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Inside This Issue:

Research Highlight: Considering the Role of Clergy in Elder Abuse Response [1](#)

Anatomy of a Grassroots Public Awareness Effort: Soroptimist International of Indian Rock, Pennsylvania Elder Abuse Awareness Initiative [3](#)

Ideas for Public Awareness Activities [5](#)

Call for Promising Practices [5](#)

Call for Presentations [5](#)

Office of Victims of Crime Releases New Video Series [5](#)

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month [6](#)

CANE Highlights of Elder Abuse Research and Literature [6](#)

Editorial Note [8](#)

Calendar of Events [8](#)

Credits [10](#)

Research Highlight: Considering the Role of Clergy in Elder Abuse Response

Years ago, John Rudnick was attending a multidisciplinary continuing education presentation on long-term healthcare issues that touched on the subject of elder mistreatment. Despite considerable experience in healthcare management services, he was shocked to realize how unaware he was of the actual and potential threat of elder abuse.

“I realized how honestly ignorant I was on these issues, and I was drawn to learn more about it,” stated Dr. Rudnick, currently administrator of Holy Family Home in Melbourne, Kentucky. Due to his background as an educator in faith-based institutions (he is an assistant professor in Business Administration at Thomas More College in Crestview Hills, Kentucky, and adjunct professor at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio) he became particularly interested in how clergy are involved in elder abuse response.

“As I delved into it, I noticed that there was a void in the literature in the role of the clergy in the process of ameliorating abuse and neglect.” From personal experience, he had observed that many clergy members he encountered in Kentucky were unaware of their legal obligation to report suspected elder abuse. Knowing that spiritual leaders are often in a prime position to detect mistreatment and self-neglect, he suspected they are a predominantly untapped resource in the response to elder abuse. The subject became the focus of his doctoral research and led to the publishing of his second book: [Elder Abuse and Neglect: Strategies for Awareness, Knowledge, Prevention and Intervention](#) (LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2009).

Dr. Rudnick interviewed key informants and surveyed ordained Protestant ministers throughout Kentucky regarding their awareness, attitudes, and interventions relating to cases of elder abuse they encountered while performing their pastoral duties. In all, 160 of the 300 ministers invited to participate responded to the mailed survey. Findings revealed the following:

- Participants were poorly informed about their legal duty to report elder abuse in Kentucky; only 44 percent of those surveyed knew that they were mandatory reporters.
- Of the 44 percent aware of the obligation to report abuse, only one-third knew where and how to report it. Those surveyed were also generally unaware of where to refer elders in need of counseling and financial services.
- Variations in circumstances influenced whether or not to report abuse. Notably, only 10 percent reported abuse if they believed that the state would be unable to handle the case; 14 percent reported if they learned of the abuse or neglect from a third party; only 30 percent reported instances of self neglect; and 81 percent

reported cases of physical abuse. Physical abuse was perceived as the most serious type of abuse, and therefore most frequently reported by the participants.

- Untrained clergy were willing to provide therapy, despite feeling inadequately prepared to do so. This was particularly true in small towns and rural areas where there were fewer mental health and financial services available, and clergy were considered among the few available professionals to whom congregants had access.
- Participants appeared to have a lack of knowledge regarding potential risk factors for mistreatment, such as social isolation.
- Neither graduate level nor continuing education courses typically covered the subject of elder abuse; in general, there was a lack of coverage of aging issues in their curricula.

Recommendations for Engagement

Dr. Rudnick has observed how limited time and competing demands create barriers for clergy attempting to manage all pastoral responsibilities. Therefore, he notes that it is important to consider how to maximize clergy's time and resources to effectively engage them in this issue. Based on his research and experience, he recommends a number of strategies for clergy collaboration in the response to elder abuse:

- Evaluate existing pastoral outreach, education, and support programs and services to see how they may be potentially adapted or expanded to address elder abuse awareness and prevention. Integrate "faith community networks" or parish health nursing as a means to provide health and social services to elder congregants in order to decrease risk for elder mistreatment (such as isolation, or unmet medical needs) and to identify signs and symptoms of potential abuse.

