

ABUSE IN LATER LIFE

WHY IT MATTERS

The gravity of abuse against individuals in later life is devastating and results in great personal losses, including the loss of independence, life savings, homes, dignity, health, and security.¹ Elder abuse is a problem that has long remained invisible, and is defined as any knowing, intentional, or negligent act by a caregiver or any other person that harms or poses a serious risk of harm to an older adult. Forms of abuse in later life can be physical, psychological, sexual, emotional, verbal, or financial and are often present as a combination of one or more types of abuse.²

WHAT IS ABUSE IN LATER LIFE?

- Every year, an estimated 2.1 million older Americans are victims of physical, psychological, and other forms of abuse and neglect.⁵
- 1 out of every 14 cases of elder abuse is reported to authorities.⁶
- Victims of abuse in later life are typically 50 years of age and older and are primarily women.²
- In approximately 90% of cases, perpetrators of abuse in later life are family members.⁴
- Perpetrators can be spouses, partners, adult children and grandchildren, other family members, caregivers or other individuals with ongoing, lasting relationships with the victim.²

DID YOU KNOW?

- Studies show that up to 10% of the elderly population have been abused.⁷
- Research suggests that elders who have been abused are more likely to die earlier than those not living with abuse, even in the absence of chronic or life-threatening conditions.⁴
- Several studies show that the rates of elder abuse rise as the age of the victim rises.⁸
- Victims of elder abuse can include physically and mentally healthy adults.⁸
- Studies show that healthy older women suffer abuse at rates comparable to, or even higher than those of younger women.⁹
- About 48% of substantiated cases of abuse involve older adults who are not physically able to care for themselves.¹⁰

SEXUAL ABUSE

- Elder sexual abuse consists of non-consensual sexual contact of any kind including non-physical contact such as forced viewing of pornography, forced listening of sexual accounts, and sexual exploitation.¹¹
- Perpetrators of elder sexual abuse are likely to be male caregivers.¹²
- Victims of elder sexual abuse are most often females over 70 years of age who are totally dependent or functioning at a low level.¹²
- Older victims suffer more genital trauma from sexual assault than younger victims.¹²
- Older victims are less likely to report sexual assault than younger victims.¹²

FINANCIAL ABUSE

The elderly can fall victim to financial abuse when family members or others engage in the illegal, improper use and/or mismanagement of money, property or assets.¹³

Economically abusive behaviors against the elderly might include:

- Coercing or deceiving an elder into signing documents such as wills and contracts.¹³
- Denying services or medical care to conserve funds.¹⁴
- Taking advantage of debilitating conditions such as Alzheimer's or dementia to take control of money or financial decisions.¹⁵
- Wrongful seizure of an elder individual's savings, investments, car, home or identity.¹⁶
- Promising lifelong care in exchange for money or property, and not following through on that promise.¹⁴
- Forcing the elder to part with resources or sign over property.¹⁷
- Adding one's name to an account under the guise of helping the victim with their financial affairs.¹⁷

PHYSICAL ABUSE¹⁸

Physical abuse involves physical contact or force intended to cause injury, pain, or impairment to the victim. It includes battery, assault, and inappropriate restraint.

Indicators (signs or clues) that abuse occurred:

- Broken bones, fractures, sprains, and dislocations
- Burns from cigarettes, hot water, and appliances
- Abrasions on arms, legs, or torso resembling rope or restraints
- Bruises, including bilateral and “wrap around” bruises
- Unexplained injuries or explanations that do not “fit”
- History of similar injuries and numerous or suspicious hospital visits
- Victims are taken to many different medical centers to prevent the medical personnel from noticing a pattern of abuse
- Delay between onset of injury and seeking medical attention; injuries that have not received proper care
- Neglect injuries from bedridden adults

CHALLENGES

- Elderly individuals face unique barriers to reporting domestic violence such as fear of loneliness, feelings of shame, fear of being institutionalized, fear of being disbelieved and separation from family.¹⁹
- There is inadequate public awareness, coordination among health care systems, social service and justice systems in regards to intervening and preventing elder abuse.²⁰
- Only 2% of federal funds spent on abuse and neglect go to elder abuse, and less than 1% of research funds for issues of aging go to elder abuse research.²
- Dependent adults may be physically unable to report abuse or may rely on their abuser for communication or transportation.
- There is a lack of protocol and training of personnel when assessing the mental capacity of an elder.

IF YOU NEED HELP

For more info or to get help,
call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at
1-800-799-SAFE or visit www.ndvh.org.

To report a case of elder abuse, contact the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116. If you can provide the address and zip code of the person being abused, the Eldercare Locator will refer you to the appropriate agency to report the abuse.

SOURCES

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NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



The Public Policy Office of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) is a national leader in the effort to create and influence Federal legislation that positively affects the lives of domestic violence victims and children. We work closely with advocates at the local, state and national level to identify the issues facing domestic violence victims, their children and the people who serve them and to develop a legislative agenda to address these issues. NCADV welcomes you to join us in our effort to end domestic violence.