

SOCIAL WELFARE INSTITUTIONS

OMR AL MADID INSTITUTION FOR ELDERLY

NATIONAL REPORT OF ELDER ABUSE STUDY

Beirut - LEBANON

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ELDER ABUSE STUDY

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Introduction

As the growing world – wide focus upon the abuse of the older people. **WHO** and the **International Net work for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA)** are developing a global strategy concerning the abuse of older people .

The over all aims are :

- ❖ To develop a strategy for the prevention of elder abuse within the context of primary health care .
- ❖ To raise the awareness among health professionals and the public at large on the extent of the elder abuse problem world wide .

The strategy will be the product of a research which will identify components of elder abuse as identified by older people themselves and by those forming the primary care teams.

Methodology

As the project will be carried out in five countries which represent the regions they belong to . In addition to other developed countries may join in the study, Lebanon was chosen as one of these countries to carry on the project and come-up with a national report which could be carried out as a sample for its region.

The **Social Welfare Institutions** headed by the general director Mr. Mohamad Barakat took a great interest in this project and agreed to work with the **WHO** to carry on the study , and assigned the director of **Omr Al Madid for the Elderly** Mr. Tammam Tayara to coordinate the focus groups and oversee the project .

Recruiting the Facilitators and Forming the Focus Groups

To recruit the facilitators, the coordinator requested resumes and conducted interviews to choose two facilitators one male and another female , and were asked to bring their own assistants with a condition that they will be satisfactory to us in doing the job and upon presenting a qualified resume.

A meeting was set-up between the the facilitators , the assistants, the coordinator and the general director Mr. Barakat to set the plan of work to the project as Mr. Barakat emphasized on the importance of conducting the study in a good and rightfull manner so the data can be useful in providing unique national data .

A project plan was developed by the coordinator as follows :

- ❖ Forming 8 focus groups . 6 of the groups of elderly , ages between 60 and 90 years old .
- ❖ Represent various ethnic , cultural , religious , socio-economic background , educated and non educated elderly .
- ❖ 2 groups of women .
- ❖ 2 groups of men .
- ❖ 2 mixed groups of men and women .
- ❖ 2 groups of main health workers .
- ❖ Set the days of the the focus groups to start on the 23rd. of August , and finish on August 27th.

After the focus group meetings finish , the facilitators and the assistants meet with the coordinator to review the individual reports and coordinate the final report to be sent and received by Mrs. Silvia in Geneva by **Friday September 21st**.

Introduction of Project

In an attempt to obtain an insight about how the Lebanese society perceives the issue of elderly abuse, eight focus group discussions were planned, conducted and reported. These groups were designed in a way so as to include participants from all the Lebanese regions in order to be as representative as possible of the Lebanese society. Six focus groups included 17 senior men and 25 senior women. Two other focus group discussions involved 13 health workers who deal and have frequent contact with elders. The male to female ratio among the participating health workers was 4:7. Additional demographic information illustrating the participants' characteristics is available in Appendix 1.

With the intention of achieving optimal clarity in reporting the findings gathered from the conducted focus group discussions, information obtained from elders will be separated from the health workers' points of view. In this context, the upcoming section will be dedicated to explore the product of the discussion with the elders.

Status of Elders in Lebanese Society

All of the participants in the six focus groups offered various perspectives on the general situation of old people in Lebanon. Some of the participants stated that there are many families taking care of their elders. However, the majority pictured the actual status of elderly people in the Lebanese society as being lonely, neglected, disrespected, and marginalized. They have commented and agreed that elderly men and women lead a miserable life and are deprived

from many essential rights. An expatriate claimed that an old man without money cannot live honorably, for there are no rules and regulations to protect elderly people. Another group of participants said that the health insurance/social security plan for elderly, which the government approved, is still not implemented. According to the interviewees the main problems they face are diverse and include: the absence of laws protecting elderly rights, unimplemented health insurance/social security plan, the regulations behind the end of service indemnity, the lack of privileges to facilitate their lives like transportation services, free tickets to cinemas and free judicial consultation in case of any legal problem. One of the participants commented that when an old man is utilizing any public or governmental service he just waits for his turn for hours without anybody offering him a chair or facilitating his request. Participants asserted that old people have no work opportunities and the retirement age of 65 is unfair. Most of them believe that at this age, elders are at the peak of their experiences and can still work and help the society with their expertise; an agricultural engineer said that till now young people come to ask him for advice in the field of agriculture. One of the groups added that becoming old entails many biological, hormonal, and physical changes. Hence elders become less able to perform hard tasks; they become unable to walk as fast as they used to, and they become more sensitive. Besides, elders become more susceptible to a wide range of diseases that need special care, treatment and medication that are not within the reach of all elders in Lebanon. In this context all of the participants mentioned directly and indirectly

that this is a form of abuse exerted by the Lebanese government towards elderly people.

