

Familial abuse of elderly common in city: Study

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NEW DELHI: The family is often a cold place for senior citizens in the Capital. A study by the charity HelpAge India has found that the city has the worst record in the country so far as familial abuse of the elderly is concerned. Its report claims that abuse by daughters-in-law, verbal abuse, and financial dependency are common problems faced by octogenarians here. At the same time, community support and healthcare schemes for the elderly are lacking.

"Senior citizens are no longer a homogenous group of people over 60 years of age. With growing life expectancy, there is a large chunk of the population that is over 80, which poses different challenges. Since the concept of institutional homes is not big here, the burden of care often falls to the families, who may or may not be able to fulfill their duties," said MM Sabharwal, president emeritus of HelpAge India, at a ceremony celebrating the International Day of Older Persons, on Saturday.

Individuals who contributed to programmes for the elderly were honoured during the ceremony. Akankshya Pratihari, a Class V student of Modern Convent School, was the youngest person to receive an award for her singlehanded contribution to the school's fundraising drive, "There is nobody to help the old-aged in India and I wanted to do my bit for them. I am very close to my grandparents and feel it is very important to look after them. I raised Rs 64,000 for the cause and want to continue doing more."

Activists see a ray of hope in youngsters' compassion for the elderly. "Unless children look after parents and grandparents, there is no hope for the country," said Mathew Cherian, chief executive, HelpAge India. "Although the government has implemented several initiatives for the uplift of the elderly, youngsters need to get involved as well for any significant improvement," said Mukul Wasnik, Union minister of social justice and empowerment, who was the chief guest at the function.

As part of its initiative, HelpAge has launched the Student Action for Value Education (SAVE) campaign and its official website, which focuses on sensitizing school children. "If children learn to respect elders early in life, they will be more grounded and develop morals that will make their education worthwhile," said Grace Pinto, managing director of Ryan International group of institutions, who also won an award at the ceremony.