



Crimes against the Elderly in India: A Content Analysis on Factors causing Fear of Crime

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Abstract

The cases of crimes against the elderly are rising fast across India. Today, they are victims of grievous hurt, murder, and abuse and isolated by neighbors, family members and domestic servants. These cases have certainly affected the way of life and sense of well being of the elderly to a large extent in the family as well as in the society. This paper examines the factors causing fear of crime among the elderly and explores the different types of crime which are raising the fear of crime. This study is based on secondary data collected from news papers. These news items pertaining to crimes against the elderly have been systematically collected and their content has been analyzed. The findings show that there are various factors such as residential location, previous victimization experience, vulnerability, defensibility and incivility that cause fear of crime in the minds of the elders in India.

Keywords: Crimes against Elderly, Factors, Fear of Crime, Content Analysis, Vulnerability.

Introduction

In India, persons aged 60 or above are considered elderly or senior citizens. The Maintenance and Welfare of parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 (Gazette of India, December 2007) defines a senior citizen as a person who has attained the age of 60 years or above. The United Nations Organization also treats persons aged 60 years or more as elderly (Group for Economic and Social Studies, 2009). Nevertheless, under the law relating to income tax in India, persons are regarded senior citizens only after they become 65 years old. Those who are between 60 and 74 years old are referred to as younger-old and those who are 75 or more years referred to as old age (GESS, 2009).

The proportion of elderly persons in India has risen from 5.63% of the total population in 1961 to 7.44% in 2011 by the 2011 Census (Census of India, 2011). In terms of absolute numbers, the elderly population has gone up from 24.6 million in 1951 to 96 million in 2011 by 2001 census. The life expectancy has increased from 40 years in 1951 to 64 years in 2011 (World Bank, 2011). Growth rate of elderly (3.09) is higher than that of general

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population (1.9) and the elderly have constituted 7.5% of total population of the country (GESS, 2009). This growing population is now becoming victims of crime and the crime against the elderly is being recognized as an emerging social problem in contemporary India.

The cases of crimes against the elderly are on the rise across the country. Today, they are victims of grievous hurt, murder, and abuse and isolated by neighbors, family members and domestic servants. According to the National Crime Records Bureau's report (2010), 32496 elderly have been murdered and 5836 cases of not amounting to murder and kidnapping have been reported all over India from 2001 to 2010. The academicians and the policy makers have begun paying attention to this dimension of elder abuse (Das, 2009). Help Age India (2011) has done study in twelve major cities of India and reported different kinds of elder abuse cases in its study. According to it, the elderly are abused verbally (60%), physically (48%), emotionally (37%) and economically (35%) and 20% elderly feel neglected themselves from the family as well as society. Furthermore, this study has reported that the major types of crimes faced by the elderly are burglary, molestations and criminal acts. Similarly, Group for Economic and Social Studies (2009) conducted a survey in four metropolitan cities of India and reported different types of crime that are committed against the elderly. These crimes may be defined as crime against the body (murder, attempt to murder, hurt and kidnapping etc.), crime against the property (dacoity, robbery, burglary and theft) and economic crime (cheating, criminal breach of trust etc.). With incidences of crime against the elderly going up, there is a perceptible increase in fear of crime among the elderly.

Ferraro and LaGrange (1987) have given a classical definition of fear of crime. According to them, "fear of crime is an emotional response of dread or anxiety to crime that a person associates with crime." The term fear encompasses a confusing variety of feelings, perspectives and risk estimations. Fear of crime can be in the form of public feelings, thought, personal risk and criminal victimization. The feeling of fear does not generate a general perception about crime in society, only involves a threat in someone. Fear as a concept is derived from beliefs which hold about crime. For example, a belief is one's chances of becoming a victim (Beer, 1982). Moreover, Ward (1990) has defined fear of crime as "a lack of a sense of security and feeling of vulnerability" (Bruges, 2006). The state of fear of crime is assumed to be multidimensional which consists (a) the individual's cognitive perception of being threatened, (b) a corresponding affective experience and (c) an appropriate motive or action tendency. Thus, being afraid implies that a situation is perceived as being dangerous and that a situation bears a motive for changes in the behavior. Hence there is a need to design fear of crime measures which assesses these three components, for example, by asking how often one (a) feels afraid, (b) thinks or worries about crime and (c) behaves fearfully (Gert, 2012).

