

Elder Victimization[®]

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Definition of Elder Abuse

Definitions of elder abuse differ depending on the field in which it is being referenced. Law enforcement agencies differ in their definitions and response, as one state's statutory definition may be different from another's. Social workers, psychologists and other medical practitioners all have their own definitions on which their response protocols are based.

Generally, elder abuse includes, among others, physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse. Neglect and abandonment of an older person is also included.

Anyone can abuse an older person. As that person becomes older with fewer resources and diminishing physical and mental capacity, the easier it is to be a victim of abuse.

Abusers can be a family member, friend, caregiver, nurse, even an attorney, doctor, financial advisor or other trusted professional. Often two or more types of abuse are perpetrated simultaneously.

Caregivers can be family members, home health aides, live-in assistants and nurses. Service providing agencies do not monitor their employees. They prefer to look the other way to prevent their companies from appearing to be culpable.

In elder abuse cases, there usually exists a relationship of trust between the victim and the abuser. An adult child or grandchild are often the abusers but any family member, boyfriend or girlfriend can abuse. Often the abuser is in need of money from being unemployed, addicted to alcohol, drugs or gambling, and/or mentally ill. The abuser can simply be lazy. Often the abuser feels entitled to the victim's money or possessions.

Wealthy persons can also be the abuser. This may be the case in a sibling dispute where the parent is used as a weapon to attack the other sibling.

Intimate partner violence also occurs in older couples. Approximately 3 percent of victims of domestic violence are elderly.

Abuse always occurs when there are no witnesses.
Be the elder victim's investigator.

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A Look at Elder Abuse in the United States

In 2009, over 38 million persons age 65 or older were victims of non-fatal violent crime. Non-fatal violent crimes include rape, sexual assault, robbery, simple and aggravated assault. Murder and manslaughter are not included in this number. (U.S. Dept. of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Criminal Victimization, 2009*).

From 2003-2007, an average of over 23 million households of persons age 65 or over were victims of burglary. In almost 30 percent of these cases, the victim knew the offender.

(U.S. Dept. of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Victimization During Household Burglary, 2010*).

In 2005, 633 people age 65 or older were murdered.

Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Crime in the United States, 2005: Expanded Homicide Data, Table 2," (Washington, DC: FBI, 2006)

In 2004, African Americans constituted 21 percent of elder maltreatment victims, despite representing 8 percent of all Americans age 65 or older.

Pamela B. Teaster et al., "The 2004 Survey of State Adult Protective Services: Abuse of Adults 60 Years of Age and Older," (Washington, DC: National Center on Elder Abuse, 2006), Page 19

The most recent survey of adult protective services found that 191,908 reports of elder abuse and neglect of people age 60 and older were substantiated in 2004.

Pamela B. Teaster, "The 2004 Survey of State Adult Protective Services: Abuse of Adults 60 Years of Age and Older," Page 5

In 2004, more than half of alleged perpetrators of elder abuse were women.

Pamela B. Teaster, "The 2004 Survey of State Adult Protective Services: Abuse of Adults 60 Years of Age and Older," Page 22

Of the alleged perpetrators of elder abuse in 2004, 33 percent were adult children, 22 percent were other family members, 11 percent were spouses or intimate partners, and 16 percent had an unknown relationship to the victim.

Pamela B. Teaster, "The 2004 Survey of State Adult Protective Services: Abuse of Adults 60 Years of Age and Older," Page 20

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Types of Elder Abuse

Elder abuse is generally ongoing and systematic. One or more of the following may and often do occur simultaneously.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is causing physical pain or injury. Among other acts, this includes hitting, slapping, shoving, cutting, burning, forcibly restraining.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is any non-consensual sexual contact or act. This includes sexual contact with a person who is incapable of giving consent. Rape, sodomy, coerced nudity, etc. are included.

Neglect

Whether by a conscious decision not to provide necessary care or any failure to carry out a care giving responsibility, the victim is left without necessary care. Examples of neglect include but are not limited to maintaining the person in soiled clothing or not providing food, medicine, glasses, dentures, mobility devices or prosthetics. Neglect can include abandonment.