Moreover, participants stressed on the difference in treating the elderly between the young people of today, and those of several years earlier. They stated that the way children are raised in addition to the media and the environment are leading the children to develop an attitude of disrespect towards older people, and this is eventually affecting the way they treat elderly in their families and in society. One woman mentioned that children learn from watching the way their parents treat their grandparents.

Another point that was mentioned by almost all the interviewed women was the conflict between the daughter-in-law and the mother-in-law. One woman said that the way one is treated by his/her children depends on how he/she used to treat his/her own parents: one of her neighbors did not treat well her parents-in-law, so now her daughter-in-law forbids the son to see his mother. Another two of the group added that there is jealousy from the sides of the daughter-in-law and sometimes from the part of the mother-in-law, and this creates problems. A participant also said that it is hard to get along with children since the son backs up his wife and takes her side against his mother.

Some of the participants commented that nowadays children are too busy with their lives; thus, they are not paying much attention to their old and needy parents. A man who had three strokes that resulted in some physical retardation needed special care. Since his working children were not able to provide him with the needed care, he willingly decided to move to a nursing

home. Another 75 year old participant stated that old people could be a burden on their families and on the society.

Types of Abuse and Related Stories

According to the interviewed elderly groups, there exist various forms of elderly abuse in the Lebanese society , namely psychological / emotional neglect / verbal abuse, financial abuse, deprivation from rights, and physical abuse.

One kind of elderly abuse, that all of the interviewees talked about explicitly, was the psychological /emotional abuse(neglect from relatives). An expatriate claimed that nowadays old people are not respected as they were in the past. They are treated with negligence. He gave an example on how he was left for 3 hours in the police station unattended for his needs, although he mentioned to them that he was ill. Other participants also added that elderly people are disrespected and suffering from loneliness. An old teacher said that it is very difficult for an old person to be alone, so she decided to pass by her old and abandoned neighbor everyday just for 5 minutes, to check on her health and her needs. One of the participants said that an example of emotional abuse is children addressing their parents in an impolite manner. This can be regarded as emotional abuse towards elderly people since according to the interviewed group old people need respect from all the community, governmental and nongovernmental. For them, respect is better than food and drink. A participating lady mentioned that "not having a choice" is a form of emotional abuse: when the elder does not choose what to eat, or when to have a bath, will affect him/her and will contribute in worsening

his/her psychological well-being. Participants added that social justice is missing in Lebanon; old people should be treated different from young people. Other related stories about emotional/psychological abuse that were mentioned by the interviewed groups are illustrated by the following:

- A mother owns the house she lives in, she registered the house in her son's name, so he took the house and put his mother in the nursing home against her will.

- A similar story happened to a father who owns several buildings, which he gave to his children who put him in the nursing home.

- A woman used to work and earn money and all her children were taking care of her because of her money, but she became paralyzed so they sent her to the nursing home and they are rarely visiting her.

- A father who offered his child excellent education, devoted all his life to him and spent on him most of what he had, is now under financial problems, the son is spending money on his father but the son is making his father feel inferior about it and as if he owned him. This is a kind of emotional and financial abuse.

- One man married the servant because she's the only one who is taking care of him, she takes care of him much more than his children do.

- A psychology graduate mentioned that an elder woman living with her daughter became seated in her bed, unable to move. Whenever the old woman became thirsty and requested to drink, her daughter refused so as not to be troubled by the consequent urination problems.

