

Elder Abuse

Deia Starr, Extension Intern

Carolyn Wilken, Ph.D.
Aging and Healthcare Specialist

Department of Human Development and Family Studies

Primary Objective

The primary purpose of this program is to educate participants of the growing problem of elder abuse and to inform them of the possible risk factors associated with abusers and abusees.

Forms of Elder Abuse

Currently there does not seem to be a universally agreed upon definition of elder abuse. The National Aging Resource Center on Elder Abuse has identified three basic categories of elder abuse:

1. domestic elder abuse
2. institutional elder abuse
3. self-abuse or self-neglect

Other common forms of abuse include: physical abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, caregiver neglect, financial

exploitation or material abuse, and sexual abuse.

Domestic elder abuse: Occurs in the victim's home and is most frequently initiated by the elder's family. Adult children, spouses, grandchildren, siblings, and other relatives often commit abuse.

Institutional elder abuse: Most frequently occurs at the hands of a paid caregiver in a residential care facility, such as a nursing home, group home, foster home, or board and care facilities.

Self-abuse or self-neglect: May occur in the elder's home or in an institution. This abuse includes a person's failure to provide himself/herself with the necessities of life such as food, clothing, shelter, adequate medication, and reasonable financial management.

Physical abuse: Nonaccidental use of physical force which results in bodily injury, pain, or impairment.

Psychological/emotional abuse: Willful infliction of mental or emotional anguish by threat, humiliation, intimidation, or other verbal or nonverbal abusive conduct.

Caregiver neglect: Intentional or unintentional failure by a caregiver to fulfill a caretaking obligation necessary to maintain an elderly person's well-being.

Financial exploitation or material abuse: Unauthorized use of funds, property, or any resource of an older person.

Sexual abuse: Nonconsensual sexual contacts of any kind with an older person.



Current Statistics

Elder abuse is not a new topic in today's world, however there has been an increase in concern recently about the issue. Recent studies have suggested that as many as 1 to 2 million individuals may be victims of elder abuse each year. The National Aging Resource Center on Elder Abuse (NARCEA) estimated that 2 million reportable cases of elder abuse occurred in 1988 in domestic settings. The NARCEA also concluded a study of various kinds of elder abuse.

The NARCEA data does not include self-neglect which aging professionals report seeing frequently. States indicated that between 40 and 50 percent of the elder maltreatment reports generally result in self-neglect cases.

The percentage of persons over the age of sixty-five years has increased dramatically in this century. The segment of

elderly over eighty-five years is also growing, with this being the most significant growth group in America today. The concerns now faced by the elderly are likely to increase as the proportion of older people in society continues to grow.

With advancing age there is also an increase in the percentage of elderly who need help in their daily lives. Almost half of those aged eighty-five and over require assistance in bathing, cooking, or performing personal chores.

Typically this assistance is provided in the home by the person's spouse, adult child, other family member, or trusted friend. Unfortunately, many dependent elderly become the victims of abuse, neglect, or exploitation by the very people entrusted with their care.

Though these abuses can occur in any setting, the evidence suggests that elder abuse is most

often a family issue, with the over-whelming proportion of cases occurring in the home. The problem often remains hidden and unresolved because people won't report abuse by family members.

Only one out of six cases are reported, according to state and national findings. Family members often do not report abuse because of fear or shame. Of the cases reported to the Social Rehabilitation Services in 1986, only 13.6 percent were reported by family members.

Elder Abuse and Kansas Law

In 1989, the Kansas legislature passed a law (HB2108) relating to abuse, neglect, and exploitation of adults. The law:

- defines adult abuse
- mandates reports by certain persons
- directs investigations

NARCEA Data

Based on 1988 data from twenty-four states in the U.S., the findings of the NARCEA study included the following:

<i>Abuse type</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Caregiver neglect	37.2%
Physical abuse	26.3
Financial exploitation	20.0
Emotional abuse	11.0
All other types	2.8
Sexual abuse	1.6
Unknown	1.1

