



The elder physical abuse reflected in judicial authorities in Eskisehir



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ABSTRACT

Aim: Elder abuse is a health and human rights problem that may occur among every race and ethnic group all around the world. This study aims at describing all cases of physical abuse of elderly which have been reported to, and investigated by Eskisehir – a western city of Turkey.

Methods: Physical abuse incidents above 65 years of age which were evaluated by the Eskisehir Council of Forensic Medicine for expert witness opinion during 5 year period between 01.01.2010 and 12.31.2014 are examined in this descriptive, cross-sectional study.

Results: 253 cases are found and evaluated in the scope of the study. It is determined that all aggressors are the acquaintance of the victim, and for 114 cases (45.1%) the aggressor is the victim's son. It is found that only investigation procedures of cases are completed, but no protection and rehabilitation program has been issued.

Conclusion: In conclusion, it is determined that elder victims are abused by family members and relatives who are mostly the care givers. It is seen that emergency physicians play a great role in the detection of abuse.

1. Introduction

Elder abuse is a health and human rights problem that may occur among every race and ethnic group all around the world (Dong, 2015). It is a complex problem with a lot of risk factors. Becoming a person in need of nursing together with increased age is a risk factor in terms of abuse (Dong & Simon, 2013; Ghodousi, Maghsoodloo, & Hoseini, 2011; Kissal & Beşer, 2011).

The reported prevalence of the elder abuse varies between 3.2% and 27.5% in the world (Cooper, Selwood, & Livingston, 2008). According to World Health Organization, it is between 1% and 10% in developed countries (Dong, 2015). In Canada, it is reported that the annual prevalence of Elder abuse in 2008 was determined as 17.1% and 1.6% of that number was composed of physical abuse incidents (Acierno, Hernandez, & Amstadter, 2010). In 2008, while the prevalence of reported physical abuse was 1.6% in the United States, the overall 1-year prevalence of elder abuse was 17.1% (Acierno et al., 2010). To the best of our knowledge, there isn't any nationwide study in Turkey on this issue. According to the local surveys, elder abuse ranges between 1.5% and 25.6% (Lök, 2015).

Compared to the European countries, in Turkey the phenomenon has been more intense and rapid, coinciding with an urbanization process, often associated with industrialization, but without the corresponding improvements in quality of life for the majority of the population. Thus, populating aging, combined with the stress of modern

living, aggravates individual and family problems and conflicts in collective life in both the public and private spheres. Such problems mount up and can be expressed in the form of violence (Lök, 2015). In this context, the elderly population becomes vulnerable due to physiological, psychological, and socioeconomic issues (Kissal & Beşer, 2009).

On the previous studies, difficulties in detection of elder abuse have been underlined (Gülen et al., 2013; Johannesen & LoGiudice, 2013a; Kissal & Beşer, 2009; Karimi & Elahi, 2008; Lök, 2015). It is determined that the aggressors are usually the relatives of the victim (victim's children, spouse and other relatives) who are the care giver at the same time (Ghodousi et al., 2011). In the study made by Ghodousi et al., it is stated that all elders were abused by acquaintances and the aggressor is the victim's son in 44.1%, spouses in 20.5%, daughter in 4.4, other family members in 13,2% of cases (Ghodousi et al., 2011).

Application to the courts due to elder abuse is rare, therefore they are considered to be particular records. To the best of our knowledge in our country, there is no study in the literature that analyzes the application to legal authorities due to beating. For this reason, it is considered important to publish the data of court cases about elder abuse.

In this study, court cases of elder abuse that required a forensic medical report in Eskisehir, a western Anatolian city of Turkey, has been analyzed. Demographical data of abused individuals, relation with their aggressor and the course of events that revealed the abuse, are published.

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2. Methods

Court cases of individuals older than 65 years of age, that required a forensic medical report and diagnosed as elder abuse by Eskisehir Office Council of Forensic Medicine in a 5-year period between 2010 and 2014 were included in this study. All of the cases have been reported to the legal authorities and judicial procedures have been initiated. The beginning of the legal procedures was first introduced by hospital police by legal reports to the prosecutors. This case, have been accepted into the emergency services because of injuries caused by physical abuse and while the patient is being examined for other health problems the attending physician found out evidence of physical abuse and filed a complaint to the authorities.

Over a 5 year period, a total of 253 forensic medical reports of elderly physical abuse has been written by our unit. These cases include elders who have applied because of physical abuse or the ones who have applied for other reasons but discovered by the physician during the physical examination. The cases have been referred to our department by the court or the prosecutor's office for forensic reports after the first examination and treatment of patients. Cases were examined in terms of demographic data such as age, sex, marital status, place of residence and employment. In addition, the relationship between the attacker and the victim, where the incident occurred, history of previous injuries, data of severity of injuries were evaluated. Since our forensic unit evaluates forensic traumatology patients, only physical abuse cases were evaluated.

In the study, forensic reports issued by our unit are used as material. Since no intervention has been applied to the cases and no identification data have been disclosed and study being a retrospective statistical analysis no ethical approval has been sought. SPSS 20 has been used for the analysis of the data and percentage analysis was performed, Standard errors were calculated manually.