- A housewife mentioned that elder people were accused to be suffering from mental retardation and insanity in order to take over their money, and others were 'dumped' in the nursing home.
- A teacher told a story about ten children who did not take care of their father after their mother's death. Then they put the father alone in a house, and only one of his daughters-in-law used to pity him and bring him food; after around three months, he died. This old man, the teacher added, used to live in luxury and he raised a big family, only to end up alone and be emotionally abused.
- A housewife said that an old woman living with her son is not invited by the daughter-in-law and her son to join their meals, although they are not poor. So this is emotional abuse, she added.
- Another story told by the psychology graduate was about a woman who was raised by her aunt. But she was ungrateful and ended up putting her aunt on the balcony alone so as not to let anyone see her.
- A housewife mentioned that her neighbor, an old woman, was living with her son and his family. She said they do not invite her to join their breakfast, and that she used to visit her. Once, she asked her if she would like something, and the neighbor asked for a dessert. The housewife prepared the dessert and sent it to her, but the neighbor's son was angry and did not like it.
- A housewife said that a woman living with her husband and his parents did not use to treat her parents-in-law right. They were blind and she used to slip the food under their door. After they died, the woman became religious, but now, her son's wife is forbidding the son to see his mother.

- A mother gave her children all what she owns, they took it and put her in the nursing home.
- A mother was forced to give her children what she owned, and her son changed the lock of the house so she cannot enter it anymore since her daughter-in-law does not want her in the house.
- The wife imposes her opinion on her mother-in-law, she does not communicate with her, and she only gives her orders through her husband.
- An old lady living with her daughter, the daughter does not give her mother the same type of food she cooks for the family.

Concerning physical abuse, participants mentioned that it is present in the Lebanese community, it is, however, rare and infrequent. They attributed the infrequency of physical abuse to the fact that they belong to an Oriental "Arabic" culture that obliges people to respect and well-treat their elders. Moreover, all religions orders to respect and to treat parents in a proper way. Nevertheless the participants offered various examples of physical abuse towards elders. One old participant told a story of an old woman deciding to divide her inheritance between her children although she is still alive. So all of her children promised to take good care of her and never leave her. However, when every one of her children took his/her share, they neglected her and did not attend to her needs. The same participant continued that one of the old woman's children locked her in a room and he instructed his young kid to beat and hit her. Consequently, the old woman went into a coma and was transported to the hospital with wounds spread all

over her body. Furthermore, a retired lawyer said that he was tortured biologically, physically and chemically by his brother . He added that medications and poison were put in the food he was given. However, he did not mention the reasons. Furthermore, an agriculture engineer said that he has seen a young man attacking his mother and hitting her, so he immediately and unconsciously interfered and hit the young man in order to protect the old lady. Most of the participating groups gave related stories about physical abuse that are illustrated as follows:

- One of the participants said that a young man drove his mother, who lives in his home, to her daughter's house to pay her a visit. He then immediately changed his home's door locks because his wife did not want her mother in law to stay with her. As a result the old lady could not access her son's home and was left outside.

- Most of the interviewees knew of many families in which the children used to hit their parents.

- One of the interviewees heard on the news that a man killed his father for his money.

- The graduate in psychology told another story about an elder woman who had four sons and six daughters. Her eldest son asked her to give him her share of the money and he promised he would take care of her. After she did that, he hit her and broke her thigh, and none of the daughters took care of her because the mother gave her share to the eldest son.

Another kind of abuse was mentioned by some of the groups was environmental abuse, like noise created by the environment surrounding their residences. One old man said that elderly people suffer a lot from nuisance created by car horns and loud parties during the night.

Reasons Behind Abusive Acts in Lebanese Society

After exploring the elderly perception of abuse, and reporting the stories they mentioned, the reasons behind the different types of abuse should be portrayed. The causes of abuse from the elders' point of view will constitute the substance of the following section.

Most of the participants agreed that the main reason behind emotional and neglect abuse is the economic situation. The responsibilities of the family are increasingly escalating, both parents are working and are preoccupied with ensuring the living of their children, and so no one is available to take care of the elderly. Moreover, since the elderly does not have a social security or an insurance plan, his/her health care bill is being too large on the family to pay. An old lady said that her younger sisters do not pass by her frequently; they only call her from time to time. She added that it is not that they do not love her, but because they are too busy in their work and personal lives.

