

ELDER ABUSE

Definition:

Elder Abuse is any abuse or neglect of persons age 60 and older by a caregiver or another person in a relationship involving an expectation of trust (CDC, 2014).

Forms of Abuse (CDC, 2014):

- ♦ **Physical Abuse:** Occurs when an elder is injured, assaulted or threatened with a weapon, or inappropriately restrained.
- ♦ **Sexual Abuse or Abusive Sexual Contact:** Any sexual contact against an elder's will. This includes acts in which the elder is unable to understand the act or is unable to communicate. Abusive sexual contact is defined as intentional touching of the genitalia, anus, groin, breast, mouth, inner thigh, or buttocks.
- ♦ **Psychological or Emotional Abuse:** Occurs when an elder experiences trauma after exposure to threatening acts or coercive tactics. This includes humiliation or embarrassment, controlling behavior, social isolation, disregarding or trivializing needs and damaging or destroying property.
- ♦ **Neglect:** Failure or refusal of a caregiver or other responsible person to provide for an elder's basic physical, emotional, or social needs, or failure to protect them from harm.
- ♦ **Abandonment:** willful desertion of an elderly person by caregiver or other responsible person.
- ♦ **Financial Abuse or Exploitation:** Unauthorized or improper use of the resources of an elder for monetary or personal benefit, profit, or gain. This includes forgery, misuse or theft of money or possessions. Coercion or deception to surrender finances or property or improper use of guardianship or power of attorney can also fall into this category.

Signs of Abuse (NAPSA, 2015):

- ♦ Disappearing from contact with neighbors, friends or family
- ♦ Bruising or welts on the skin, especially ones on the face, neck, breasts, inner thighs or arms
- ♦ Any bruising in the shape of finger prints or hand prints around neck, wrists or arms
- ♦ Cuts or puncture wounds
- ♦ Fractures, dislocations or sprains
- ♦ Burns from cigarettes or scalding
- ♦ Internal injuries or vomiting
- ♦ Appearing malnourished, hungry or disoriented
- ♦ Having clothing that is torn, soiled or bloody
- ♦ Caretaker unwilling to leave elder person alone while being examined
- ♦ Caretaker canceling appointments or not allowing for medical attention

Risk Factors for Elder Abuse (CDC, 2014):

- ♦ Dementia or cognitive impairment
- ♦ Lack of social support
- ♦ Shared living situations

Risk Factors for Perpetrating Elder Abuse (CDC, 2014):

- ♦ Mental disorders and alcohol or substance abuse
- ♦ High financial and emotional dependence upon elder



- ♦ Inadequate preparation or training for care giving responsibilities
- ♦ Exposure to abuse as a child
- ♦ Lack of social or formal support

Prevalence:

It is difficult to determine the exact incidence of elder abuse because according to the CDC only about 21% of all cases are reported to Adult Protective Service agencies (2014); the rest go unreported. It is believed that between 1 and 2 million United States residents aged 65 or older have been abused or exploited (WHO, 2014)

Prevention

The World Health Organization predicts that elder abuse will increase as many countries are experiencing rapidly increasing aging populations. It is expected that the global population of people above 60 will reach 1.2 billion by 2025 (2014). The following are strategies to help prevent elder abuse:

- ♦ Public and professional awareness campaigns
- ♦ Screening for potential victims and abusers
- ♦ School-based intergenerational programs
- ♦ Caregiver training on dementia
- ♦ Mandatory reporting of abuse to authorities
- ♦ Adult protective services
- ♦ Home visitation by police and social workers
- ♦ Self-help groups
- ♦ Safe-houses and emergency shelters
- ♦ Strong relationships with a variety of people

Treatment/Care:

Removal of the individual from the abuse is the first step in treating the problem. Once in a safe environment additional medical treatment can begin, including counseling to help victims overcome trauma. Counseling usually focusses on breaking through denial and shame and helping victims regain control in their life by giving resources, support group information as well as helping them create a safety plan if the abuse happens again. Legal assistance is given for restraining orders, guardianship and lawsuits in order to recover assets and property. Information about temporary housing options and support services are also discussed (NCPEA, 2008).

Disclaimer:

If someone is in immediate danger, call 911 or the local police. If you suspect that a family member or someone you know is being abused, report it to Adult Protective Services. To find an agency in your area visit the Eldercare Locator website at: http://ncea.aoa.gov/Stop_Abuse/Get_Help/State/index.aspx

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