Old Age can be Painful



NADIA KABIR BARB

MARGARET Smith is a sweet old lady in her late seventies. She just moved in with her daughter and son-in-law six months ago because she recently found it hard to look after herself and needed someone to care for her. A nursing home was not an option as there was not enough money to send her to one so her daughter took her in. To the undiscerning eye, she always seems to have a smile on her face and appears to be lost in her own thoughts. Therefore you are not particularly surprised that she is very quiet and does not talk too much with other people. However, if you look a little closer, you will find that beyond the smile there lies a sense dread or maybe even fear in her eyes. Sudden movements startle her. But a fear of what? If you were to roll up her sleeve you might notice the bruise on her right forearm or the cut on her forehead. She managed to acquire these courtesy of her son-in-law when he grabbed her and slammed her against the wall thus hitting her head on the corner of a kitchen cabinet. The reason being that the mug she had been drinking her tea from had slipped out of her hand and broken.

Shocking? Definitely. But sadly this kind of maltreatment is something that happens more frequently than we would like to believe. No matter how much we would like to disbelieve it, the abuse of elderly people is quite widespread and in many cases this is perpetrated by someone in their own family or someone who acts as their carer. In the UK, the author Daniel Blake, of a report commissioned from a leading charity by the Department of Health said: '...that many older vulnerable adults are being harmed in their own homes by people in the family. Most of the abuse will remain unreported because people are too frightened, ashamed or embarrassed to do so.' Also in the majority of cases the victims are women.

Abuse of the elderly can take many forms, starting from neglect to mental and physical abuse that can sometimes lead to injuries that require hospitalisation. Also one cannot point a finger and say it is an Eastern or Western phenomenon as it happens everywhere. When we talk about neglect we mean the lack of provision of 'food, water, clothing, shelter, personal hygiene, medicine, comfort, personal safety, and other essentials' that are necessary to for the general wellbeing of a person. In many households the additional mouth to feed becomes a burden and may lead to the elderly parent or relative in question being given one meal a day or being deprived of the required medication.

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Mental abuse is just as horrific. How terrifying must it be when you are no longer able to fend for yourself and are at the mercy of other people even if they are family? Can you imagine constantly being under a barrage of verbal abuse, shouting and screaming, threats of physical abuse or just being isolated from the rest of the family or from outside contact and even abandonment? It is traumatising for the recipient of this kind of emotional and psychological abuse. Sometimes this kind of mental abuse can as distressing and painful as physical abuse especially if you have no one to confide in. If many cases it becomes shameful to admit that they are being mistreated by their own family members. In Bangladesh I am sure there are a countless number of cases where parents who are dependent on their offspring are treated with disrespect and are taunted and ridiculed by