Participants blamed the government and the system that is completely neglecting the rights of the elderly. Participants also accused the media that is neglecting the issue of elderly, and promoting acts and ways that lead to abusive actions. Moreover, the interviewees added that the reason behind neglecting old people is the modernization of the society by trying to imitate the west culture. They have mentioned that in the previous generations,

people were more sensitive, caring and polite with their parents or grandparents. However, today young people are being disrespectful and careless towards old people. The participants believe that the family bonds are collapsing, and that there is no more respect for the elder, with the authority being shifted to the children. One claimed that the situation in Lebanon is still better than other countries. Another one thinks a time might come when the situation will become like that in Europe, but she believes that in their society, since the religion forbids such abuses, the situation will always be better than the west. An old lady in her sixties who is a retired teacher from a public school claimed that there is a difference between the old generation and the new one. She mentioned that even in the same house there exists two generations, of which the old one takes better care and respects old people more than the younger generation. In addition, they brought up the issue of the working mother and how she assigns to a maid or to day care center taking care of her baby, they said that this is affecting and weakening the family bonds.

Participants also blamed the civil war that caused family members to be living apart from each other's which also lead to affecting and weakening family bonds. They also accused the way children are brought up these days, in addition to the media, and the school environment.

One of the participants stated that previously children used to live with their parents, but nowadays they are living alone. Furthermore, the economic and financial status of the elder affects the way he/she is treated: if an old man/woman does not have money his children will not care for him/her, but if

he/she has money his family will provide love and care for him/her, knowing that sooner or later they will inherit. A barber has stated that his brother accused him of insanity in order to take his money. He said that some people would kill their brothers for a meter of land. A housewife claimed that the economic crisis increases the violence in the society. Others claimed that the money could lead to violence. A housewife confirmed that if elders have money then they will be respected, and they would have no problems for getting care.

As for the main reason behind the physical abuse, it was discussed that it is financial and materialistic. Other reason for such abuse was the relationship between the wife and the mother in law, especially in the Arabic culture. Also, the relationship between the children and their parents may lead to physical abuse. Most of the interviewees believe that children have duties and obligations towards their parents. However, some children may suffer from financial and economic problems; hence leading to physical abuse towards their parents. An agricultural claimed that in the Islamic religion, a son has an obligations and duties to take care of his parents .

Concerning the impact of abuse, members of the focus groups uttered that abuse leads to tension, desperateness, and depression. Eventually this will reflect on the health status of the elderly who will suffer from several problems resulting from the impact of abuse. On the other level, elderly abuse will have an impact on the future generations who are witnessing the current abuse and getting used to it as a normal way to treat seniors, so this will affect the way they will treat their parents in the future. This is leading to the

weakening and sometimes the disruption of family bonds thus affecting the whole social hierarchy. One participant said that violence largely affects the mental and physical health of the elderly, and that it might even cause psychological illness. Two other participants confirmed that violence could cause illness and sometimes may lead to suicide.

All the participants agreed that there are all "kinds" of abuse in Lebanon but the government is not doing anything about it. . In one of the groups some of participants considered financial abuse as the abuse with the greatest impact on elders and as the one mostly exerted in Lebanon. However, the others insisted on the importance of the emotional and verbal abuse on both the impact and the frequency of exertion levels. The rest gave equal importance to both types. Nevertheless, There was a concordance between the rest of interviewed groups that emotional and psychological abuse is by the most important type in Lebanon in terms of impact and frequency. Next come financial and economical abuse, physical and environmental abuse respectively. One of the participants said that one rude word said to an old man is stronger than stabbing him with a knife. Moreover, all of the participants confirmed that physical abuse is very rare in the Lebanese society, but it is present. Two groups think that the rate of elderly abuse in Lebanon is higher than the neighboring countries. Nevertheless, the interviewees stated that in developed countries old people have more rights and privileges like health insurance, salary and special centers to attend for their needs.