- Screen congregants to identify those at greatest risk for elder abuse, neglect, exploitation, and self-neglect, including those over 80, living alone, socially isolated, homebound, widowed, with multi system health needs, etc. Dr. Rudnick notes that it is particularly important to recognize the potential for abuse in domestic settings as well as in institutional settings. He also emphasizes the need for clergy to understand the serious threat that self-neglect, the most commonly identified but often overlooked type of elder abuse, poses. "When I speak with clergy about self-neglect, it is truly eye-opening."

When screening for risk, it is equally important to consider additional factors, such as the economic climate and its potential to increase risk. Clergy must also be attuned to cultural issues, as well as the needs of smaller and rural congregations that have limited access to resources.

- Launch seminary and/or university-based education for clergy addressing elder abuse and aging issues.
- In addition to networking within faith-based communities, clergy should familiarize themselves with available resources in their areas and develop partnerships with community-based and business entities in order to provide an umbrella of services for older congregants.

It is important to note that this research was conducted within a specific geographic region and with clergy members of one denomination, which may limit the ability to generalize these findings. However, these insights provide the basis for further exploration of how leaders of other faith-based organizations, who are ideally positioned to identify and intervene early, may be engaged as valuable partners in the fight against elder abuse.

Dr. John D. "Jack" Rudnick, Jr., a licensed nursing home administrator at Holy Family Home in Melbourne, Kentucky, is a Fellow in the American College of Healthcare Executives and has over 30 years of professional healthcare experience in hospitals and post-acute-care facilities including military service in the U.S. Navy Medical Service Corps.

For more information on his second book, [Elder Abuse and Neglect: Strategies for Awareness, Knowledge, Prevention and Intervention](#) (LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2009), [Click Here](#).

Please [contact Dr. Rudnick](#) for more information or with questions concerning clergy collaboration in ameliorating elder abuse.

Anatomy of a Grassroots Public Awareness Effort: The Soroptimist International of Indian Rock, Pennsylvania Elder Abuse Awareness Initiative

Patti Cullen, a longstanding member of the [Soroptimist International of Indian Rock, Pennsylvania](#) (SI of Indian Rock), first contacted NCEA last September with an idea to raise elder abuse awareness among seniors in her community. One year later, the club, in collaboration with the [Network of Victim Assistance \(NOVA\) of Bucks County](#), is launching what it hopes will be the first of many initiatives of the group's Elder Abuse Awareness Project.

Soroptimist means "what's best for women." SI of Indian Rock consists of 85 professional women and business owners from fields such as education, administration, law, medicine, real estate, and finance. The club works to improve the lives of women and girls in the Bucks County area through

a number of community collaborations and other projects. Ms. Cullen is responsible for the spearheading the region's "Peace Begins at Home - Stop Domestic Violence" program.

"One thing we were aware of is that there were so many non-profit groups addressing teen violence and other types of domestic violence but we couldn't find very much on elder abuse projects." So she suggested the topic to fellow members, who agreed overwhelmingly that elder abuse awareness would be a great initiative for their club.

The first step Ms. Cullen undertook was to research what other community groups had done previously to highlight the issue. She accessed both the [NCEA](#) and the [Clearinghouse on Abuse and Neglect \(CANE\)](#) websites in search of ideas and to identify outreach materials, and eventually focused on the idea of creating placemats to distribute through senior centers, meals-on-wheels programs, and at regional events. She consulted with CANE, the NCEA grantee based at the University of Delaware responsible for public awareness initiatives, to find samples of placemat designs. Ms. Cullen was able to connect with several members of the [NCEA ElderAbuse Listserve](#) who previously had a hand in similar outreach efforts.