There are various major factors of fear of crime that affects the elderly. These factors include location of the residence, previous victimization experience, vulnerability and defensibility. The most common factor of fear of crime is crime rate of an area. The crime rate of an area reveals anxiety about crime and it is also assumed that crime rate is higher in urban areas and urban people are more fearful than rural areas (Miethe & Lee, 1984). Further, a number of studies claim that prior victimization is a strong factor of fear of crime (Beaulieu, Dube, Bergeron & Cousineau, 2007; Donder, Verte, Messelis, 2005; Nalla, Joseph & Smith, 2011; Yin, 1980). Criminologists have established a positive correlation between fear of crime and victimization experience. Those who are victims of

any violence have higher level of fear of crime (Donder *et al.*, 2005). Another common factor of fear of crime is incivilities in the neighborhood. Incivilities imply those unusual conditions and events which are active in neighborhood and breaches social order and control of the neighborhood (Vandeviver, 2011; Walklate, 2011). There are two types of incivilities, namely, social and physical incivility. While social incivility consists of disruptive behaviors such as loiterers, inconsiderate neighbors, loose dogs, unruly teenagers, gangs, beggars and public drinking, physical incivility refers to disturbed social environment such as abandoned cars, vandalized property, vacant houses and deteriorated homes (Franklin, Franklin & Fearn, 2008).

Vulnerability is another strong predictor of fear of crime among the elderly. Studies have identified four groups who face more problems due to their vulnerability, viz., elderly, women, poor and ethnic minorities (Hale, 1996; Jackson, 2009; Powell & Wahidin, 2007). Vulnerability entails defects in living environment that are perceived as threatening by the people. The concept of vulnerability has been divided into physical vulnerability and social vulnerability. Physical vulnerability refers to the perception of increased risk to physical assault such as murder, rape, sexual harassment. Accordingly, elderly feel that they are not capable of physically protecting themselves (Franklin *et al.*, 2008; Franklin & Franklin, 2009; Walklate, 2011). Physical vulnerability also includes defects in the physical environment which may provide an opportunity for an offender to commit a crime. For example, pipes outside respondents' buildings may serve as scaling ladders for offenders to enter the household (On-fung, Chan, Cheng & Phillips, 2009). Social vulnerability talks of absence of social network that can cause fear of crime among the elderly (Hale, 1996; On-fung *et al.*, 2009). Besides it, history of crime, income levels and known villains living in the community also decide vulnerability. They are also determinants of fear of crime among the people (On-fung *et al.*, 2009).

Similarly, defensibility also triggers fear of crime among the various age groups. Defensibility is understood as the level of protection provided by the living environment which helps to minimize the fear of criminal victimization among the people. Defensibility provides physical security devices such as closed circuit televisions, window grills and locks and social security such as police and security guards. It goes without saying that people feel safe where there is better defensibility (On-fung *et al.*, 2009).

The Present Study

Fear of crime among the elderly is a new field for the criminological and sociological research in India. A few studies have been done related to fear of crime in India (Madhava Soma Sundaram, 1989, 1996; Nalla *et al.*, 2011). These studies have presented a general view of fear of crime. A study has been done related to fear of crime in Mumbai (Nalla *et al.*, 2011) in Indian perspective. This study contends that economic growth has brought to India problems inherent to rapid urbanization and modernization such as uncontrolled population growth, migration from rural to urban areas, high level of poverty, inner city neighborhood and rising crime. Consequently, there is growing feeling of fear of crime among the elderly. This study has claimed that the level of fear of crime is low among the middle class communities than higher class.

Similarly, International Crime Victim Survey (ICVS) (1992) studied the criminal victimization and fear of crime in developing countries. Mumbai city was selected for this study in India. It was found in this study that level of fear of crime is low in India but it may increase in future. Higher crime rate of an area expresses higher feelings of insecurity.

This study also identified different types of crimes such as murder, rape, burglary, theft, robbery. Basically, violent crimes are committed in the victim's own house (ICVS, 1995). A number of studies have been done related to crime against the elderly and elder abuse in India (Gupta & Chaudhuri, 2008; Patel, 2010; Thilagaraj & Priyamvada, 2003; Rufus & Shekhar, 2011). These studies discuss causes and consequences of crime and abuse against the elderly which indirectly reveal fear of crime. From the literature, we can find a research gap and there is a dire need of scientific enquiry to analyze this issue from multiple perspectives and explore the factors affecting fear of crime among the elderly in India. The present study examines the factors related to fear of crime among the elderly. Finally, the paper provides various suggestions for ensuring the safety and security of the elderly.

