

Abuse as a Type of Discrimination Against the Elderly in the Federal District

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Abuse and discrimination towards the elderly are phenomenon which are on the rise in the world and in Mexico specifically. In recent years, there has been growing interest and concern for the quality of life of the elderly and this has become a priority of the Mexican government and of the government of the Federal District. Along these lines, a policy of attention which is responsible for the creation of institutions and programs which defend the rights of the elderly have been developed. The purpose of these institutions and programs is to attend to the reports which the victims of, among other things, abuse and discrimination make. In this respect, the role played by The National Institute for the Elderly (INAPAM) and The Units for the Attention and Prevention of Family Violence (UAPVIF) of the Secretariat of Social Development of the Government of the Federal District should be pointed out.

In the case of INAPAM, said institution was given the control of public policies for the attention of this sector of the population and among its main powers is those of protecting, attending to, helping and advising people over 60. This institution receives the complaints of the elderly who are victims of abuse and discrimination. The other important institution, UAPCIP, is a network of units which receive reports of family violence, abuse and discrimination of this sector of the population.

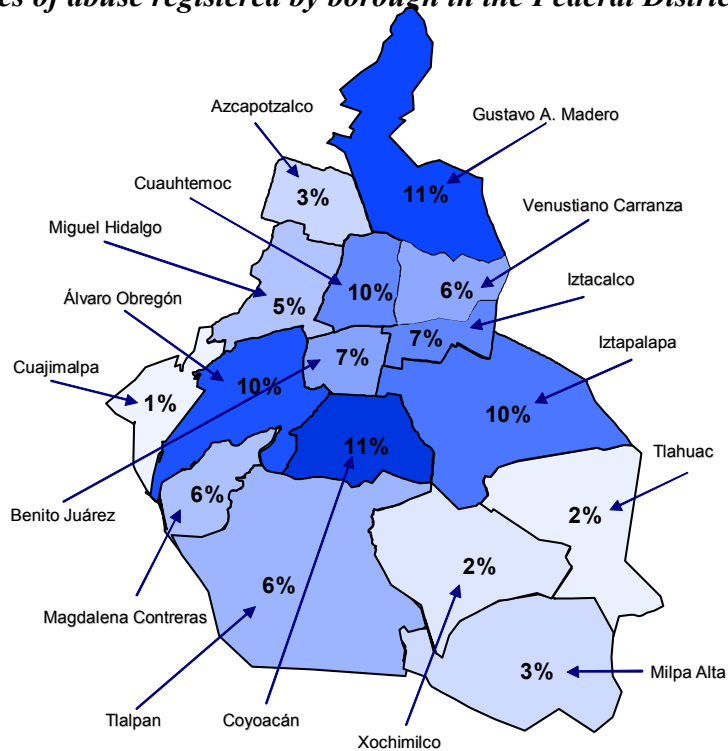
The main objective of the present paper is to bring to light the problems of abuse and discrimination towards the elderly in the Federal District. With this in mind the

different types of abuse and discrimination were identified from the reports which had been filed by the affected parties. Here victims of abuse and discrimination are considered to be those elderly people whose cases have been reported in either of the above mentioned institutions, by the person who was affected himself or by a third party, with the purpose of receiving professional help, support or defense in confronting the actions of abuse and discrimination which affected them.

Data from the reports filed with INAPAM and UAPVIF during 2005 show that the number of elderly adults seen by INAPAM was 8,870, 6.4% or 540 of these were for abuse and discrimination. During the same period UAPVIF attended to 19,383 people, but it should be mentioned that this institution receives reports from all those who are victims of violence, regardless of their sex and age. In this case the number of elderly people seen was 1.5% of the total or 296 cases.

It was found that in all the political divisions (boroughs) which make up the Federal District there were reports of abuse. Map 1 shows that the largest percentage of the elderly population who reported abuse (42%) were from the boroughs of Coyocan, Gustavo A. Madero, Iztapalapa, Alvaro Obregon and Cuauhtemoc. The boroughs with the fewest reported cases were Xochimilco, Tlahuac and Cuajimalpa: it is important to point out that these are the boroughs with the smallest proportion of elderly.