The next challenge was to obtain funding for placemat production. Ms. Cullen again consulted NCEA for elder abuse information used to support a grant request submitted to the Soroptimist International of the Americas North Atlantic Region in December. This past spring, the club learned that it received \$2000 to launch the venture, and began designing, pilot-testing, revising, and producing the placemats.

SI of Indian Rock, which was chartered in 1972, has established strong ties with other non-profits, victims' services, and businesses throughout the Bucks County region, and collaborating with these partners has been essential at multiple stages

throughout the initiative. Club members worked with NOVA representatives to first decide on a theme and identify the type of elder abuse information that they wanted to include.

The committee ultimately decided to feature a word search puzzle relating to "The Good Old Days of Music" and tied this into the question, "What kind of days are you having?" Former art teacher and club member Sue Price led the design effort and incorporated feedback provided by seniors and aging service professionals who previewed the product at various stages of development. The group also solicited feedback from NCEA regarding formatting issues and content presentation.

"We wanted to capture the seniors' attention without scaring them," noted Ms. Cullen.

In addition to the region's elder abuse hotline number, the placemat includes a short checklist of statements that are potential indicators of different types of abuse, such as: "I am afraid of some people in my life." These are juxtaposed with a series of positive statements reflecting the kind of treatment all elders deserve, such as "I feel safe and comfortable with people close to me."

Nearly one year later, the project is ready to roll.

In all, 27,000 placemats have been printed, including 500 reusable laminated placemats tied with ribbons and pens for distribution through Meals-on-Wheels deliveries. According to Ms. Cullen, the kick-off is set for September through a number of distribution channels.

"Our official launch date is September 8th when we debut the placemat at our club membership meeting. Members of Soroptimist International of Indian Rock will have the opportunity to take a small quantity to share through their social, professional, and religious affiliations.

"We will also distribute placemats on September 23rd at the Annual Senator Tommy Tomlinson Senior Expo where 800 seniors are expected to attend. In addition, we will provide placemats to the local Aid for Friends organization and to each of the 13 Bucks County Senior Activity Centers. That's just for starters! We're working on several other distribution outlets such as the Bucks County YWCA and A Woman's Place (which is a domestic violence shelter and program)."

Ms. Cullen wishes to thank the entire membership of the SI of Indian Rock and the staff of NOVA for their support and involvement in this project, along with the Soroptimist International of the Americas North Atlantic Region. In particular, she wishes to acknowledge the extensive contributions of Ms. Price; Kathy Bennett, Associate Director of NOVA; club member Kathy Meyer, a financial analyst who provided additional funding; and Associated Printing and Graphics for additional support.

Ever looking forward, Ms. Cullen has already set her sights on the next phase of the club's Elder Abuse Awareness Project. The club will be seeking additional funding to continue the placemat project in 2011. But they intend to expand their efforts by engaging the healthcare sector in elder abuse awareness and outreach.

Ms. Cullen promises to keep us informed on the project and hopes to be able to report on a year of progress next fall!

For questions on the Soroptimist International of Indian Rock Elder Abuse Awareness Project, please [email Ms. Cullen](#). To visit the club's website, [Click Here](#).

[Soroptimist](#) is an international organization for business and professional women who work to improve the lives of women and girls, in local communities and throughout the world. For more information on Soroptimist, [Click Here](#).

Ideas for Public Awareness Activities

Are you looking for elder abuse public awareness ideas for your organization? Visit [CANE](#) and enter the keyword, "Public Awareness" for descriptions of projects and outreach materials, or download the NCEA's [Join Us – How Your Organization Can Generate Awareness & Foster Action in the Fight Against Elder Abuse](#).

For more information or to submit public awareness suggestions or materials, [Click Here](#).

Call for Promising Practices

The [NCEA Promising Practices Clearinghouse](#) is an online tool that helps locate program models and information resources around the country related to elder abuse prevention, intervention, and public education. The database allows academics, advocates, and practitioners to search for and learn from established programs in order to strengthen their respective prevention and intervention strategies. It is also a valuable networking source.

