

Elder Abuse

Training Curriculum developed by
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Objectives

- Introduce elder abuse and related terms
- Define elder abuse
- Present the types of elder abuse
- Describe the signs and symptoms of elder abuse
- Present the causes of elder abuse
- Identify who abuses the elderly
- Describe the results of elder abuse
- Present the steps for reporting elder abuse
- Introduce the process for preventing elder abuse

Definition of Elder Abuse

Elder abuse is the intentional or unintentional hurting, either physical or emotional, of a person who is age sixty or older.

Types of Elder Abuse

- Elder abuse usually occurs in one of two locations:
- Domestic elder abuse (in the elder's home)
- Institutional elder abuse (in a nursing home or other long-term-care facility)
- The types of senior abuse are:
- Physical abuse of the elderly

Types of Elder Abuse

- Emotional abuse of the elderly (psychological or verbal)
- Neglect or abandonment of elders by caregivers
- Self-neglect by elders
- Sexual abuse of the elderly
- Financial exploitation of seniors (elder financial abuse)
- Healthcare fraud or healthcare abuse of the elderly

Signs and Symptoms of Elder Abuse

The following are warning signs of some kind of elder abuse: (a) frequent arguments or tension between the caregiver and the elderly person; (b) changes in personality or behavior in the elderly. If you suspect elderly abuse, but aren't sure, look for clusters of the following physical and behavioral signs.

Some signs and symptoms of physical abuse of the elderly

- Symmetric injuries on two sides of the body
- Unexplained bruises, pressure marks, black eyes, welts, lacerations, cuts, or burns
- Bone fractures or broken bones
- Sprains or dislocations
- Internal injuries or bleeding
- Bite marks
- Broken eyeglasses or frames
- Signs of being restrained, such as rope marks
- Laboratory findings of medication overdose
- Under-utilization of prescribed drugs
- A sudden change in behavior
- Caregiver's refusal to allow visitors to see the elder alone
- An elder's report of being physically abused

Signs and Symptoms

Some signs and symptoms of elderly self-neglect

- Dehydration or malnutrition
- Physical weakness
- Foul body odor, poor personal hygiene
- Human or animal feces and urine in the house
- Medical conditions left untreated
- Lack of medical aids such as hearing aids, glasses, or dentures
- Homelessness
- Foul household odor
- Inadequate, unsafe, or unclean housing (no running water, no heating, no functioning toilet facilities, nonfunctional wiring, pest infestations)
- Inadequate clothing for the climate

Some signs and symptoms of sexual abuse of the elderly

- Bruises around the breasts or genitals
- Unexplained venereal disease or genital infections
- Unexplained vaginal or anal bleeding
- Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- An elder's report of being sexually assaulted

Signs and Symptoms

Some signs and symptoms of financial or material exploitation of seniors

- Large cash withdrawals from the elder's bank account
- The elder's withdrawal of a large sum of money from the bank when accompanied by another person
- Numerous withdrawals from the elder's bank account, particularly in round amounts, such as \$100 or \$500
- Large checks written to unusual recipients
- Names being added to the senior's bank account signature card
- Objects or money missing from the senior's household
- Withdrawals from investments in spite of penalties for early withdrawal

Signs and Symptoms

Some signs and symptoms of financial or material exploitation of seniors

- **Abrupt changes in wills, trusts, contracts, the power of attorney, the durable power of attorney, property titles, deeds, or mortgages**
- **Changes in beneficiaries on insurance policies or IRAs**
- **Sudden changes in the elder's financial situation**
- **Home or institutional care that is lacking, despite sufficient funds to cover the care**
- **Unpaid bills, despite enough assets to cover the payments**
- **Forged signatures**
- **Unnecessary services, goods, or subscriptions**

Causes of Elder Abuse

Sometimes those who care for elders are not suited to the requirements of the job, and they allow themselves to vent their impatience, frustration, and anger on the elder whom they are supposed to be protecting and nurturing. In nursing homes, in particular, staff may be prone to elder abuse because of:

