

An Introduction to Elder Abuse:

Communities United in Faith
and Committed to Neighbors

Learning Objectives

By the end of this presentation you will be able to:

- ▶ Define elder abuse and recognize examples of abuse;
- ▶ Identify risk factors that may make individuals more vulnerable to victimization;
- ▶ Take action to identify resources and help neighbors in your own faith community.

Aging Communities

- ▶ The Administration on Aging expects that by 2030, the U.S. population over age 65 will have doubled from 2000, with older adults representing 19% of the population.
- ▶ One in 10 adults over the age of 60 are victims of elder abuse, according to the National Institute of Justice.

Elder Abuse Underreported

- ▶ For every case of elder abuse that comes to the attention of a responsible entity, another 23 cases never come to light.*

* *New York State Elder Abuse Prevalence Study Final Report, Lifespan, Weill Cornell Medical Center, New York City Department for the Aging. May 2011.*

Definition of Elder Abuse

- ▶ Physical, sexual, psychological or spiritual abuse as well as neglect, abandonment and financial exploitation of an older person by another person or entity
- ▶ That occurs in any setting (e.g. home, community or facility)
- ▶ Either
 - In a relationship where there is an expectation of trust, and/or
 - When an older person is targeted based on age or disability.

See: The Elder Justice Roadmap Project Report: Appendix A
"Definition of Elder Abuse," National Center on Elder Abuse, 2015.

Case Study Vignettes

- ▶ Yusuf, Tom and Ahmed
- ▶ Miriam, James and William
- ▶ Luisa and Christine

Co-Occurrence of Abuse:

Multiple forms of elder abuse often occur at the same time.

Elder Abuse Includes:

- ▶ Physical, sexual, psychological and spiritual abuse
- ▶ Neglect and abandonment
- ▶ Financial exploitation

Physical abuse can be:

- ▶ Hitting, slapping, pushing, shaking, kicking or burning (and other injuries)
- ▶ Inappropriate use of drugs or restraints
- ▶ Force feeding
- ▶ Strangulation or suffocation

Sexual abuse can be:

- ▶ Nonconsensual sexual contact of any kind, meaning
 - Any unwanted sexual contact, or
 - Sexual contact with a person who is unable to give consent

Psychological abuse can be:

- ▶ Infliction of anguish, pain or distress through verbal or nonverbal acts
- ▶ Systematic perpetration of malicious and explicit non-physical acts against a victim
- ▶ Making threats

Spiritual abuse can be:

- ▶ Preventing person from participating in spiritual community, event or ceremony
- ▶ Ceremonial items taken from victim
- ▶ Belittling or ridiculing a person because of their spiritual belief (or using a person's spiritual belief as an excuse to engage in other abusive behaviors)

Neglect can be:

- ▶ The deliberate or negligent isolation of a person
- ▶ The refusal or failure to fulfill any part of a person's obligations or duties to an elder
 - Including fiduciary responsibilities

Abandonment can be:

- ▶ The desertion of an elderly person by an individual who has assumed responsibility for providing care for the elder, and/or
- ▶ The desertion of an elderly person by an individual who has physical custody of that person

Financial exploitation can be:

- ▶ The illegal or improper use of an elder's funds, property or assets including
 - Theft or fraud, and/or
 - Fiduciary misconduct or wrongdoing (such as the misuse of a Power of Attorney document; or inappropriate action by a Conservator)

Related phenomena are:

- ▶ Abuse in later life (term often used by domestic violence and sexual assault advocates when victims are elders or over the age of 50)
- ▶ Abuse of vulnerable adult (some state statutes and Adult Protective Service units use this language)
- ▶ All crimes against persons age 60 or older (criminal justice)
- ▶ Self-neglect (living without basic needs and refusing help)

Older victims in our communities are...

...diverse in many ways:

- ▶ Culturally
- ▶ Ethnically
- ▶ Linguistically
- ▶ As to gender
- ▶ As to social status (class)
- ▶ As to cognitive ability
- ▶ As to physical ability
- ▶ As to living arrangements

Characteristics of abusers

Abusers are often individuals that older victims know and trust or hope to trust:

- ▶ Family members
- ▶ Spouses or partners
- ▶ Caregivers
- ▶ Persons in positions of authority (including substitute decision makers, fiduciaries, “model citizens” or clergy members)

However, some abusers are strangers to victims.