The database is a work in progress, and the NCEA periodically updates existing programs and adds new ones. [The National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse \(NCPEA\)](#), a grantee of the NCEA, is the entity charged with updating the database. The current focus for information concerns evidence-based practices, projects, or training that is based on research.

If your program is currently listed, we would greatly appreciate a review of the current posting. If you have already done so, we thank you for your help. If you know of other programs that should be listed in this database, please [send us](#) their contact information and we will send them a Promising Practice Information template. If your organization has an additional program to include, or if your program is not currently listed, please [contact us](#)

for an information template. (Please note that the information you submit via the template will be posted verbatim, with the exception of grammar, spelling, and punctuation edits.)

Thank you so much for your participation, and we look forward to hearing from you!

Special thanks to Frances Vorsky of the University of Kentucky Graduate Center for Gerontology for submitting this article. Please [contact Ms. Vorsky](#) for more information or to obtain a Promising Practices Information Template.

Call for Presentations: The 2011 Academy on Violence and Abuse Scientific Conference

The 2011 Academy on Violence and Abuse (AVA) Scientific Conference will be held April 14-16th, 2011, in Minneapolis, Minnesota with the theme: ***The Developing Science of Violence and Abuse: Toward a New Understanding***. AVA is now soliciting proposals for long papers, short papers, poster presentations, and breakfast roundtables.

Deadline for proposals is October 15th, 2010. For more information: [Click Here](#).

Office of Victims of Crime Releases New Video Series

The [Office of Victims of Crime \(OVC\)](#) recently released a series of three DVDs designed to promote awareness among specific law enforcement and justice systems audiences:

Responding to Elder Abuse: What Community Corrections Should Know "...provides community corrections professionals with the information they

need to help identify and respond to elder abuse, neglect, or exploitation they may encounter in their work with offenders. It includes basic information about what to consider when placing offenders in residential situations, communicating effectively with older victims, following mandatory reporting laws, and working collaboratively with other organizations."

Responding to Elder Abuse: What Judges and Court Personnel Should Know "...highlights critical issues for judges and court personnel to consider when they encounter abused, neglected, and exploited older persons participating in the judicial system. The video illustrates what judges may face in these situations, offers recommendations focused on the special needs of older abuse victims, and highlights examples of successful court-based elder abuse initiatives."

Responding to Elder Abuse: What Law Enforcement Should Know "describes what law enforcement officers can do when they encounter elder abuse, neglect, or exploitation in residences, nursing homes, or other long-term care facilities. It includes basic information about locating appropriate referral resources for intervention and support for the older abuse victim, following mandatory reporting laws, and working collaboratively with other organizations."

A discussion guide is also available for the series.

For more information or to order, visit the [OVC website](#).

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

To support outreach and educational efforts, the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRC DV) has created the 2010 Resource Packet. The packet is accessible on the Center's [Domestic Violence Awareness Project](#) web page.

Domestic Violence Awareness Month provides an opportunity to remind the public that older individuals may also be victims of this type of interpersonal abuse, and that elder abuse cases often share the same power and control dynamics seen in domestic and intimate partner violence.

For more information on the relationship between elder abuse and domestic violence, visit the [NCEA Publications Database](#) and select "Domestic Violence in Later Life" from the drop-down list. Additional references are highlighted in the CANE Annotated Bibliography, [Addressing the Needs of Older Battered Women, with Special Emphasis on Intimate Partner Violence](#). More recently published references are indexed in the [CANE Database](#) of elder abuse research and literature.

CANE Highlights of Elder Abuse Research and Literature

The [Clearinghouse on Abuse and Neglect of the Elderly at the University of Delaware \(CANE\)](#), a grantee of the NCEA, maintains an annotated index of peer-reviewed literature on elder mistreatment and related issues. Here are the highlights of several recently indexed publications:

Anetzberger, G. and Balaswamy, S.
Elder Abuse Awareness and Action: The Role of State Summits
Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect

Vol. 22(1-2), 180-190; 2010.