Methodology

In this study, the authors decided to employ content analysis, a method of qualitative and quantitative data analysis which aim is to analyze the content of documents, books, newspapers, magazines and other forms of written material, as the newspapers in India are the biggest and the best source of report on crime against elderly. It is very difficult to find data on elder abuse otherwise. In fact, no agency has reported the scope and extent of crime against the elderly. Making use of content analysis allowed the authors to easily access data on cases of elder abuse occurred within a certain time period. The data have been collected from two Hindi language newspapers, *Dainik Jagran* and *Amar Ujala* (Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Delhi Edition) and one English language newspaper, Times of India (Delhi edition). These news items have been collected from April 2012 to September 2012. The newspapers invariably reported the possible reasons for crime against the elderly as well as the types of crime committed. Since the factors and types of crime against the elderly constituted the major objectives of the study, the content analysis of news items was considered to be a very useful method to understand the phenomena under study.

The study included six areas of different size, namely, Delhi, Kanpur, Lucknow, Meerut, Roorkee and Unnao for analysis of crime against elderly. The high incidences of crime reported from these areas were the main reason to select these places for the current study. These regions have been divided into rural and urban areas. The authors collected newspaper reports of 170 incidents of crimes against the elderly from these areas. These incidents of crimes have been categorized in seven items such as victims' gender, age group (55 to 60 year, 61 to 65 year, 66 to 70 year, above 71 year and age not known), crime rate of an area (rural and urban), crime scene (home and outside), nature of crime (Murder, attempt to murder, theft, cheating, hurt, robbery, chain snatching and mistreatment), victim-offender relation (family members/relatives, neighbors and strangers) and time of committing crime (morning, noon, evening and night).

Results

As we have stated in the section on methods of data collection, a total of 170 cases have been collected from two Hindi language newspapers and one English language newspaper. The newspaper reports were collected for a period of six months starting from 1st April 2012 till 30th September 2012. Through content analysis, the cases of crime against the elderly have been distributed into different categories. Each of the categories is discussed under the following headings.

1. Nature of Crime

The break-up of 170 cases of crime (Table 1) shows that there are 76 cases of murder, eight cases of attempt to murder, 11 cases of cheating, 15 cases of robbery and six cases of kidnapping, seven cases of theft, 14 cases of hurt, nine cases of mistreatment and 11 cases of chain snatching. The remaining 13 cases pertain to accidents (8) and suicides (5).

Table 1: Nature of Crime

Nature of Crime	Number of Cases	%
Murder	76	44.71%
Attempt to Murder	8	4.71%
Theft	7	4.12%
Hurt	14	8.24%
Robbery	15	8.82%
Kidnapping	6	3.53%
Cheating/Fraud	11	6.47%
Mistreatment	9	5.29%
Chain Snatching	11	6.47%
Others	13	7.65%
Total	170	100.00%

2. Gender

Table 2 shows that a total of 91 (53.53%) incidents of crimes have been reported against the elderly men as compared to 65 (38.24%) incidents of crimes reported against the elderly women. While, there are 14 (8.24%) cases where both elderly men and women have been victimized.

Table 2: Gender

Sex	Number of Cases	%
Male	91	53.53%
Female	65	38.24%
Both Sex	14	8.24%
Total	170	100.00%

3. Age Group

Looking at the age group of the victims (Table 3), we find that the elderly in the 61-65 year age category have been victimized the most. There are 48 (28.24%) such cases in that age group. There are 29 (17.06%) incidents reported in the 55-60 year age group. While 25 (14.71%) incidents belong to 66-70 year age group, 24 (14.12%) incidents of crime have been found against elderly of 71 and above age group. Moreover, 44 (25.88%) incidents of crimes are related to such elderly victims, whose age is not available in news items.

Table 3: Age Group

Age Group	Number of Cases	%
55-60 Year	29	17.06%
61-65 Year	48	28.24%
66-70 Year	25	14.71%
Above 71 Year	24	14.12%
Age Not Known	44	25.88%
Total	170	100.00%

4. Crime Rate of an Area

A total of 71 (41.76%) incidents of crime have been reported against the rural elderly as compared to 99 (58.24%) incidents of crimes reported against the urban elderly. Our finding is in corroboration with the earlier study of Miethe and Lee (1984) where they found that most of the incidences of crimes are committed against the elderly in urban areas. They further argued that the urban elderly are more fearful of crime than their rural counterparts. Our study does vindicate that as higher number of crime committed in urban areas are bound to raise fear among the elders residing there.

5. Location of crime

When we compare the crime committed against elderly at home and outside, we find that a total of 89 (52.35%) incidents of crimes have been reported against the elderly within the house, while 81 (47.65%) incidents of crimes reported outside house. Inside homes elderly are more vulnerable to be victimized.