The negative effects of abuse

The experience of elder abuse of any kind can result in:

- ▶ **Distress:** significantly higher levels of psychological distress and lower perceived self-efficacy (ability to manage) than other older adults (Comijs, et al., 1999; Dong, 2005)
- ▶ **Health:** Bone or joint problems, digestive problems, depression or anxiety, chronic pain, high blood pressure, heart problems (Dyer, et al., 2000; Stein & Barret-Connor, 2000)
- ▶ **Mortality:** Rates of premature death up to 300% higher than for non-abused people (Lachs, et al., 1998; National Academies, 2010)

Particular risk factors and challenges to consider:

- ▶ Cultural differences and sensitivity
 - Communities of all kinds are increasingly multicultural
- ▶ Availability of support resources and social services
 - Presence of in-person advocates and crisis services
- ▶ Caregiver stress
 - Fewer professional caregivers with larger caseloads
 - Challenges for family caregivers balancing intergenerational caregiving responsibilities

Particular risk factors and challenges to consider:

- ▶ Isolation
 - Geographic
 - Social
- ▶ Privacy
 - Close-knit communities and long-standing relationships can be a double-edged sword
- ▶ Economic Stressors
 - Limited financial resources and opportunities are risk factors for abuse

Despite these challenges, we know victims want abuse to end

Nonetheless, elder victims may maintain a relationship with an abuser because of:

- ▶ Hope
 - That their situation will improve
- ▶ Fear
 - Of retaliation; facility placement; health complications; loss of economic resources, loss of relationship with relative(s)
- ▶ Love
 - Abuser may be child or other relative; close friend; or caregiver

Responding to Elder Abuse

The special strengths of faith communities include:

- ▶ Social connectedness; long and close relationships within communities
- ▶ Creative responses to (and experience with) challenges and risk factors
- ▶ Experience leveraging variety of networks for support (official and unofficial; professional and non-professional)

Responding to Elder Abuse

What are some strengths particular to your community?

- ▶ Study groups?
- ▶ Social groups?
- ▶ Health resources?
- ▶ Volunteer opportunities?
- ▶ Supportive services such as home visitation or meal delivery?

Responding to Elder Abuse

Special considerations in faith communities:

- ▶ Shared faith experience can be a special comfort to a victim of abuse
- ▶ Responses must support safety
 - Violence breaks the marriage covenant, and is unacceptable within any relationship or interaction
 - God does not want any person to remain in a dangerous situation or to be victimized
- ▶ Members of faith communities in which an abuse victim and an abuser participate must be especially sensitive to privacy

Victim Safety

All responses and interventions must consider and prioritize victim safety.

Report and Refer

Report:	Refer:
9-1-1 or law enforcement (life threatening or possible crime)	Domestic violence or sexual assault organization
Adult Protective Services	Aging network agency
Licensing Board (if abuse occurs in facility)	Ombudsman (if abuse occurs in facility)

Local Resources and Contacts

Consider creating a slide that contains resources specific to your local area, your congregation or faith community.

Connections Help Us Help Others

Connections with older adults in our community will assist us in identifying and intervening. We support connectedness by:

- ▶ Listening to older adults or others discussing the experience or suspicion of abuse,
- ▶ Not discounting an individual's claim simply because of a cognitive impairment or forgetfulness,
- ▶ Watching for indicators of abuse and behavior changes; and
- ▶ Asking questions!

Consider asking:

- ▶ Do you feel safe? Is anyone hurting you or scaring you?
- ▶ Is anyone asking you to do things that you do not understand or that make you feel uncomfortable?
- ▶ Has anyone taken things that belong to you without asking, or without your approval?
- ▶ Do you rely on anyone else for help? What kind of help? Does that person ever fail to help you?

Ask privately in an area where you will not be overheard.

Consider asking:

- ▶ Do you regularly see friends and family? When is the last time you saw them?
- ▶ Do friends and family visit you?
- ▶ Are you being disrespected? In what way?
- ▶ Are you concerned about your finances?
- ▶ Are you afraid of anyone in your life?

Ask privately in an area where you will not be overheard.

Questions and conversation support connections...

And connections support our community members!

Remember, trust takes time. You may need to be patient (or persistent) to start and maintain a conversation.

Any questions or observations about how to connect with older community members who may appreciate our help?

Stand for Dignity and Respect

- ▶ Speak out for justice.
- ▶ Collaborate with other agencies and disciplines.
- ▶ Educate the public, other professionals and policy makers.
- ▶ Initiate changes in policy and protocols.
- ▶ Promote resources for victim services.

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For more information, visit:

ncea.aoa.gov



elderjusticemn.org



For other informative resources developed for faith communities such as toolkits, as well as partnership and outreach guides, please visit the following websites:

Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence and Elder Abuse:

www.interfaithpartners.org

and/or

National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life:

<http://www.ncall.us>

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