

Addressing the Psychological Impact of Elder Mistreatment Through a Community-Based Training and Treatment Intervention

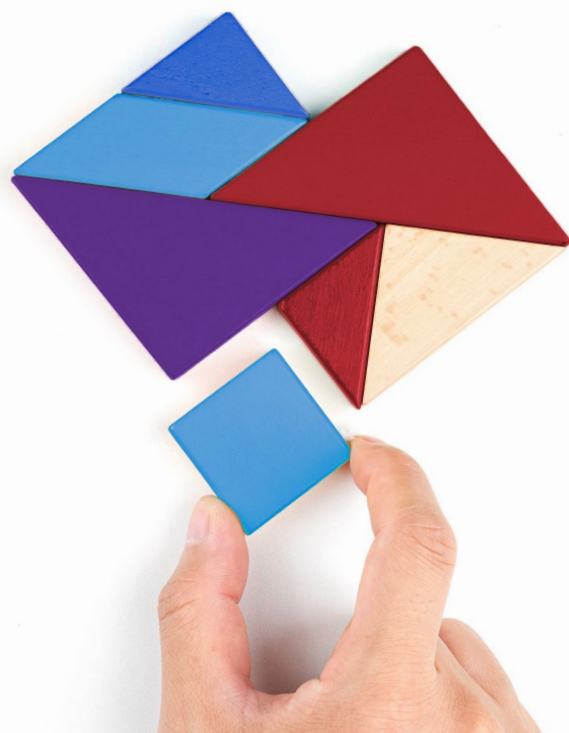
Summary

Elder mistreatment exposes older adults to adverse physical, psychological, and social impacts. Psychological correlates of abuse include increased risk of depression, suicidal ideation, stress, anxiety, and mortality. Between 14% to 20% of abused elders report significant mental health symptoms, but over 65% of those experiencing symptoms of depression or anxiety do not receive treatment. Older people at greatest risk, including those who are socially isolated and less educated, are least likely to pursue mental health services. Additional barriers to accessing resources include the stigma of abuse, lack of transportation, inadequate caregiving support, and misapprehension of available treatment options. Melba Hernandez-Tejada and colleagues designed and assessed an integrated, community-based provider training and treatment program to help allay elder depression, anxiety, social isolation, and post-traumatic stress following abuse.¹

Method

The program design is comprised of three components:

1. Identify healthcare providers, advocates, and community stakeholders most likely to be in contact with elder abuse victims
2. Train the providers, advocates, and community stakeholders in elder abuse detection, response, and community referrals; and
3. Provide best practice mental health assessment and treatment, in-person or through telehealth visits, to identified and potential victims of abuse referred by community partners or initiated through self-referral.



Results

- From January 2018 through March 2020, more than 1600 healthcare providers received training
- From July 2018 through December 2019, 349 older adults received services
- 40% of program referrals came from community health providers
- Program participation appeared to be associated with significant reductions in depression and social isolation
- Treatment was useful in addressing symptoms of anxiety, including those related to posttraumatic stress disorder
- Participants experienced increased positive perceptions of their quality of life

Key Takeaways

- Training community members to identify elder abuse was effective in increasing access to treatment for older adults who are at greatest risk of abuse but are less likely to pursue mental health services
- Providing the option of telehealth appointments (with provided telehealth devices and/or training in the relevant devices), in addition to in-person appointments, increased the reach of the best-practice mental health treatment program as telehealth helps to eliminate barriers to care such as economic constraints, health issues, and/or lack of transportation
- Community engagement efforts in conjunction with scheduled appointments further decreased risk factors of elder abuse due to the increased social connection between older adults

Implications for Practice

Future practice efforts to diminish the psychological impact of elder abuse may focus on increasing access to community-based mental health services and mitigating barriers to resource provision. Training older adults in the use of telehealth technologies and equipping them with devices can enhance connectedness to healthcare and increase socialization. Research is needed to assess the efficacy of telehealth, technological modalities, and interventions to prevent abuse and reduce harms for older adults who have experienced abuse.



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