6. Victim-offender Relationship

The study reveals some surprising results when it comes to the offender-elderly relationship. Table 4 shows that 38 (22.35%) incidents of crime have been committed by family members and relatives. The neighbors of the elderly persons were found to be involved in 34 (20.00%) incidents of crime. If we add up the data on crime perpetrated by family members and neighbors, the number obtained is 72 (42.35%).

Table 4: Victim-Offender Relation

Victim-Offender Relation	Number of Cases	%
Family Members/Relatives	38	22.35%
Neighbors	34	20.00%
Strangers	73	42.94%
Others	25	14.71%
Total	170	100.00%

7. Time of Committing Crime

Table 5 shows the time of occurrence of the crimes committed. There were 50 (29.41%) incidents of crime which took place at night as compared to 38 (22.35%) incidents during morning. The morning crimes were committed when the elderly have gone for morning walk. While 23 cases were reported to have taken place during noon,

18 cases of crime happened in the evening. The newspapers have not reported the time of crime in as many as 41 cases. Though we do not find any trend regarding the time of occurrences of crime, still one can notice that elderly are more vulnerable during night and early morning time.

Table 5: Time of Committing Crime

Time	Number of Cases	Percentage
Morning	38	22.35%
Noon	23	13.53%
Evening	18	10.59%
Night	50	29.41%
Not Available	41	24.12%
Total	170	100.00%

Discussion

From the results it is apparent that there is a substantial rise in crime against the elderly. Such crimes are bound to inject fear among the elderly affecting their physical and mental well-being. Instilling fear among elderly with every passing hour indicates brutal cases that are coming to light through media channels. Though the percentage of crime by unknown persons and criminals is quite high but what alarms the social scientists are the growing incidences of crime committed by family members, relatives and even neighbors. In fact, in our study we found the involvement of near and dear ones and neighbors is close to 43% of cases. Some studies have already indicated this trend where the family members, relatives and neighbors pose serious threat to physical and mental and financial well-being of the elderly (Patel, 2010; Rufus & Shekhar, 2011). Patel (2010) found in her study that 25% crimes against elderly are committed by their own family members, particularly, by sons, daughters- in-law, relatives, neighbors and servants. She has explained that the causes responsible for crime against the elderly are property and land disputes, caste rivalries, living alone, lack of attention of police to crime against elderly and rural factionalism.

The fact that the offenders are now found to be the ones the elderly have relied on is ominous signal. In one case, the daughter-in-law and his grandson were accused of kidnapping the elderly father at New Delhi (*Amar Ujala*, 2012). The kidnapping took place for forcefully grabbing the property from the elderly man. In one disturbing case, a son conspired to get his father murdered in Nagalsauti, a village near Meerut in Western Uttar Pradesh for land (*Dainik Jagran*, 2012). In another case a girl accused that her cousins have murdered her father for his property in Malihabad, Lucknow. While the elderly being abused and killed by family members is a matter of serious concern, the number of murders against the elderly living alone or with spouse also draws attention to extreme vulnerability of the elderly. For instance, in one case, six elderly women, in separate cases, were murdered after robbery in their homes at Lucknow in a span of six months (Times of India, 2012). In all these cases, the victims were staying alone when they were killed and their belongings were looted. The killers were found to be acquaintances in most of these incidents. In another case, an elderly couple was murdered after robbery at Roorkee at their home during night (*Dainik Jagran*, 2012). Such cases reveal the risk involved for the

elderly in staying alone. In many cases the elderly has no choice but to stay alone as their children are residing elsewhere due to their jobs. Such crime cases are bound to infuse fear of crime among the elderly.

In our study, we found that 73 (42.94%) cases of crime have been committed by unknown persons and criminals. Moreover, 25 (14.71%) incidents of crime have occurred as accidents. These incidents came on grounds of negligence from municipal administration part. For instance, some elderly persons lost their lives due to attack from animals or they fell into uncovered potholes. In our study we found the corroboration of social incivility. There are as many as 34 cases where the neighbors have been involved in mentally harassing, stealing, injuring and even murdering the helpless elderly. In one case, for instance, in Unnao, one 65 year old farmer was brutally killed by his neighbors for conflict over sharing of woods (*Amar Ujala*, 2012). In another case in Kanpur, one mother-son duo was seriously injured by the neighbors when they objected to a drainage pipe being dug next to their house (*Dainik Jagran*, 2012). This is striking as it is commonly seen that the elderly living alone rely upon the neighbors for their physical safety and mental security.