Recommended Prevention Measures

All participants agreed that solutions for most of the problems that face elderly people in Lebanon could be achieved through the following means:

- Developing and implementing rules, regulations and laws by the Lebanese government to ensure the proper rights for old people, protect them from all kinds of abuse and secure for them a healthy and honorable life for them not to become a burden on their families. For example, implementing the health insurance/social security coverage scheme, enhancing the age of retirement legislation, and establishing special procedures for elderly people when using public services.
- Conducting nation wide awareness campaigns regarding the situation of old people, their problems and how they can benefit the society from their experience. These campaigns should include schools (reviewing curriculum to include the senior as part of the family in readings and stories).
- The media should play an important role on two levels, first, it should increase the awareness among children about the correct way of dealing with seniors, and second, it should consider dedicating a share of its time to entertain elderly
- Enhancing family role that affects the raising of children. Children at home should be brought up on respecting their parents and grandparents. Also, parents should act as role models for their children in all aspects of life and specifically in dealing with seniors.
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- One of the participants mentioned that a grandchild used to watch his father treat the grandmother in a caring and respectful way, so he learned from him . When he got married he taught his wife , who is German, on how to respect and care for her mother-in-law.
- Establishment of special places and amusement centers for old people to enjoy their time and spend it out of their homes. In one of the interviewed groups, the participants offered various reasons for their joining to their nursing homes or elderly clubs. One of them stated that in order to avoid continuous conflict with his wife while staying at the home doing nothing, he decided to join a club for the elders. Also, a housewife said that she joined a club for the elderly to change the routine of her life and to fight stress. Another one admitted that care centers and nursing homes are safer place than their societies, since old people that do not have children might suffer a lot in their societies.
- Attaching more to religion, which states that, the person is responsible for his/her parents when they grow old. He/she should take care of them and not insult them what any work or act that might cause any harm.

Health Workers Prospective

After presenting the elders' standpoint with its detailed particulars, it is crucial to demonstrate the issue from the health workers angle. The subsequent section is the fruit of the discussion conducted with the health care workers.

Two groups composed of seven health workers and six health workers respectively participated in the focus group discussion. Seven of the interviewees were nurses,two nurses aid, three of them were physiotherapists

and one was a geriatric medical doctor. The health workers come from different Lebanese areas.

Status of Elders in Lebanese Society

When the health workers were asked about their experience with the elders in Lebanon, the answers varied, depending on the experience and the working field of each. One of the nurses, who worked for twenty years in a rural area followed by ten years in an urban nursing home, stated that he finds a difference between the elders of the village and those of the city. Social services are easier in the village, people are used to each other; there are stronger family bonds and the elder is respected for all the work he/she did in the past. In his opinion, the elders in the village do not suffer from many health problems and have a better health status, perhaps due to the atmosphere and the clean air. On the other hand, the nurse continues, in the city, people are so occupied and pressured, and do not take proper care of their elders. One of the physiotherapists agreed by saying that the elders in the rural areas have better chances because not all the family members work. She said that all the neighbors are relatives and one can always find someone to take care of the elder, unlike the urban areas, where the families are smaller and every family member works. The physiotherapist added that when a person retires in the city, he/she usually remains in the house with nothing to do. Whereas in the village, the elder has no retirement age, even if he/she is over sixty years old, he/she can go out, work in his/her garden, and practice other sorts of physical work.

The doctor promulgated that 10% of the Lebanese population is old. Out of the elders, 90% do not suffer from any mental or physical disability. He added that 1% of the old population is present in health care organizations while the rest live with families or relatives. However, this 1% used to be 0.25%; the doctor attributed this increase to different factors, such as the degrading financial situation of the individuals, the high prices of medications, the high cost of treatment, and the presence of special centers that offer care at home. All of these factors are forcing people to put their old parents in care centers.

Another nurse mentioned that members of the family such as the daughters-in-law might cause problems and push the sons to put their parents or grandparents in nursing homes, sometimes against their will. One of the caregivers talked about a personal experience, her own grandfather. His children used to dispute taking care of him. One of the daughters-in-law was bothered by his presence because she was unable to leave him alone and go out. Once she was sewing and he bothered her with his stories and comments so she hit him with the sewing scissors. Then she felt guilty and he forgave her. But one month later she hit him with a chair and broke his arm. When the grandfather was at his other son's house, he was put on the balcony (with a diesel motor beneath the balcony) and was locked there whenever people visited them, because he used to spill water on himself. At the end, he was left in a nursing home, where he died.

Types of Abuse and Related Stories

The health workers agreed that emotional, neglect, financial, sometimes physical, in addition to other sorts of abuse such as legal and judicial abuse are present in our society.