Map 1. Cases of abuse registered by borough in the Federal District, 2005



With regard to the composition of the elderly seen for abuse by sex, it is notable that the number of women (524 cases or 69.3%) is twice the number of men (232 cases or 30.7%). With regard to age, the average age of the people seen was 71.7 years: in the case of men it was 71.8 years and for women 71.7 years. Slightly over half of those seen (51%) were between 60 and 70 years old. The concentration by age diminishes along with life expectancy and there is less chance of reporting by ever ageing adults. In this regard, only 3.5% of the men and 3.6% of women were over 90 at the time they reported abuse.

The greater presence of aged people in the first three age groups is tied to greater ease and independence which, along with the demographic factor (the number of those between 60 and 74 years of age is greater than those 80 and over), enables a person to seek help. It also must be assumed that the older the person, the more

physical limitations he has which would limit his going to an institution to report abuse.

Following are some facts in regard to the different kinds of abuse (psychological, physical, economic, neglect and sexual) and discrimination of which the elderly were victims.

With regard to psychological abuse or chronic verbal aggression, which includes the use of words or actions which denigrate the older adult, and which hurt or diminish the person's identity, dignity and self-esteem (United Nations, 2002), it was found that this is the most common type of abuse to which the elderly are subjected. This type of abuse is not necessarily tied to physical abuse and is more subtle, silent and more difficult to detect, but no less harmful: in fact sometimes it is more destructive than other forms of violence in the end. Of the total of those who made reports, 436 cases or 57.7% were for psychological abuse. Following are some manifestations of this type of abuse:

- “He took away the identification I need to get my pension and he has me living in a teeny room.” He insults me by saying, “Mule, why didn't you have any children?” He doesn't let me use the bathroom and I have to bathe at a public bath.” (68 year old woman)
- “I use a walker to get from one place to another and the bathroom is on the other side of the house from my room and my relatives who I live with put obstacles in my way, they constantly insult me. When I wanted to go make a report I was told that in order for me to be protected by the law I had to be beaten by the people I was accusing and bleeding, only then will they be incarcerated. And I wonder, ‘and the verbal wounds, name-calling such as

lame, bastard, blind old lady (since I have glaucoma and have to use special drops which cost 200 pesos or more), etc. aren't they punishable?" (66 year old woman)

- “The neighbors are always knocking on the wall of my room, making all sorts of noises which bother me, and besides they are always insulting me.” (63 year old woman)
- Another person reports that “the son of the lady throws me into the street; he's always throwing me out of the house; he turns off my electricity and treats me very badly.” (80 year old woman)
- “My daughter-in-law and my son won't let me see my other children and they treat me very badly.” (75 year old woman)
- “My daughter died and her husband won't let me have any interaction with my grandchildren, I sued him through a lawyer and the judge ruled in my favor, ruled that I should be able to see my grandchildren, but he won't let me.” (61 year old woman)
- “My neighbor is always insulting me and has tried to hit me.” (83 year old woman)

Physical abuse is understood to be single or repeated acts or prolonged situations which include any type of inappropriate restriction or confinement which cause bodily pain or injury, where excessive and inappropriate physical force is used which may endanger the physical, social or emotional development of an elderly person. It was found that of all those reporting abuse, 266 cases or 35.2% were for physical abuse. Following are some manifestations of this type of abuse:

- “I divorced my husband and he still lives in the house and abuses me physically and verbally, I’m afraid someday I will be upstairs on the roof (where she washes) and he will push me off.” (63 year old woman)
- “My daughter abuses me verbally and physically, she has run me out of the house several times; she won’t let me eat in the dining room; I have to stay only in my bedroom; they don’t feed me and my daughter has asked me very rudely ‘and when are you going to get out of here?’.” (74 year old man)
- “On a bus on my way home a bus driver insulted me and physically attacked me.” (65 year old man)
- The children of this elderly person collect the rent for his properties and don’t give him the money and don’t take care of him. They won’t let him out of the house. Another person filed this report since this elderly person cannot leave his house. (70 year old man)
- Mrs. Lidia Solis J. (daughter-in-law) is the one who files the complaint. She says that none of the sons help their mother and that some grandchildren and their families even live with her and these relative yell at her and there have even been some blows. They don’t help. (81 year old woman)
- “He wouldn’t let us in the house where we lived; we had to stay out in the street until dawn, suffering the inclemency of the weather. The next day this person, the same one who wouldn’t let us in the house, told us we shouldn’t arrive late again, or he wouldn’t let us in and he threatened us.” (these elderly people do not own the house and do not pay rent, but rather they do domestic work) (85 year old man)
- “I was working in the Comercial Mexicana (a large chain of grocery stores) and I am being accused of robbery which I did not commit and they abused