The rising cases of crimes against the elderly in areas covered in this study such as Delhi Kanpur, Lucknow, Meerut, Roorkee, Unnao makes these places unsafe for the elderly. There is a strong likelihood of increased perception of risk to physical danger among the elderly living in such towns and cities due to rise in crime against the elderly. The concept of physical vulnerability explains the effect of deficiency in physical environment generating fear among the elderly. On-fung et al (2009) state that once criminal cases appear in their locality, older persons often experience an increased level of fear because it means that the criminal selected their community to victimize. Consequently, people living in such communities may feel at greater risk of becoming victims of crime. Therefore, with a previous history of crimes in a given community, the perceived vulnerability as well as fear of crime increases. Miethe and Lee (1984) also discuss that the crime rate of an area and different types of crime trigger anxiety among the elderly. One of the main factors of fear of crime is the crime rate of an area. More the crime against the elderly in an area, more it creates anxiety, discomfort and fear among the elderly residing in that locality. Our study also suggests that the elderly are bound to feel more anxious and live in a state of fear as there is high occurrence of crime against the elderly in the six areas covered through content analysis of newspaper reports.

Conclusion

The paper set out to assess the various factors instrumental in fear of crime among the elderly. The factors such as crime rate of an area, nature of crime, prior victimization, incivility, vulnerability and defensibility give rise to feeling of fear among the elderly. The authors, based on content analysis, found that 76 incidents of murder have been reported against the elderly during the six months period of April to September. In some cases, the murdered elderly were residing alone. This lends credence to concepts of incivility, vulnerability and defensibility as all these concepts, more or less, talks of weaknesses in physical environment, lack of proper social network, the presence of anti-social elements in the neighborhood and poor vigilance by the police. It has also been observed that the known persons such as family members, relatives and neighbors have been involved in elder abuse in many cases of crime. This is a significant finding as the elderly have, in general, relied upon the family members and relatives for physical and mental support.

Their dependence on family members is based on trust, reciprocity and to some extent helplessness. But as these cases of crime attest, the elderly have been victimized, in many cases, at their own homes. The different forms of elder abuse obtained in this study such as murder, attempt to murder, hurt, theft, cheating, kidnapping and mistreatment highlights the social vulnerability experienced by the elderly. The concept of social vulnerability points to absence of meaningful social attachment between the elderly and other family members and neighbors, to some extent. This definitely raises concern among the elderly as occurrences of such cases generate feeling of fear of crime among them.

Suggestions

Community policing can reduce the fear of crime among the elderly through three ways. The Police should implement neighborhood watch programs through community policing. The police patrolling should be intensified in areas prone to crime. The police with the help of voluntary sector should identify those areas and colonies where there is higher concentration of retired elderly residing alone or with spouses. Regular vigil should be kept in the market places, public parks and neighborhood areas adjoining these colonies populated by retired persons. The elderly themselves must be made aware of possible threats to them so that they take cautionary measures. First, when police engage in community partnerships it enhances the level of police presence among the elderly, thus police presence can reduce the fear among the elderly. Second reason is that as police become more actively involved with elderly, security satisfaction will rise among the elderly and it is believed that if elderly have higher satisfaction with the police, they will have less fear of crime. Third reason is that when police do become involved with elderly through neighborhood level groups, neighborhood watch programs, these groups and programs strengthen the actual bonds between police and elderly and possibility of fear of crime would be less among the elderly (Roh & Oliver, 2005).

Apart from the implementation of Community Policing to reduce fear of crime among the elderly, the other suggestions are: (a) Senior citizens cells should be established by police in every police head quarter of district. (b) Police should start elderly helpline in which elderly may register their problems (c) Police should pay attention to security of life and property of elderly who are living alone (d) The effective patrolling should be done by police both during day and night to check undesirable elements, who are loitering in parks, neighborhood and market places (e) Police personnel should be given training sensitizing them to needs of the elderly (f) Police should punish those family members, who abuse and neglect the elderly (g) Police should prepare separate crime statistics related to elderly for better understanding of elderly issues. (h) Friendly vigil should be started by the police (Das, 2009). The police in collaboration with the voluntary sector and the network of elderly persons can make videos on the needs and rights of the elderly as well as on the redressal mechanism and safety measures available to them and air them through television channels (Deswal, 2011).

Limitations

Due to its nature, the paper is based on secondary data. The paper is based on content analysis of a few newspapers in Hindi language and only one English language newspaper of India. Further the sample area in the paper covers only four districts of Uttar Pradesh, the national capital territory and Roorkee, which is a subdivision of Haridwar district of Uttarakhand. The sample area chosen do not reflect a complete picture of crime against

the elderly in India. Moreover, since there is a paucity of Indian literature on the subject, the authors have relied heavily on studies on elder abuse done outside India. Despite these limitations, the study does indicate certain trends regarding elder abuse and was helpful in analyzing the factors causing fear of crime among elderly in India.

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