Abuse In Later Life

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Graying of America

• By 2030, the number of elders is expected to have doubled since 1990 to 70 million
• Between 1990 and 2030, Hispanic elderly will increase by 570%
• Elderly American Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts will increase by 294%
• Elderly Asian and Pacific Islanders will increase by 643%
Prevalence

- 1 in 10 people will experience a form of abuse after age 65
- 1 in 2 people with a dementia will experience a form abuse after age 65
Definition

- The National Center on Elder Abuse defines elder abuse:
  - “as any knowing, intended or careless act that causes harm or serious risk of harm to an older person – physically, mentally, emotionally, or financially.”
The US Department of Justice defines domestic violence:

- “as a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone.”
Abuse Types

- Emotional/Psychological
- Financial
- Physical
- Sexual
- Neglect
- Self-Neglect
Key Points

- Multiple types of abuse occur simultaneously
- Most commonly reported is financial, but most pervasive is emotional
- Can change and look different over time
- Family members are most commonly identified perpetrators of abuse
  - 90% of cases (national study)
Victims

- Elder abuse: Age 65 and older
- Abuse in Later Life: Age 50 and over
- Females are victimized at a higher rate
- Occurs across ethnicities, socioeconomic status, religious background
Victim Risk Factors

- Cognitive Impairment/Dementia
- Mental Illness (Depression, Anxiety, Trauma, Grief/Loss)
- Isolation/Loneliness
- Substance Abuse
- Cohabitation
- Retirement/Unemployment
- Past Traumatic Incidents
- Needing Assistance with ADLs
Perpetrators

- Strangers
- People of Authority (doctors, attorneys, fiduciaries, religious leaders, etc.)
- Caregivers (professional, paid, unpaid)
- Family members
  - Spouse/Intimate Partner
  - Adult Children
  - Grandchildren
  - Extended Family
Intimate Partners as Perpetrators

- Long Term Intimate Partner Violence
  - Cycle of Violence changes
  - Abusive tactics can change as well
- Late Onset Spousal Abuse
  - New relationships (second marriages, new partners)
  - Changes in relationship (grand parenting, retirement, health issues)
Adult Children as Perpetrators

• Dependent on the older adult
• Often lives in older adult’s home
• Many times does not have a job or can not hold a steady job
• May have a mental illness
• May have a substance abuse problem
• Sense of entitlement
Grandchildren as Perpetrators

• Incredibly challenging situation
• Learned behavior
• Maybe connected to substance use or mental illness as well
• Victims often experience intense feelings of guilt and helplessness
• Collaboration with other service providers is key
Abuse Across the Lifespan

• Unintentional
  – Inability to provide care
  – Inability to control behaviors
• Greed
• Caregiver Stress
• Power and Control
• Power differentials in relationships are normal, it is the exploitation of that differential that is abusive
Working with Older Victims

• Self-awareness of your beliefs about aging
• Awareness of cultural beliefs about aging
• Consider their historical experience
• Consider their generational cohort
Working with Older Victims

• May need to educate slowly
  – Abuse dynamics and services
• Assess for any disabilities and adjust interventions accordingly
• Story telling is often a way of communicating deeper issues and values
• As with all victims respect their self-determination
• Trauma can look like dementia or physical illness
Working with Older Victims

- Research suggests that traditional DV interventions such as safety planning, information about the dynamics of DV abuse, legal advocacy and support are more appropriate for older women.
Legal Remedies

• Elder Justice Act
• Criminal Laws
• Civil Laws
Investigative Agencies

- Local Law Enforcement
- State Law Enforcement (DOJ-BMFEA)
- Federal Law Enforcement
- Adult Protective Services
- Ombudsmen
- Licensing Agencies
Collaboration

• As with all our work, it is critical
• Develop connections with aging services
  – Placement agencies
  – Caregiving and home health
  – Geriatric medical and psychiatric services
  – Elder law attorneys
  – Forensic Centers
  – Senior and community centers
Reflection Challenge

- Does your website, brochures, flyers reflect that abuse occurs across the lifespan?
- Would an older adult know they are eligible for services with your program?
- Is abuse across the lifespan included in your mission, vision, fund development strategies, fund raising, outreach, community education?
- Are your forms inclusive of age, gender, and sexual orientation?
- Is your physical space able to accommodate older adults and individuals with disabilities?
- Could your service delivery model be altered to better serve older victims?
- Do you participate in aging collaborative and the elder abuse movement?
- Would your staff feel comfortable in working with an older adult? Do they need training?
- Are the funds you are leaving on the table by not including victims of abuse in later life?
Resources

• National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (www.ncall.us)
• National Center on Elder Abuse (www.ncea.aoa.gov)
• Center of Excellence on Elder Abuse and Neglect (www.centeronelderabuse.org)
• Ageless Alliance (www.agelessalliance.org)
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