me, the manager dragged me out of the store and while I was working there, they treated us badly as packers. They treat the elderly badly and accuse them of stealing.” (68 year old woman)

Economic abuse consists of the illegal or inappropriate use, or the unrightful appropriation of property or finances of an elderly person. 215 such cases were reported; that is 28.4% of all reports. Following are some manifestations of this type of abuse:

- “I have been a hard working person and this situation doesn’t seem fair to me since I’ve bought my things over the years and my despicable children didn’t think twice about doing it.” (70 year old man)
- “My own children took advantage of my trust and took my money and now my house, they forged my signature. There have been a lot of irregularities and I’m asking you to please give me advice since no one anywhere has wanted to help me, since I’m elderly and not well off and I can only count on my son’s support.” (man, age not specified)
- “I had to hire a lawyer to solve a rental problem in order to have the renter vacate my property and the lawyer’s uncle is now trying to claim ownership of the property. He made me sign a blank paper and now I have no idea of what is going on with the case.” (85 year old man)
- “I hired a person to process license plates for a taxi for me a year and a half ago and she hasn’t done it yet and besides, when I try to talk with her, she hides.” (75 year old woman)
- “Some neighbors even steal my food and they’ve been changing the locks where I live and they still keep stealing from me.” (85 year old man)

- “I have some nephews who want to force me to go to a home so they can have my house. My nephews come to my house to put pressure on me and my sister, they want me to sign documents turning the rights of the house over to them and try to force us to go to a home or institution for the elderly.” (81 year old woman)
- “After my husband died, I’ve had problems because a person from the Frente Cardenista (a political group) came to my house and told me that the house wasn’t mine and also my two daughters along with this man want to take my house from me. I found out through a niece that my oldest daughter is in the legal process of interdiction to be named my legal representative...” (72 year old woman)

In relation to negligence which is understood as the lack of action to attend to the needs of an elderly person, it also entails not providing necessary care in regard to proper food, clothing, hygiene, shelter and medical care. Of the cases presented, 131, that is 17.3% of the total, were for acts of negligence. Following are some manifestations of this type of abuse:

- A daughter reports: She was there to represent her father because her brothers and she agreed to each take care of him every third day and when it’s her turn, she takes care of him but when its her brothers’ turns they are late or just don’t show up, so he doesn’t eat and he stays dirty covered with his bodily wastes and sometimes she finds him lying around vomiting. Once she went to see her father who was with her brother who does drugs. Her father hadn’t eaten, so she decided to take her father home with her, but her brother

attacked her twice with knives. She wants to be able to have her father with her and take care of him. (100 year old man)

- “Please, I don’t want to go to a home or public institution, I want to go home and live with my brother, even though he abuses me.” (82 year old woman)
- He says that his mother is with his brother and he doesn’t take good care of her, he doesn’t feed her properly and she has senile dementia. (85 year old woman)
- “I’m very sick and my children don’t give me any money; also The Social Security Institute used to give me my medicine, but they don’t anymore.” (72 year old man)
- A neighbor reports the case: she says that in the community there is an old woman living alone who apparently only has one relative. The old woman lives in unhealthy conditions with a lot of garbage and fetid smells from the garbage. She is approximately 86 years old.

In relation to sexual abuse, this type of abuse which is understood to be any sexual contact without consent, including rape, attack on sexual modesty and sexual harassment, there were 55 cases reported, that is 7.3% of all cases. Following are some manifestations of this type of abuse:

- “My husband attacks me verbally, physically and sexually. He forces me to have sexual relations with him; he tears my clothes, pinches me and bites me. He hurts me and now he has kicked me out of the house and he fights with my children because he doesn’t want them to see me. I’m afraid to return to my husband because I know what’s in store for me.” (65 year old woman)

- The daughter comments that her mother is not in good health anymore and that there are men who touch her body; here son-in-law has had problems with the neighbors over this; and in the ISSSTE (Institute for Social Security and Services for Workers of the State) her doctor says that her mother has Hazthaimer (sic)...