According to the health workers, the most important impact of abuse seemed to be that on the emotional state of the elders. Elderly people are affected by the absence and the neglect of their families and children . As a result, most of them become depressed, and they might become aggressive and hurt others or even themselves. A nurse said that an old woman told her that if her children were really concerned about her and truly cared then they would have not dumped her. A physiotherapist confirmed that by saying that once one of the patients knew she was not going back home, she had a depression case, constantly demanded to live next to her family, and ended up dying. Such people, she added, do not accept anyone else to replace their children. One of the nurses said a similar story about a widow in a village who worked as a maid in order to raise her son. When they moved to the city, the son left his mother in a nursing home without visiting her. The widow used to cry wishing she could see him, until she had a depression. She started taking a treatment and lost a lot of weight. She then became amnesic, but never forgot her son, claiming that he must have good reasons for not visiting her. She died and he only came to take her body.

Almost all health workers attributed the largest part of abuse in the society to economical reasons and the need for every family member to work. A staff nurse confirmed by saying that the pressure and daily stress affect emotions

and might hinder the family members from visiting their elders. A physiotherapist commented that three fourths of her urban patients have money but their families cannot take care of them. Most have a maid to serve them, and since there is no communication between the elder and the family, with the family not involving the elder in the conversations and not taking his opinion, most of the elders start becoming amnesic. The doctor said that some wealthy people tend to hire more than one maid to take care of their parents. As a result, he added, the father or the mother will suffer a lot because their children are not near them or taking care of their needs. The doctor commented that it is not important to pay a lot of money to hire maids, for the elders say that the presence of their children by their side, even for just half an hour everyday, is by far more important than all the money of the world. He stated that elderly people suffer a lot from the negligence of their children. A social worker that works at a public nursing home gave an example of children taking care of their parents only because of money or materialistic rewards. Furthermore, one of the health workers commented that the fact that children do not accept and respect the ideas of their elderly people could be considered emotional abuse. She added that after the children get what they want from their parents, they become tough and rude and they mistreat them. A nurse that works at a nursing care center said that laughing at old people and not listening to what they are saying is an emotional abuse.

Elders are also emotionally affected by the fact that they have no more authority over their children. Their words, opinions and decisions are no more

respected. They are not having a choice even in day-to-day activities: things are being imposed on them, like the shower time, eating time, television time, medication time... they are not being involved in the daily activities or conversations, and this largely affects their emotional state. Even in the nursing homes, a certain lifestyle is being imposed on them, and sometimes the caregiver takes control over their lives and deprives them from the right to freely choose what to do.

The doctor also remarked that people fear to approach an old person. Elders become weak and worried about their health, shelter and life. They become more vulnerable to many physical and psychological diseases making them in need of additional special care. As a result, they think they are a heavy burden to their families, thus try to withdraw from them. A physiotherapist uttered that elders are affected by the fact that they are no more able to cope with changes and be constantly up-to-date. He believed that old people could slowly and partially follow the technological development. According to the healthcare workers, old people can still give a lot but only in a comfortable atmosphere and if they sense appreciation for their work. A physiotherapist claimed he knows a 60 year-old-person who is currently studying medicine.

As for the physical abuse, the participants mentioned that this sort of abuse is present in Lebanon, however, it is very infrequent and occasional. They consider that emotional and religious factors are contributing elements in the scarcity of physical abuse. The health workers declared that in some instances there are both physical and emotional abuse combined, for

example, giving an old person worse or lower quality food than what is offered to the rest of the family. A physiotherapist mentioned that an elder woman suffering from amnesia had no control over her urination, so her son used to hit her in order to teach her not to do that. She had osteoporosis and he broke her hand. At last the son abandoned her. Another story relating to physical abuse was about an elder woman living with her two daughters and her grandson, who was supposed to take care of them. The elder woman ended up dying as a result of physical injuries and harsh beating, one of the daughters died as a result of a hemorrhage from being beaten and left in the toilet, and the other daughter got depressed and was left in a nursing home.

A doctor commented that sometimes the elderly themselves are being abusive. He gave an example of a mother instructing her son to hit his wife, which led the son to grab a saw and beat his wife till death. The nurse with the rural experience mentioned that sometimes the elder himself might be the one who triggers the violence against him, due to the way he used to treat his children and because he used to deprive them from tenderness...

Reasons Behind Abusive Acts in Lebanese Society.

