a private, family affair.**

Elder abuse being such a major problem which elderly face has not even been mentioned in the National Policy on Ageing 1999. Although, the Older Persons (Maintenance, Care and Protection) Bill tries to protect parents who have handed over their savings and property to their children by making it mandatory for them to provide maintenance for their parents, the tribunals have still not been set up and it remains to be seen whether parents will actually register cases against their own children.

The problem of elder abuse has to be dealt with on both 'micro' and 'macro' levels. Also, a multi-pronged approach is required from different professionals who have an adequate understanding of the phenomenon of elder abuse, the dynamics of ageing, abuse within and outside the family, cultural and societal influences, of appropriate helping strategies to implement this knowledge.

At the micro level, in the context of structural and functional changes in the family as an institution and also disintegration of values of elderly care, it needs to be recognized that families on their own are not equipped to care for older persons and there is an urgent need for supportive services for families. **At the macro-level**, the value system which results in ill-treatment of the elderly needs to be inculcated through greater awareness about issues of elderly among the younger generation.

A Columbian psycho geriatrician, Dulcey-Ruiz has said that there is a need to change the idea of being passive, useless, dependent and isolated into one that is active autonomous and socially participative.

Following are some of our recommendation to stop and minimize the cases of Elder Abuse and make the Society Elder Friendly. Its also to be noted that Its not only responsibility of Government but also of the Society at large to see to it that Elderly can live in peace , with security and dignity.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Formation of Senior Citizens Forum in every community which can act as a powerful agency in cases of detection, prevention & amelioration of domestic abuse.
- Vigilance committees in every urban residential colonies that need to work in collaboration with Residents Associations /Mohalla Committee of the area to deal with cases of elder abuse.
- Multi-service community Gero-Care Centre which can address several issues faced by elderly and their care givers.
- To start 4 digit national Elder Abuse Helpline
- To have National Nodal agency for Elder Abuse
- Give More power/give Guidelines to local police station to take action against Elder Abuse
- Law to make Elder Abuse as Non Bailable Offense like dowry act
- Law where NGO or third party can lodge complaint on behalf of abused personally
- Establishment of Counseling centers for Abuse, Legal , Financial , Psycho – Social
- To have Grievances centers in each Tehasil / Taluka
- Sensitizing and Awareness campaign through Media by Government like Polio , Child Labour and Women's issues
- Introduce special chapters or projects in colleges and secondary school with regards to Elder care and issues
- To appoint Welfare officer or special cell in each Police Station for Elder Abuse , similar to Child welfare officer / Women cell
- To have more Short stay ad Respite care centers ,this will benefit the care takers and the family
- Empowering Elderly through Awareness campaign and special training
- Social security pension should be increased to Rs.3000/- per month and to be given to all seniors irrespective to urban or rural and also it should be updated similar to DA for other government pension schemes
- Immediate implementation of Senior Citizens Bill for Maintenance

This Petition is part of one month programme during June 2008 and **a Initiative of Silver Innings**, a organisation dedicated for Senior Citizens and their family members **And** promoted by **INPEA (International Network for Prevention of Elder Abuse), Indian Chapter through Development, Welfare and Research Foundation (DWARF) and 'Little Things Matter Initiatives' (LTMI);The Family Welfare Agency, Mumbai; ARDSI (Alzheimer's Related Disorder Society of India), Mumbai Chapter; Society for Serving Seniors, Hyderabad; Shree Manav Seva Sangh, Mumbai; and AISCCON (All India Senior Citizens' Confederation).**

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