This article describes the first nationwide research on state level elder abuse summits examining how summits are formed, what they accomplish, and what allows them to be successful. States are increasingly convening summits to establish adequate local responses to elder abuse. This study found that two-fifths of all states have held summits, and 80 percent of these have been convened since 2000. Typically, the summits were convened by the state department of human services or aging and included between 25 to 50 participants. Half of the study respondents felt that summit goals had been met, and 60 percent said that recommendations were implemented because of committed participants, the involvement of influential people, or strong advocacy. State summits were found to be an effective means for galvanizing collective action to address the complex problem of elder abuse.

Post, L., Page, C., Conner, T., Prokhorov, A., Fang, Y. and Biroscak, B.

Elder Abuse in Long-Term Care: Types, Patterns, and Risk Factors

Research on Aging

Vol. 32(3), 323-348; 2010.

This study examines the rates and risk factors of abuse by paid caregivers among long-term care residents in Michigan nursing homes. Proxy reports from relatives of long-term care residents aged 60 and older were obtained through a random-digit-dialed survey that yielded a total sample of 816 participants. Variables examined included abuse types, functional status, and demographic variables. Among those sampled, approximately 71 percent of the proxies reported no instances of abuse. The highest rate of abuse reported involved neglect (16.2 percent) followed by emotional abuse (13 percent); caretaking abuse, which involves certain care provision tasks such as inappropriate use of restraints, over or inappropriate medicating, etc. (12.7 percent); verbal abuse (11.2 percent); material abuse (9.2 percent); physical abuse (4.2

percent); and sexual abuse (0.6 percent). Of the residents reported to have experienced one type of abuse, more than half were reported to have experienced another type of abuse. Notably, behavioral problems on the part of the resident, (being verbally abusive, or physically or actively resisting care) were significant risk factors for all types of abuse except material abuse. Physical functional limitations and activities of daily living limitations were also associated with various types of abuse. A major implication of this study is that care providers working with residents that exhibit behavioral problems should be well-trained, well-supervised, and well-monitored.

Vandecar-Burdin, T., and Payne, B.

Risk Factors for Victimization of Younger and Older Persons: Assessing Differences in Isolation, Intra-individual Characteristics, and Health Factors

Journal of Criminal Justice

Vol. 38, 160-165; 2010.

Using a random sample phone survey, this research compares risk factors for victimization for adults aged 60 and older with those younger. Independent variables evaluated were social isolation, health factors, and individual characteristics (demographics, emotional problems, and reports of bodily pain). The final sample consisted of 211 older participants and 535 younger adults. Participants were surveyed about the experience of physical, financial, and emotional abuse. Of the differences in risk factors noted, the only significant predictor of abuse among the older sub sample was social isolation, an association previously documented in the literature. Among younger participants, experiencing bodily pain and emotional problems were correlated with victimization. The author notes that one limitation of the study is that participants who are most vulnerable may have been under represented in the study sample.

O'Connor, D., Hall, M., and Donnelly, M.

Assessing Capacity Within a Context of Abuse and Neglect

Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect
Vol. 21, 156-159; 2009.

This provocative discussion considers capacity assessment within the context of an abusive situation. In particular, it looks at how living within an abusive and/or neglectful situation may influence the determination of capacity, and the implications of conducting an assessment within a potentially abusive context. Undue influence and the psychological concept of relational connection, which values relationship primarily over autonomy, are discussed. Gender influences within relationships and within society are also considered.

Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect
Vol. 22 (3-4) 2010

Special Issue: The Archstone Foundation's Elder Abuse and Neglect Initiative

This issue of JEAN features an overview of the [Archstone Foundation's Elder Abuse and Neglect Initiative](#), a five-year, \$8 million strategic project launched throughout the state of California in 2005. Articles outline the history of the Foundation's involvement in aging and elder abuse issues, and feature several of the 20 projects that have been funded through the initiative. The importance of project evaluation, innovation, support, and the development of a culture of learning for grantees are discussed as essential for philanthropic success. JEAN, edited by Georgia Anetzberger, is the official journal of the [National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse](#). Laura Mosqueda, MD, co-director of the [Center for Excellence on Elder Abuse](#), an Archstone grantee, provides the introduction. For more details on this special issue, and on subscribing, [Click Here](#).

Visit [CANE](#) to search for additional references on elder abuse and related issue.

Editorial Note

The NCEA E-News features the following columns on a rotating basis: Research Highlights, State News, and Federal Legislative Updates. The October NCEA E-News will highlight State News. To submit news of projects, programs, and initiatives in your state, [Click Here](#).

Calendar of Events

September 12, 2010

[National Grandparents Day](#)
National Observance

September 12-15, 2010

[15th International Conference on Violence, Abuse, and Trauma](#)
Town and Country Resort and Convention Center
San Diego, CA

September 13-16, 2010

[American Society on Aging East Coast 2010 Conference on Aging](#)
Philadelphia Corporation for Aging Conference Center
Philadelphia, PA

September 14-16, 2010

[National Center for Victims of Crime – 2010 National Conference](#)
Hilton Riverside New Orleans Hotel
New Orleans, LA

September 24, 2010

[Commission on Aging Raleigh County Annual Elder Abuse Conference](#)
Raleigh County Senior Center
Beckley, WV

September 26-29, 2010

[26th National Home and Community Based Services Conference](#)

Hilton Atlanta
Atlanta, GA

September 29, 2010

[Los Angeles District Attorney's Victim Witness Assistance Program: Elder Abuse Symposium](#)

Almanson Court
Alhambra, CA

October 1 -31

[National Domestic Violence Awareness Month](#)

National Observance

October 5-7, 2010

[Prosecuting Elder Abuse Cases](#)

Inn at USC
Columbia, SC

October 6-8, 2010

[State Bar of Michigan Elder Law and Disability Rights Section Annual Conference: Changes and Choices](#)

Crystal Mountain Resort
Thompsonville, MI

October 19-22, 2010

[35th NCCNHR Annual Meeting and Conference](#)

Caribe Royale All-Suite Resort & Convention Center
Orlando, FL

October 26-29, 2010

[27th Annual Texas Adult Protective Services Conference: Empowering, Enriching, Protecting Lives](#)

Holiday Inn Select San Antonio International Airport
San Antonio, TX

October 27-30, 2010

[International Association of Forensic Nurses 18th Annual Scientific Assembly](#)

Omni William Penn Hotel
Pittsburgh, PA

October 27-31, 2010

[20th Annual Multi-Disciplinary National Conference on Domestic Violence](#)

Gaylord National Resort and Conference Center
Washington, DC

October 27-29, 2010

[2nd International Conference on Violence in the Health Sector](#)

De Meervaart
Amsterdam, the Netherlands

November 6-10, 2010

[American Public Health Association 138th Annual Meeting and Expo](#)

Colorado Convention Center and the Hyatt Regency
Denver
Denver, CO

November 8-10, 2010

["Healing the Culture of Abuse"](#)

21st Annual NAPSA Conference in partnership with the University of California, Irvine
Westin Gaslamp Quarter San Diego
San Diego, CA

December 9-11, 2010

[2010 National Aging and Law Conference: The Changing Face of Aging](#)

Westin Hotel
Alexandria, VA

Credits and Contact Information

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To **subscribe** to the NCEA E-News, go to:

www.ncea.aoa.gov.

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- National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse
- Clearinghouse on Abuse and Neglect of the Elderly, University of Delaware (CANE-UD)

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