- **Insufficient staffing**
- **Lack of training**
- **Stressful working conditions**
- **Staff burnout**
- **Sometimes neglect is not intentional; it may be the result of lack of adequate training about how to care for the elderly or because staff members cannot monitor needy elders in a timely manner.**
- **Taking care of the elderly, whether at home or in an institution, can be very stressful. The incidence of depression is very high among caregivers. Caregivers habitually lack exercise and outdoor time, have inadequate nutrition, and need more sleep. Many people with dementia have trouble sleeping, so caregivers are kept up caring for them. Caregivers have a high level of anxiety. Because stress affects the heart and cardiovascular system, the stresses of caregiving can even lead to death in the caregiver.**

Causes of Elder Abuse

The amount of stress that the caregiver experiences depends upon:

- **The elder's type of disease or dementia**
- **The progression of the elder's requirements for care: at first, care may have been mundane errands or financial management, but the needs may have progressed to helping to eat, bathe, and toilet**
- **How the caregiver perceives the responsibility of caring for the elder (burdensome or not)**
- **What the elder thinks about the caregiver**
- **How the caregiver perceives the care recipient: if the caregiver finds the care recipient to be ungrateful, the caregiver is more likely to feel stressed**
- **How close the elder and caregiver were before and how close they are now**
- **How the caregiver copes with stress, in general (resilience)**
- **Whether others help with the caregiving**
- **Violence or aggression from the elder**

Causes of Elder Abuse

- **Violence or aggression from the elder**
- **Caregiver depression and living with the care recipient are predictors of caregiver elder abuse.**
- **Violence from a care recipient toward the caregiver is strongly related to subsequent caregiver violence. A history of domestic violence in the household makes a senior more likely to be included in the domestic violence.**
- **Financial exploitation of the elderly is related to the lack of boundaries regarding using another person's belongings and money. Sometimes this lack of boundaries is criminal, and sometimes it is simply a lack of ethical behavior. The exploiter gains because of the vulnerability of the elder.**

Who Abuses the Elderly

- Most elder abuse occurs in the elder's home, and the abuser is usually a family member. Most commonly, the perpetrators of elderly abuse are spouses or partners of elders. Next most frequent abusers are the adult children of elders.
- Abusers can be men or women. Men ages thirty-six to fifty are the most common perpetrators.
- In nursing homes and other long-term-care facilities, the abusers may be employees, outside visitors, or intruders.
- Anyone associated with an elder may abuse them: friends, relatives, doctors, lawyers, bankers, accountants, clergy, caregivers, or strangers.

Results of Elder Abuse

- Elder abuse can have a host of resultant conditions:
- Inability to move (immobility)
- Incontinence
- Longer time to heal
- Pressure sores or bed sores
- Dehydration, malnutrition, or starvation
- Depression
- Loss of dignity or self-esteem
- Loss of friendships and companionship
- Loss of assets, poverty, homelessness
- Criminal attack (due to lack of precautionary measures)
- Worsening or irremediable medical conditions
- Death

How can an elder report abuse

- If you are an elder who is being abused, neglected, or exploited, tell at least one person. Tell your doctor, a friend, or a family member whom you trust. Other people care and can help you.
- You can also call **Eldercare Locator** at **1-800-677-1116**.
- The person who answers the phone will refer you to a local agency that can help. The Eldercare Locator answers the phone Monday through Friday, 9 am to 8 pm, Eastern Time.

Reporting Elder Abuse

- If you suspect elder abuse, call someone now! You do not have to be sure of the abuse, and you do not have to give your name. You are protecting someone from further harm by reporting elderly abuse or suspected elderly abuse.
- If an elder is in danger now, call:
 - **911** or
 - **Your local police emergency number** or
 - **Your local hospital emergency room**
- If you have some time to notify authorities, call:
 - **Your [State Elder Abuse Hotline](#).**
- Each state's elder abuse hotline has two options. These two numbers are for:
 - **Domestic elder abuse**
 - **Elder abuse in a nursing home (the institutional number)**
- All state elder abuse hotlines are free and anonymous.

