

Elder Abuse Information

What is Elder Abuse?

Elder abuse is a term referring to any knowing, intentional, or negligent act by a caregiver or any other person that causes harm or a serious risk of harm to a vulnerable adult. This also includes domestic abuse. Each year hundreds of thousands of older people are abused, neglected, and exploited. Many victims are people who are older, frail, vulnerable and who cannot help themselves and depend on others to meet their most basic needs. Abusers of older adults are both women and men and may be family members, friends, or "trusted others". Statistics show that 1 in 10 elderly adults will be a victim of abuse. When a diagnosis of any form of dementia the numbers are a staggering 1 in 5 elderly will be a victim of abuse.

Elder Abuse is Rarely Reported

There are many obstacles in determining an accurate number of elder abuse victims each year. The main reason is the fact that elder abuse is rarely reported. Estimates show that only 1 in 14 incidents of elder abuse are reported to authorities. The reasons for this include:

Fear

Fear of retaliation by the abuser.

Fear of not being believed.

Fear of being institutionalized, removed from their home or separated from family and familiar things.

Fear of the criminal justice system.

Fear of loneliness.

Protect the Abuser

Adult children and caregivers are often the abusers and because of the guilt and shame in being abused by one's own child or by a trusted caregiver, the abuse is not reported.

Social Isolation

An isolated older victim may not know where or how to seek help. Elders often live alone or with family members and do not interact with others in the community. Abusers may even refuse to give or transport the elderly to appointments, faith services or social gatherings.

Self-Blame/Denial

Many victims do not seek help because they either blame themselves for the abuse or they tolerate and accept the abuse.

Inability to Report

Mental impairments: Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia may cause memory loss

and impair the ability to communicate effectively.

Physical impairments may affect the victim's ability to get to the phone or leave the home to report abuse or a stroke may affect their ability to communicate.

Types of Elder Abuse and Warning Signs:

- **Sexual Abuse** - non-consensual sexual contact of any kind. Warning signs: unexplained genital infections or sexually transmitted diseases, torn or bloody underclothes, difficulty walking or sitting, victim is withdrawn, fears touching, shameful, anxious.
- **Neglect/Self neglect** - the failure by those responsible, or victim themselves, to provide food, shelter, health care, or protection for a vulnerable elder. Warning signs: bed sores, dehydration, malnutrition, poor hygiene, unsanitary/unsafe living conditions, improper use of medication; victim appears detached, unresponsive, helpless.
- **Exploitation** - the illegal taking, misuse, or concealment of funds, property, or assets of a senior for someone else's benefit. Warning signs: unexplained or sudden inability to pay bills, unexplained or sudden withdrawal of money from accounts, disparity between assets and living conditions, unusual interest by family member in an elder's assets, changes in the elder's will/other documents, improper use of guardianship, conservatorship or power of attorney.
- **Emotional Abuse** - inflicting mental pain, anguish, or distress on an elder person through verbal or nonverbal acts, e.g. humiliating, intimidating, threatening or hiding assistance devices like eyeglasses, walkers etc.. Warning signs: fearful, eating disorders, self-medication with alcohol or prescription medications, depression, agitation, withdrawn, anger, low self-esteem.
- **Abandonment** - desertion of a vulnerable elder by anyone who has assumed the responsibility for care or custody of that person.

Characteristics of Victims

- Majority are 75 years old or older
- Two-thirds are female.
- Have one or more physical or mental impairments.
- Often widowed or divorced and socially isolated.
- Usually live with the abuser.

Characteristics of the Abusers

- 90 percent of abusers are known to the victim.
- More than two-thirds are relatives of the victim.
- May be socially isolated, possibly substance abusers or persons with poor employment history.
- May be forced to provide care and are unprepared for the responsibility and related stress.
- May be financially or emotionally dependent on the elder.

How to Report Elder Abuse

Report any suspected abuse to the Spring Lake Park Police Department by calling 9-1-1, or the Minnesota Adult Abuse Reporting Center at 844-880-1574. Help us protect the elderly and give them the honor and respect they deserve.

Other Minnesota Agencies Involved in Elder Abuse Investigation

- Anoka County Adult Protection: 763-323-5313
- Minnesota Department of Human Services: 651-431-2000
- Anoka County Attorney: 763-323-5550

Additional Resources for information on Elder Abuse

- Administration on Aging (<https://www.usa.gov/federal-agencies/administration-on-aging>)
- National Council for Aging Care (<http://www.aginginplace.org/guide-to-recognizing-elder-abuse/>)
- National Committee to Prevent Elder Abuse (NCPEA) (www.preventelderabuse.org)
- American Association of Retired Persons (www.aarp.org)
- National Center for Victims of Crime (NCVC) (www.ncvc.org)
- Alexandra House 763-780-2330