Passive Neglect

Passive neglect is unintentional or thoughtlessly not providing for the care of the individual. The intent of the caregiver may not be to harm the individual. This could be an elderly spouse who is incapable of providing for the loved one and who is without the resources to seek assistance outside the home. This could be well-meaning family members who call the individual and are told that everything is all right but do not go over the house to look in on the elderly individual.

Active Neglect

Active neglect is the intentional and willful failure to provide for the elder in need. This could be to hasten death for an inheritance or to bring distress to the individual as a way of punishing or “getting back.”

Psychological/Emotional Abuse

Mental pain caused by name calling, insulting, ignoring, threatening, isolating, pitting family members against one another, demeaning, and/or controlling behavior. Changing routines in an older person, which include changing schedules, phone numbers, methods of communications, and activities cause disorientation and worry. Almost any activity that induces fear or a sense of insecurity is abusive.

Financial Exploitation

Financial exploitation is the unauthorized, coerced, illegal or improper use of the money, assets or belongings of an older individual for personal gain or profit. This includes the misuse of a Power of Attorney and other legal controlling documents such as bank accounts and credit cards.

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Signs of Elder Abuse

It is difficult to determine abuse, especially when the victim is unable to report the abuse. Inability to report abuse can be for numerous reasons. These reasons include but are not limited to:

1. Not knowing that there is help available,
2. Not defining what is happening as abuse.
3. Fear of the abuser.
4. Love for the abuser.
5. Incapacity due to emotional issues, trauma, dementia, or Alzheimer's.
6. The abuse being hidden as in financial abuse or the theft of belongings.
7. Physical attributes such as loss of sight, hearing or voice.
8. No one taking an interest.
9. Interested parties not knowing what to look for.
10. The victims being too prideful to suggest they cannot take care of themselves.

Signs of Abuse in the Elderly Victim

1. Inadequately explained bruises, abrasions, burns, welts or cuts.
2. Dehydration or malnutrition
3. Overly medicated or sedated
4. Unusual confinement or out of routine location in home such as closed off in a room or tethered to a chair.
5. Unclean or lack of grooming, soiled or odors.
6. Going quiet in the presence of a caretaker. Using terms such as, "I am not allowed to talk about that." Showing nervousness or fear when asked routine questions.
7. Undue shame, fear or embarrassment.

Signs of Abuse in the Home of the Elderly Victim

1. Lack of food in the home
2. Lack of heat, air conditioning or electricity.
3. Internal or external areas of the home in disrepair.
4. Malnourished pet.
5. Odors from feces, urine or decaying food.
6. Infestations of bugs and other pests.
7. Responsibilities of home care aide not being fulfilled.
8. Family automobile not present at home when victim is home.
9. Locks changed.
10. Phone disconnected or number changed.
11. Email or other forms of communication changed or disconnected.
12. Utility and other bills not paid.

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Signs of Financial Abuse of the Elderly Victim

1. Deviations in financial habits such as withdrawals, loans and new credit cards.
2. Unpaid bills, especially when the victim can afford to pay or has a history of responsible bill paying.
3. Personal and financial documents missing or moved to another location.
4. Addresses changed on financial documents inc. credit card and bank statements.
5. Victim unaware of personal and household finances including income.
6. Gifts to caregivers.
7. Caregiver not spending designated money on victim.
8. Missing checks or checks cleared out of order.
9. Checks made payable to "Cash".
10. Misuse of a Power of Attorney or other guiding documents.

Types of Financial Abuses of the Elderly Victim

1. Fraud committed by strangers

Prizes and sweepstakes
Investments
Charities and non-profits
Home repairs
Automobile repairs
General household vendors such as Charter Cable
Loans and mortgages
Health funeral, life and other insurances
Health remedies
Travel scams and come-ons
Confidence games
Phone scams
Internet scams (phishing, Nigerian, friend in need, etc.)
Mail fraud
Identity theft
Mailbox pilfering
In-home burglary and theft
Common business names

2. Financial exploitation by relatives and caregivers

Many of the issues in the above section
Joint bank accounts
Deed and title transfers
Power of attorney and durable power of attorney
Living wills and trusts
Medicare Fraud
Assisted living and nursing home manipulation

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