Reporting Elder Abuse

- When you call to report elderly abuse, be ready to give the elder's name, address, and contact information, and give details about why you are concerned. You will be asked for your name, address, and telephone number, but you do not have to give this information in most states. The highest priority to everyone is to make the elder safe.
- Some states have emergency shelters for elders who are being abused. When you report the elder abuse to the elder abuse hotline in your state, ask for help in getting the elder away from the abusive situation.
- If you need to report abuse of an elder in another state:
- Look in the [State Elder Abuse Hotlines](#) table to see if the phone number for the elder's state accepts out-of-state calls. If not, call the Eldercare Locator for a referral: 1-800-677-1116.
- Various state, local, and county agencies investigate and enforce elder abuse laws. The first agency to respond to a report of elderly abuse, in most states, is the Adult Protective Services (APS). There are no federal funds set aside and no federal regulations regarding the operation of each state's APS, so each APS agency operates independently and somewhat uniquely. Many Adult Protective Services apply for and receive federal grant money, but the vast majority of funds come from state or local funds. The role of APS is to investigate abuse cases; intervene; and offer services and advice.
- In some states, certain professionals are required or encouraged to report elder abuse. The people required to report elder abuse in these states are doctors and nurses, psychologists, police officers, and social workers. In no states is a neighbor or friend ever required to report suspected elderly abuse.
- Remember that suspected abuse is sufficient reason to make a report to authorities.

Preventing Elder Abuse

- Elders themselves are unlikely to be on the forefront of prevention of elder abuse. Elders are most often silent in their suffering because they may be physically unable to speak out and because society does not listen well. One of the ironies of elder abuse is that younger people may be too busy to listen or act. Elders in westernized societies are often pushed away from the hub of action and ignored.
- Prevention is especially important because the majority of elder abuse cases go unreported. We cannot even count how many elderly abuse cases we prevent by making changes that stop abuse. Through prevention, we can make elders' last years more pleasant, and we can save elders' lives.
- Key elements in the prevention of elder abuse are:
- Educate

Preventing Elder Abuse

- Enforce
- Intervene
- The public can help to prevent elder abuse by helping to educate seniors, professionals, caregivers, and others about elder abuse. If you cannot directly help, you can volunteer or donate money to the cause of educating people about elder abuse. Encourage law enforcement agencies to prosecute elder abuse when they find it. Mental health professionals, social workers, nurses, and lawyers can step up interventions.
- Caretakers can prevent abusing their elderly charges by doing the following:
 - Stay healthy and get medical care for yourself when necessary.
 - Get professional help for drug or alcohol abuse, which can lead to elder abuse.

Preventing Elder Abuse

- Elders themselves are unlikely to be on the forefront of prevention of elder abuse. Elders are most often silent in their suffering because they may be physically unable to seek counseling for depression, which can lead to elder abuse.
- Make contact with domestic violence prevention services.
- Find a support group for spouses, partners, or grown children caring for the elderly.
- Family members and friends who are not caregivers of the elder can help to prevent abuse:
- Watch for warning signs that might indicate elder abuse.
- Make sure that the elderly person is eating properly and taking required medications. A weakened elder cannot think clearly about the care being given.
- Scan bank accounts and credit card statements for unauthorized transactions, if you can get access permission from the elder. Watch for possible financial exploitation.
- Call and visit as frequently as you are able. Keep the lines of communication open so that the elder feels comfortable talking about abusive behaviors.

Preventing Elder Abuse

- Gain trust so that the elder allows you more oversight in financial and caretaking matters.
- An elder can do the following to prevent elder abuse:
- Plan for your own financial future with a trusted person or persons. Make sure that your finances are in order: beneficiaries of insurance policies and IRAs; durable power of attorney; your will; a living will for healthcare instructions; any trusts you wish to create; titles to your assets, and so on.
- Be socially active and avoid social isolation, which can make you vulnerable to elder abuse. Keep in touch with family and friends.
- If you are not happy with the care you are receiving from your family or from another caregiver in your home, speak up. You have a right to your preferences.
- If you live in a long-term-care facility and have no one close to you who can speak up for you when you are not happy about your care, contact your state's **Long-Term-Care Ombudsman**. The Ombudsman's charter is to be your advocate and to intervene when necessary.

Post Test

- Provide the definition of elder abuse
- Describe the types of abuse
- List the signs and symptoms of abuse
- Explain the causes of elder abuse
- Describe who abuses the elderly
- List the results of elder abuse
- Explain who can report elder abuse
- Describe how to prevent elder abuse