

NATI ALERTS

ELDER ABUSE

Most frequently hidden, elder abuse may not be evident in your community. Victims dependent on abusive caretakers may not report abuse. Financial exploitation may occur without the victim's knowledge.

The National Crime Victimization Survey cannot accurately measure elder abuse, as it is vastly unreported, and the mentally impaired often cannot report victimization or describe details.

Elder Abuse Defined:

Elder abuse refers to any knowing, intentional, or negligent act by a primary caregiver or other, that willfully or through negligence, causes a senior harm, serious risk, or death.

Abuse Facts:

The National Center on Elder Abuse states that about two of three cases involve a caretaking relative – estimating a 5-to-1 ratio of abuse cases going unreported.

About 59% of crimes were neglect, 16% physical abuse, and 12% financial crimes.

The Senate Special Committee on Aging states that there were 2.5 million abuse incidents; a 20 percent increase from '99 - 2000.

Self-neglect is abuse often due to diminished mental or physical ability or social isolation.

Many seniors remain in a neglected/abusive situation. A competent senior may have the right to remain in an abusive situation.

Passive neglect - failing to provide proper nutrition, hygiene, living conditions, or administer medication is common, leading to serious health problems or death.

Elder Abuse and Death:

Of the 1.7 million senior deaths in 2000—about 574 were classified as homicides, suggesting that some go undetected. Less than one percent of elder deaths have autopsies.

Dr. Elizabeth Burton, MD, Baylor Univ. School of Medicine, noted a 44% discordance on cause of death between clinicians and pathologists.

Abuse may be:

- ***Physical*** - Threatening/inflicting physical pain or injury, or depriving of a basic need.
- ***Emotional*** - Inflicting mental pain, anguish, or distress by verbal/nonverbal acts.
- ***Sexual*** - Non-consensual sexual contact.
- ***Exploitation*** - Taking, misusing, or concealing senior funds, property, or assets.
- ***Neglect*** - Failure by caregivers to adequately provide food, shelter, and/or health care for a senior.
- ***Abandonment*** - The desertion of a senior by a caretaker.

Elder Abuse warning signs:

Listed below are some indicators of possible abuse:

- Bruises, pressure marks, broken bones, abrasions, burns, or untreated injuries in various stages of healing.
- Unexplained withdrawal from routine activities, a sudden shift in alertness, and unusual depression.
- Bruises or bleeding around the breasts or genital area, or unexplained STD's.
- Sudden changes in financial situations, unexplained disappearance of funds or valuables, or unexplained transfer of assets to a family member or someone outside the family.
- Bedsores, unattended medical needs, poor hygiene, and abnormal weight loss.
- Behavior such as belittling, threats, and other uses of power and control by caretaker.
- Strained or tense relationships, frequent arguments between the caregiver and elderly person.
- Unusual behavior usually attributed to dementia (e.g. sucking, biting, rocking).
- Desertion of an elder person in a hospital, nursing facility, shopping center, or other location.

Self-Neglect signs:

Most cases reported to Adult Protective Services are due to self-neglect. Self-neglect is often coupled with health factors, lack of a social support group, Alzheimer's disease/dementia, or drug/alcohol abuse.

Self-neglect often includes:

- Hoarding
- Failure to take medications
- Failure to seek medical treatment
- Neglecting a stove/oven
- Poor personal hygiene
- Inappropriate clothing (e.g. no coat in winter)
- Bewildered
- Poor housekeeping
- Dehydration/Malnutrition

Types of Offenders:

Generally, a combination of psychological, social, and economic factors, along with the mental and physical conditions of the victim and the perpetrator contribute to elder maltreatment.

Well-Intended, normally competent individuals—now overwhelmed, highly stressed, with low resources.

Well Intended, Impaired individuals—may have chronic or cyclical impairments.

Narcissistic Individuals—Self centered, exclusive interest in their own needs.

Abusive Individuals—Chronically angry, unhappy, critical, and feels justified in abuse.

Sadistic Individuals—Derive a sense of power from controlling/inflicting pain and suffering on others.

Resources:

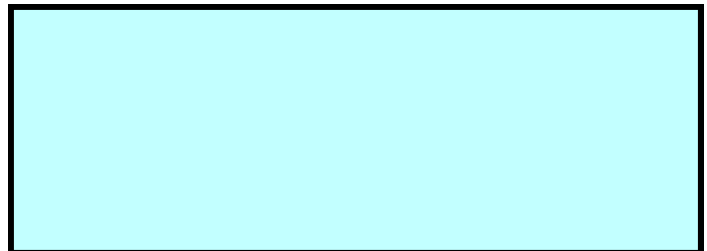
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National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse
www.preventelderabuse.org

Eldercare Locator:
www.eldercare.gov

Elder Abuse FAQ's/NCEA Publications:
www.elderabusecenter.org

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