Every participant agreed on the important role of the government in providing and assuring special services for the elders. There are no governmental rules or laws regarding health insurance or any kind of provision of special services or rights to facilitate the life of elderly men and women, especially in the hospitalization, medication, and judicial areas. According to the doctor, this is the first emotional abuse that the elderly face in Lebanon and it is exerted by

the Lebanese government. He said that an old person might stand at the doors of the Ministry of Public Health for hours begging for medications and approval of certain surgical procedures at a hospital. He added that a 30 year-old-man can stand but an elderly cannot due to his/her physical weakness. Other health workers said the least the government can do is provide special equipment and medications for the elders, not necessarily free of charge but for a reasonable price. One of the participants stated that a private nursing home took the initiative of taking the responsibility to cover 30 old people for their health insurance. The institution discovered that old people cost less than young people did especially when preventive medicine was actively implemented.

Some health workers added that there must be special rules and conveniences, such as discounts on hospitalization fees and special transportation prices for elders. A nurse claimed that the elderly people have no social or even legal rights; she blames the current political situation for practicing emotional and psychological abuse towards old people. Another nurse said that the economic situation in the country and the pressures of daily life might represent an indirect cause of emotional and financial abuse towards the elderly.

There was also an emphasis on the importance of setting a special law specifying the age of retirement, so that the elder will not be troubled from violently shifting from an active productive individual to an inactive burden on his/her family and society, while he/she can still be productive. One caregiver gave the example of the situation in developed countries, where people look

forward to reach their retirement age, whereas in our country, people consider it as an end to their life.

Another kind of abuse that was mentioned by the healthcare workers is the legal and judicial abuse. They said that there are no laws that protect the rights of the elderly people, especially regarding inheritance issues. A doctor pointed out that the people face a lot of problems in Lebanon regarding the inheritance of dead people. This is because religious courts are responsible for dividing the inheritance between the benefactors. However these courts sometimes misunderstand the cases presented: He gave the example of a case whereby one party presented to the judge of a religious court a doctor's testimony accusing a father of being insane, and this was enough to deprive the old man of his money.

Another kind of emotional abuse that is exerted indirectly in nursing homes and care centers is the treatment of the caregivers towards the residents. The doctor, who works at one of the Lebanese nursing homes, said that it is important to let the elderly feel independent and not pamper him/her a lot. He added that in the oriental societies, caregivers tend to deal very intimately with elderly people, which is totally different from western societies, who are more professional when dealing with their elderly population. In addition a nurse said that in some nursing homes physical abuse is practiced towards aged people; she gave an example of nurses giving a disabled old man medications to put him in a continuous state of sleep, so as not to be disturbed by his nagging.

Furthermore, according to most of the participants, not all caregivers in the country are qualified to do their jobs. A physiotherapist said that some people do the work because they pity elders, but this is not enough. A caregiver must have the passion for such social work and the proper education to complete it. She criticized that there is a lack of expertise in this field. A staff nurse remarked that they used to treat the patients in a wrong way until a geriatric came and explained the right way to treat and deal with elders. Another physiotherapist complained that there is no university in Lebanon that teaches this specialty, and a nurse from a private nursing home said that they have a yearly exchange program with France to increase their knowledge and experience. One nurse, who had ten years of experience but no degrees, claimed that one does not need education and degrees but one must rather know how to deal with elders. All the other caregivers disagreed, saying that education together with the experience are both important. One said that it is important to be constantly up to date and attend continuous lectures or conferences. A physiotherapist italicized the importance of doing research and reading, saying that one cannot attain his goal relying only on experience; one needs education in order to effectively reach his/her goals. The participants also mentioned that it is wrong to group healthy elders with mentally or physically retarded elders, and pointed out how much this will negatively affect the healthy elders.

In addition, the caregivers pointed out the importance of the comportment of the caregiver with the patients. They said that one should not show any disgust or discomfort in front of the elders. A physiotherapist even said that showing pity is a sort of abuse, and that one should look at the elder as an equal human being in need of help. She added that a caregiver must be very patient and ready to accept the patients with all their problems and in all their situations. Another nurse said that a caregiver must forget all sorts of violence while dealing with elders.

Moreover, the caregivers agreed on the importance of having regular multidisciplinary meetings among the staff nurses, doctors, and other health workers to discuss the different cases and situations. Another health worker emphasized the importance of trying to provide the elders with all the care they need while keeping them in their own environment.

