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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

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#### LEPROSY AS CAUSE OF DEFORMITY.

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#### Manuscript Info

##### Key words:-

Leprosy, Deformity, factors giving rise to chronic pain, preventive measures.

#### Abstract

Leprosy is a leading cause of permanent physical disability. Leprosy is a chronic infectious disease caused by *Mycobacterium leprae*, an acid-fast, rod-shaped bacillus. WHO, fact sheet on leprosy reveals that the disease mainly affects the skin, the peripheral nerves, mucosa of the upper respiratory tract and the eyes. Leprosy is curable and treatment provided in the early stages averts disability. According to WHO; 1.27 lakhs new cases of leprosy in India during 2013-14 and 46845 new cases of leprosy during 2013-14 were women. Disabilities and stigma resulted in lower education, income, and marriage prospects for all elderly women. To change people beliefs and attitudes about leprosy and disability and to improve access to rehabilitation services action researchers need to take action. Therefore it is very important to learn about these aspects to know the gaps at various stages and to evolve effective strategy to fill those gaps which have a positive influence on the outcome of any preventive measures and improves the life condition of those affected elderly women. The aim of the paper is to find out explain women, the ways in which women experience deformity and disability due to leprosy and to depict social stigma and alienation due to leprosy among elderly women. The method involves data collected through secondary sources and arrived at certain conclusions and made suggestions based on that.

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#### Introduction:-

Gale Encyclopedia of medicine (2006) stated the facts that Leprosy Transmission from human to human is through respiratory droplets. It's also possible to get the bacteria from armadillo and other non-human primates. Leprosy left untreated causes damage to the nerves, limbs, skin and eyes. It is also explained that this damage gives the patient decreased feeling in the areas affected. The decreased feeling can leave the patient unaware that they have injured themselves and they can get secondary infections. These infections result in the loss of body tissues. Further, the fingers and toes can become shortened and deformed due to cartilage being absorbed back into the body. Apart from experiencing illness women also suffer pain due to leprosy

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**Factors giving rise to chronic pain:-**

Leprosy has marked consequences on the affected person and more so for the women who already has lower status in the society. The disease causes chronic pain among the sufferer due to Biological, Psychological and Social factors.

Physiological factors give rise to the difficulties among leprosy affected women include injuries, unhealthy bodies, shortened fingers and toes, disability, due to these conditions the patients become unfit to do certain household works. Women affected with leprosy suffer from Psychological problems such as stress, depression, loss of self-confidence and low esteem. The Social factors consisted of reduced social status, weird look, untouch ability and isolation and loss of respect

**Preventive measures:-**

i) Early detection and regular treatment are the important measures for leprosy prevention. The preventive measures to avert deformities causing disability includes timely diagnosis and treatment before nerve damage occurs, is the most effective way of preventing disability due to leprosy. Multi-drug therapy treatment was available by WHO free of charge to all patients worldwide since 1994.

ii) Awareness Measures include Intensified Health Education and Public Awareness Campaign. Need is there to involve community especially patients in the creative, sustainable awareness generation programs by using community art. People own stories, experiences, and needs should form the basis of the program.

iii) Disability prevention and Medical Rehabilitation and Universal Precautions.

Apart from these factors, women have reported functional limitations and the need for financial help for completing their own education and starting the small-scale business. The older women were more interested in educating their children. Women with a disability gave evidence of the stigma, as a result, social participation restrictions. They suffered from self-stigma as well as stigma from relatives and community members.

A case study in this regard throws the light on the issues about women affected with leprosy. Pre testing of the questionnaire on knowledge attitude and practices of leprosy revealed such a case of Leprosy affected women in Melanur village of Thiruvallur district of Tamilnadu. Where in a family both middle-aged mother of age 45years and her teenage son of 19 years both were found affected with leprosy. She belonged to a Backward Hindu community with poor socio-economic conditions, living in a one room hut. Her husband was the daily wage earner and used to do cattle rearing for the living as the sole earner of the family. The prevailing poor conditions further worsened after the death of her husband. Although her in-laws were staying at the same place but she could not get any support for her family at the time of crisis which rose due to the death of her husband. As a result she joined her son to do labor to earn their living. Due to appearance of patches on their body both mother and son diagnosed with leprosy from the government health staff of the area and the early detection led to early treatment of both of them. However due to appearance of symptoms she started facing discrimination and alienated from the in-laws family. Who stopped interaction with her and involving her in any family function and sharing food or vessel with her. She was left alone with her son to cope with her poor health conditions. Her Co-sister attended a health education program for the sensitizing people towards leprosy as organized by government and that changed her attitude towards leprosy. As a result her behavior changed and she became sympathetic towards her co-sister and started interacting with her. She also received monetary support and help from her in-laws in getting treatment. She and her son both started working in a company after getting cured from the illness. The case depicted prompt treatment; family support and rehabilitation are crucial factors to prevent the disability among the affected people.

A case study of a woman of 70 years revealed the conditions when leprosy remained untreated and lead to deformity in the person affected in the Hanumante village of Villupuram district in Tamilnadu . The woman was a widow with two married children including a daughter and son. She had advanced illness with shortened fingers and toes. She also had wounds in the fingers but remained unattended and without getting treatment. As she could not help her son's family in the household jobs and remained unattended. She had to leave her son's house as she was not taken care there so she shifted to her daughter's house. However she was not facing stigma and discrimination from others in the community as people around were unaware of leprosy and its consequences. This shows the case of lack of awareness causing delay in treatment and led to deformity and became major cause of disability for the elderly women and due to lack of availability of treatment she had received no proper treatment for her problems. In

this way the two case studies highlighted the problem of leprosy affected women and the interventions such as early detection, treatment, health education and its impact on their rehabilitation.

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