3. Results

253 cases are evaluated in the scope of the study. It is determined that 72 cases ($28.5\% \pm 2.8$) are male and 181 cases are ($71.5\% \pm 2.8$) female. The age range of cases is between 65 and 87, and the average age is 74 ± 8.9 . Demographical data regarding cases are given in Table 1.

While $71.5\% \pm 2.8$ of the victims are women and the aggressor is the victim's spouse in only 18 cases (7.1%). However, it is found that 240 aggressors were ($94.9\% \pm 1.4$) male, 13 aggressors ($5.1\% \pm 1.4$) were women. $79.4\% \pm 2.5$ of cases ($n = 201$) in this study here were widows, and live together with their children or relatives, $87.7\% \pm 2.1$ of cases ($n = 222$) were unemployed. 217 victims ($85.8\% \pm 2.2$) were exposed to violence in the house they live, in places where they supposed to live safe.

It is determined that all aggressors are the acquaintance of the victim, and for 114 cases ($45.1\% \pm 3.1$) the aggressor is the victim's son. The relationship between the victim and the aggressor is given at Fig. 1.

It is discovered that in 148 of the cases ($58.5\% \pm 3.1$) elders have been accepted into the emergency services because of injuries caused by physical abuse and the investigation has commenced. On the other hand, in 105 cases ($41.5\% \pm 3.1$) while the patient is being examined for other health problems the attending physician found out evidence of physical abuse and filed a complaint to the authorities.

It is determined that 43 cases ($17.0\% \pm 2.4$) have already applied to judicial authorities at least once due to domestic physical violence. The victim is assaulted by the same person in 35 cases ($13.8\% \pm 2.2$). Among them, the aggressor is the victim's spouse in 18 cases ($51.4\% \pm 8.4$) and the victim's son in 17 cases ($48.6\% \pm 8.4$).

Evaluation of injuries revealed that all cases have the characteristics of blunt trauma injury, and all injuries are caused by punching, kicking, hitting with a hard object or slapping on to a firm ground. Injuries of

Table 1
Socio-demographic characteristics of elder abuse victims.

	n	% \pm SE
Sex		
Male	72	28.5 ± 2.8
Female	181	71.5 ± 2.8
Age		
65–74	95	37.5 ± 8.9
75–84	131	51.8 ± 8.9
85 and above	27	10.7 ± 8.9
Marital Status		
Married	52	20.6 ± 2.5
Widow	201	79.4 ± 2.5
Where they live		
City	129	51.0 ± 3.1
Country side	124	49.0 ± 3.1
Employment status		
Working	31	12.3 ± 2.1
Not working	222	87.7 ± 2.1
Living arrangements		
Spouse	52	20.6 ± 2.5
His/her son	61	24.1 ± 2.7
His/her daughter	95	37.5 ± 3.0
Alone	33	13.0 ± 2.1
A relative	12	4.7 ± 1.3

*SE: Standard Error.

173 cases ($68.4\% \pm 2.9$) could be treated with a simple medical treatment, and injuries of 80 cases ($31.6\% \pm 2.9$) required more than a simple medical treatment. Bone fractures are determined in 4 cases ($1.6\% \pm 0.8$): nasal bone fractures in 3 cases and radius fracture in 1 case.

It is determined that no protection order has been issued for elders that were physically abused in cases discussed within the scope of the study. It is reported that only investigation procedures of cases are completed, but no protection and rehabilitation program has been issued.

4. Discussion

In studies related to the Elder abuse, it is reported that elders are mostly abused by family members and relatives (Acierno et al., 2010; Cooper et al., 2008; Devons, 2002; Ghodousi et al., 2011; Johannesen & LoGiudice, 2013a; Karimi and Elahi, 2008). In the study made by Ghodousi et al., it is stated that all elders were abused by acquaintances and the aggressor is the victim's son in 44.1% of cases (Ghodousi et al., 2011). In this study here, it is also determined that aggressors of all cases are relatives of elders and $45.1\% \pm 3.1$ of the time ($n = 114$) it is the victim's son. The elderly are often exposed to violence by their own children, who live in the same house. For this reason, it is generally thought that judicial notification has not been made. It is thought that older physical abuse is usually hidden and the rate of elder abuse is higher than anticipated.

Since the aggressors are mostly relatives, it is difficult to detect the abuse. Fortunately, in 105 cases ($41.5\% \pm 3.1$) physical injury had been located by the doctor during the examination for other health problems and was reported to judicial authorities. In our country, elderly people usually live with their children after their spouse die. Due to both lack of nursing home and cultural reasons, staying in the nursing home is not as common as western societies. However, in this study, it is shown that elderly people are mostly abused by their son whom they live together. Considering the very tiny amount of the cases reported to legal authorities, the problem is bigger than we assume.

In studies related to Elder abuse, it is stated that elder women are exposed to violence more compared to elder men (Ghodousi et al., 2011; Johannesen & LoGiudice, 2013a; Kissal & Beşer, 2011;

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