Recommended Prevention Measures

As recommendations, the healthcare workers see that the following should be applied:

- Establishment of specialized care centers for old people and amusement centers that can help people enjoy their time and have their new friends. This is because; children nowadays are under a lot of pressure, work, schools, bills, home and family needs, so they have less time to spend with their parents. Also, to avoid conflict between children and their old parents that may result from the routing stay of elderly at home doing nothing.

- Establishment of laws and rules and regulations by the Lebanese government to preserve the rights of old people and to facilitate their lives. For example, implementing the national health coverage/ social security plan of old people that the government promised to execute. Also, adjusting the retirement age legislation to include articles on the age of the retirement, how to prepare old people for their retirement (stop working gradually and not suddenly) and how to benefit from old people that are still productive and experienced. The retirement legislation should be organized in order not to be tough on old people.
- Organizing and implementing awareness campaigns targeting the Lebanese population and informing them about elderly people their status, problems, rights and how do they contribute to the Lebanese society. Give a more important role to mass media in these campaigns.
- Enhance the role of the Ministry of education and Ministry of Public Health regarding the rights of old people using the services of these ministries.
- Reinforcing family bonds and respect for the elders through the media, schools and parental awareness.

These recommendations complete the health workers perceptions on the discussed issue.

Conclusion

Conclusively, it was demonstrated that elders in the Lebanese society suffer from various types of abuse, among which the emotional one has the strongest impact and is the most frequently exerted. Moreover it was revealed

that the economic situation is the main reason leading to elder abuse, for it is diverting the attention of family members from taking care of their elders towards being kept busy by ensuring the financial needs of their children. It was furthermore depicted that abuse can have a tremendous effect on the psychological health of the elder, which can lead to serious physical conditions. Abuse also affects the family and the society since it weakens family bonds, and increases the gap between society members. Many parties are responsible for the current status of the elders in the society, namely the government, the health workers, and the family members. It is therefore crucial for all these parties to cooperate and coordinate with other parties like the media (the ministry of information), the ministry of education, the ministry of public health, the ministry of social affairs, and religious leaders in order to undertake several preventive measures that will lessen the extent of elder abuse and enhance the conditions of seniors in the Lebanese society.

Abuse in Lebanon by Priority

- I- Psychological / Emotional / Neglect Abuse
- II- Verbel Abuse
- III- Economical / Financial Abuse
- IV- Physical Abuse

APPENDIX 1

Demographic Characteristics

Eight focus groups were conducted:

- Group I: consisted of six Lebanese people whose ages range from 60 years to 90 years old. Four of the participants are widows and two are married. One of the participants was born in Palestine, two are from Beirut and the one is from South of Lebanon and two from North.

- Group II: consisted of six women. One of the members is an AUB graduate (psychology) and used to work in the FAO as well as in The Arabian University in New York; another was a teacher and the other four were housewives. The average age of the participating ladies was 67 years (with a range of 58-77) One of them was from Baalbeck , two from Mount Lebanon one from South and the other two were from Beirut.

- Group III: consisted of six male individuals. Three of them are from Beirut, two are from south of Lebanon, and one is from north of Lebanon. One of the participants is single, another one is a widow and the rest are married.

- Group IV: consisted of 7 women, with an average age of 70 years and an age range between 58 and 81. two ladies were from Beirut, two from North ,one from the east valley one was from the South and one from Mount Lebanon. Three of them are married while 4 are widowed.

- Group V: consisted of 9 members, 2 males and 7 females. Two from south , two from North, one was from Greater Beirut and the rest were from Mount

Lebanon. The range of ages was from 60 to 79 years. Three of the participants are married, one is single, and the rest were widows .

- Group VI: consisted of 10 participants among which five males and five females. Three were from Beirut, two from the South, one from east Lebanon, and four from Mount Lebanon. The range of ages was from 62 to 81 years.

- Group VII: consisted of seven health workers. Three of the participants are males and the rest were females. Also, three of the interviewed were nurses ,two nurses aid one is a physiotherapist and one is geriatric medical doctor. They come from different areas of Lebanon.

- Group VIII: consisted of 6 health care workers: two nurses (a male and a female), a staff nurse (female), a care nurse (male), and two physiotherapists (females). Three of them were from Beirut, one from the North , and two from Mount Lebanon .