

Elderly Abuse by Grandchildren: A Growing Concern

By Viwe Mazwana

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Recently, a shocking video surfaced online and has gone viral. The video shows a young man, Luluvo Ngqaza (19), violently beating an elderly lady later confirmed to be his grandmother. The incident has sparked outrage and concern within families and communities, highlighting a growing issue of grandparents and the elderly being abused by their grandchildren.

The video, which trended over several days, shows teenager Ngqaza repeatedly hitting his elderly grandmother while she tries to defend herself. This disturbing video has brought to light the often-hidden issue of 'grandparents abuse' within families. The act of a grandson assaulting his grandmother has not only shocked the community of Wallacedene, Kraaifontien, in Cape Town, but also stirred national outrage.

Many people have expressed shock, anger, and sadness over the incident. Many are calling for stricter measures to protect the elderly and ensure that such incidents are not repeated. "It's heartbreaking to see our elders being treated this way. We need to educate our young people about respect and care for their grandparents," said Thobeko Siyoni.

"This incident is a wake-up call, we need to provide better support for both the elderly and their caregivers to prevent such abuse," added Asithandile Njongo (33).

The University of Cape Town's July 2023 research highlighted an alarming estimation of the statistics of the abuse of the elderly. It says that one in ten elders (65 years and older) have experienced some level of abuse, with financial and emotional abuse ranked as the most common. The abuse of elderly people and grandparents often happens in their own homes, or while living with family members and in facilities responsible for their well-being.

The abuse of senior citizens is not only physical but ranges from financial exploitation such as taking their money and withholding their South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) cards without their consent, which is in fact illegal, to forcing or pressurising an elderly person to change their will. Other forms include persuading them to grant power of attorney. Neglecting to care for an elderly person is also another form of abuse they suffer, especially when an elderly person experiences physical or mental challenges.

"It is very sad because the issue of elderly abuse is serious, especially [the] grandchildren abusing their grandparents, we are well aware of this issue as it happens in our own homes, but we don't talk about it", said Siyabonga Ntuli.

Family members and the community should watch out for signs such as a lack of personal hygiene or cleanliness, dehydration, being underweight, living in dirty conditions or being unable to manage their medical treatment. For communities to organise themselves and combat this problem immediately, the community and family members must look for signs of why grandchildren or family might abuse their grandparents or the elderly.

Substance abuse is one of the biggest factors leading to junior-to-senior abuse, some family members may be influenced by drugs or alcohol, leading them to show aggressive behaviour at home. Financial stress can also be another cause, with a high unemployment rate especially among young people, not having enough money can also play a huge role. This is because economic hardship can cause frustration and anger, which might then be

taken out on vulnerable family members. Another reason is a lack of respect, personal responsibility amongst young people and improper upbringing could result in grandchildren not valuing their seniors, especially the grandparents whom they may easily take advantage of. Mental health issues can also lead to violent behaviour, making it important to address any underlying problems within our families and communities in general.

To address this problem, the community and families especially, have to take responsibility and raise awareness about elderly abuse by teaching young people about respect and taking care of their elders. Communities must stand together by providing resources and support to families dealing with substance abuse or financial struggles to help relieve some of the pressures that lead to such shocking behaviour.

Communities can do this by establishing projects that keep elderly people empowered so that they are able to report incidents of this nature and talk about these abuses to anyone outside their homes. We should be “encouraging people and family members to report elderly abuse and ensuring effective systems are in place, such as social workers’ intervention and police arrests to protect senior citizens”, said Linda Dlamini, an employee at an undisclosed old age home. Another important measure is to offer mental health services to those who need them, this can prevent violent behaviour from escalating.

The abuse of grandparents and elderly abuse by grandchildren is a serious issue that requires immediate attention. As a community, we must come together to protect our elderly and ensure that they can live in safe homes with dignity. By addressing the root causes of abuse and providing the necessary support, the community can help prevent such tragic incidents in the future. Communities and family members must speak up when we suspect that an elderly person is being abused, test measures to see if abuse is really taking place should be put in place and done in such cases. Families should be encouraged to see such measures as a normal part of a healthy society.

*Siyabonga Ntuli not his real name.

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