Common Elder Abuse Scenarios

Elder abuse is a topic that many people are not aware of or do not want to face. Although society as a whole neglects to address this issue, elder abuse is very real among all classes, races, and ethnic groups. The following scenarios will introduce you to elder abuse:

- In Texas, an alcoholic man in his 50s was beating up his alcoholic mother in her 70s. A social worker found her in bed, unable to move because of a neck injury, with bruises on her wrist. She admitted that her son did it but refused to press charges. The victim was confused, disoriented, and incompetent.
- An Indiana woman was admitted to a local nursing home when her daughter (her caregiver) was hospitalized. Once in the nursing home, the woman discovered her daughter and son-in-law had emptied her bank accounts and were attempting to sell off her property. The woman sought and received a court-appointed guardian.

- provides for protective services

According to Kansas Law (HB2108), abuse means:

- intentional infliction of injury
- unreasonable confinement
- financial abuse
- cruel punishment
- neglect by omission or deprivation of services by others

This law is a good start to prevent elder abuse problems but the lack of a common definition creates a number of problems.

Self-Neglect Causes Great Concern

The most controversial form of elder abuse is self-neglect. Many professionals question whether a person who is competent but is neglecting personal health and safety even suffers abuse requiring intervention of service providers.

Most agree intervention is necessary if the individual is incapable or unable to care for his/her physical needs or financial affairs. The inability for these individuals to function on their own in turn fosters such problems as malnutrition, poor personal hygiene, and unhealthy or unsafe living conditions.

Summary

Unfortunately, the crisis of elder abuse cannot be resolved by lawmakers. Individual citizens, family, professional caregivers, and all others who come into contact with older adults must be part of the solution.

We must all become informed about the various types of abuse, signs and symptoms of abuse, and our reporting responsibilities.

References

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), *Domestic Mistreatment of the Elderly: Towards Prevention*. Criminal Justice Services Program Department.

Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, *What Are Some Possible Indicators of Adult Abuse?* Elder Law Reform, Vol.I, No.6, (Nov./Dec. 1989).

Kosberg, Jordan I. *Preventing Elder Abuse: Identification of High Risk Factors Prior to Placement Decisions*. The Gerontological Society of America, Vol.28, No.I, (1988), pp.43-49.

South Central Kansas Area Agency on Aging, *Adult Abuse Prevention*.

For More Information

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)

*What About Me? Domestic Mistreatment of the Elderly:
Some DOs and DON'Ts*

Write: American Association of Retired Persons,
Health Advocacy Services, Long-Term Care,
601 E. Street N.W., Washington, DC 20049

Domestic Mistreatment of the Elderly: Towards Prevention

Write: Criminal Justice Services, Program Department,
1909 K Street N.W., Washington, DC 20049

Attorney General

*Information for Victims of Crime on the Kansas Program
for Compensation*

Write: Crime Victims Compensation Board, 700 S.W. Jackson,
Jayhawk Tower, Suite 400, Topeka, KS 66603-3741
913-296-2359

Kansas Department on Aging (KDOA)

KDOA Legal Guide with Family Legal and Financial Record

Write: Kansas Department on Aging, Docking State Office
Building, 150-S, 915 S.W. Harrison, Topeka, KS 66612-1500
800-432-3535

Kansans for Improvement of Nursing Homes (KINH)

Consumers Guide to Kansas Nursing Homes

Write: Kansans for Improvement of Nursing Homes,
913 Tennessee, #2, Lawrence, KS 66044
913-842-3088

Kansas Department of Social Rehabilitation Services (SRS)

*What Are Some Possible Indicators of Adult Abuse
SRS, Adult Abuse, and You*

Write: Kansas Department of Social Rehabilitation Services,
1901 Delaware, P.O. Box 590, Lawrence, KS 66044-0590
913-832-3700



Cooperative Extension Service, Manhattan, Kansas

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, as amended. Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts, and U.S. Department of Agriculture Cooperating, Richard D. Wootton, Associate Director. All educational programs and materials available without discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability.

August 1994

File Code: Human Development and Family Relations-5