Institutional Discrimination

Discrimination is a social and cultural phenomenon linked to the dynamics of inclusion/exclusion which is expressed in prejudice and stigmas, the later being defined as a significantly discrediting attribute which functions socially to degrade a person who possesses it. Thus, evidence proves that stigmas and forms of discrimination have several focal points of production and reproduction: a) an interpersonal expression, which is expressed in the form of daily communication and interaction; b) a structural expression which takes plate in relation to social inequality; and c) institutional expressions as seen in the application or omission of application of social policy by the State or welfare institutions, which reproduce asymmetric relationships of power, control, detriment, negligence and discrimination. The following evidence shows how those with a certain degree of power and who should be at the service of this population group in Mexico City show discrimination.

- The doctor who is supposed to take care of me denied me medical service and insulted me, just because she said I did not respect her as a doctor, since I addressrd her as “miss” and not “doctor”. (70 year old man)

- “...my employer is demanding I sign my resignation so he will be free of any possible severance payments.” (61 year old man)
- “I have received poor attention from the doctors in the Social Security Institute. Last time they had to operate and it was done badly and I am suffering many adverse consequences...” (70 year old man)
- “... I worked as a messenger for EXDI and they didn’t pay me the whole salary, besides they act arbitrarily towards the elderly. Please, don’t send people to work at this business (job agency at INAPAM)...” (73 year old man)
- “...where I work they are hostile towards me and don’t pay me what they should.” (63 year old man)
- “A year ago, more than a year ago, I went to IMSS to arrange for my pension and they sent me back to work one more year, so I worked and now the auditor who visited my employer doesn’t believe I really worked since my employer is a relative of mine. Now the auditor doesn’t want to credit the work.” (66 year old man)
- “...two gerontologists at the Home for the Elderly of DIF attack me and insult me, a few days ago they asked me to leave the Home, I keep my documents in a night stand and sometimes I find them all over the floor...” (71 year old man)
- “I was fired two days ago from my job as a concierge and they wouldn’t tell me why or give me any reason.” (68 year old man)
- “I was just fired from my job for no reason at all; I worked at Bicycles of Mexico, S.A. de C.V. for 36 years and 11 months....” (60 year old man)

- “My employer has been asking me to sign blank papers; I’ve been asking for termination of my job so I can apply for my pension.” (63 year old woman)
- I was working in the store, Comercial Mexicana, and was fired. They treated me like a delinquent and I was only working as a voluntary packer. I’ve noticed that the elderly are the object of abuse....” (66 year old man)
- “I had surgery on one eye and later felt bad and went back to the clinic where I always go and they sent me to La Raza Hospital where they told me that I had a hemorrhage and that there was nothing to do about it, that it would go away with medicine. I wasn’t happy with that and was still feeling bad so I went to a private doctor who told me that if he didn’t operate, I would go blind....” (75 year old man)
- “I’m working as a packer in Super Calite and the manager mistreats me. He doesn’t want to give me a contract and I only work for the tips that the clients give me.” (71 year old man)
- “... a bus driver insulted me and physically abused me....” (65 year old man)
- “The tenants where I live bother me constantly; they throw garbage at me and ruin my windows.” (74 year old woman)
- “My neighbor constantly throws his garbage in front of my house and the trees are full of trash and when I call his attention to it, he threatens to hit me.” (67 year old man)
- “...when I go to the doctor he always tells me it’s nothing and he treats me indifferently.” (64 year old woman)

It is evident that the problem of abuse and discrimination exists and that it tends to grow due to prejudice and stereotypes which people have towards the elderly population on the one hand, and because of demographic dynamics and the economic and social situation present in the country on the other. Then these factors interact as forms of ethnocentricity based on myths such as eternal youth which in our society is evident in the market values: production, consumption, strength and competitiveness: all those who do not form part of a productive society are thus devaluated and segmented from that society.

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