Perpetrators of Elder Abuse

February 21, 2019
Minnesota Elder Justice Center Webinar
Shelly Carlson, MPA
Criminal Justice Systems Manager
Objectives

› Review definition, statistics and polyvictimization
› Discuss where abuse occurs and how location may hide abuse
› Examine relationship of perpetrator to older adult/victim
› Discuss tactics, excuses and justifications
› Describe perpetrator characteristics
› Consider how ageism fosters elder abuse
› Review reporting
Elder Abuse: toward a definition...

› Knowing, intentional or negligent act

› Causes harm or serious risk of harm to an older or vulnerable adult
Elder Abuse: toward a definition...

- Defined by age, relationship, type of abuse
- Victims are often on a continuum from very active to having various medical, cognitive, mobility issues
- 2/3 of perpetrators of elder abuse are family members, trusted individuals and/or caregivers
Poly-victimization: different forms of abuse occurring at the same time

Prevalence

› 1,000,000 – 2,000,000 adults in later life in U.S. are victims of abuse\(^1\)

› 1 in 10 persons over the age 60 are victims of elder abuse\(^2\)

› Victims of elder financial abuse in U.S. lose close to $3 Billion each year\(^3\)

\(^1\)National Center of Elder Abuse: 2005 Elder Abuse Prevalence and Incidence
\(^2\)National Institute of Justice: Elder Abuse as a Criminal Problem
\(^3\)Blancato, Robert: Violence Against Older Women and The Elder Justice Act; 3/04/12
Elder Abuse: Under the Radar

For every 1 case of elder abuse that comes to the attention of a responsible entity...

another 23 cases never come to light.

Source: NYS Elder Abuse Prevalence Study; Weill Cornell Medical College, NYC Department for the Aging; Lifespan; (2011)
Slide courtesy of Life Long Justice
Higher Risk of Death

Elders who experienced even modest abuse had a **300% higher risk of death** than elders who were not abused

---

U.S. Population Age 65 & Older is on the Rise: 1990-2050

65 & Older

2008: 39 million
13% of population

2030
72 million
20% of population

85 & Older

2008: 5.7 Million
2050: 19 million
Where does elder abuse occur? How might location help hide abuse?

› Facilities *4.5% of older Americans

› Public settings

› Private Homes
Who abuses older adults?

› Intimate partners
› Adult children / grandchildren
› Other family members
› Caregivers
› Others in positions of authority
  › Accountants
  › Faith community leaders
› Individuals who befriend older adult
› Strangers i.e. scams
Abuser tactics

› Smoke & Mirrors
› Abusers often:
  › Lie
  › Manipulate
  › Charm
  › Justify their behavior
  › Blame the older adult & others
Common Excuses

› I have a problem with my temper
   • *Anger management issues*
› I was drunk / high
   • *Substance abuse problems*
› I’m sick – have physical or mental health problems
   • *Physical or mental health issue*
› Learned behavior – he/she hit me as a child
   • *Learned behavior*
› In my culture we share resources
   • *Culture excuse*
› He wants me to have the money, possessions, etc.
   • *Consent*
Common Justifications

› Blames the older adult:
  › “She’s so clumsy!” “I didn’t mean for it to happen”
    • Accident
  › “He didn’t do what I wanted.” / “She wouldn’t listen”
    • Victim’s behavior
  › “He started it.”
    • Mutual abuse
  › “She’s took difficult to care for.”
    • Caregiver stress
Caregiver stress

› Term coined in research based on abuser’s self-reports
› Abusers used caregiver stress as an excuse to justify their behavior so they would not be held accountable
› Helped to create sympathy for the abuser
› Professionals would collude with abuser

Policy Implications of Recognizing that Caregiver Stress is Not the Primary Cause of Elder Abuse, Bonnie Brandl and Jane A. Raymond, Journal of the American Society on Aging, 2012.
Caregiver stress

Providing care *can* be stressful

Sometimes the stress is overwhelming and can lead to problems

Caregivers often experience overeating, lack of sleep, depression, etc.

Policy Implications of Recognizing that Caregiver Stress is Not the Primary Cause of Elder Abuse, Bonnie Brandl and Jane A. Raymond, Journal of the American Society on Aging, 2012.
Reframe Abuse & Caregiver Stress

› Everyone experiences stress – most do not abuse, neglect or exploit
› Target is the older adult – no one else
› Pattern of behavior vs. isolated incident
› Society would not tolerate this excuse with children or pets

Policy Implications of Recognizing that Caregiver Stress is Not the Primary Cause of Elder Abuse, Bonnie Brandl and Jane A. Raymond, Journal of the American Society on Aging, 2012.
The Breaking Point: Nancy
Terra Nova Films
Discussion

› Is Nancy a stressed caregiver?

› Is Nancy an abuser?

› What does Nancy say to indicate she can control her behavior?
If abuser is believed...

› Victim safety is not addressed

› Chilling effect on reaching out for help

› Abuser is not held accountable

› Ineffective remedies provided

› Message: You can do whatever you want and there will be no consequences
What if...

› Nancy described caring for a 3 year child in this manner?

› Nancy described caring for a disabled adult in this manner?

› Nancy’s financial situation was independent of her mother’s?
Entitlement and Exploitation

› Reframing experience through lens of:
  › Child
  › Disabled adult
  › Financial dependence

› Changes the understanding of caregiver abuse
Entitlement and Exploitation

Entitlement / Greed

Abuse, Neglect & Exploitation (Power & Control)

Elder Abuse
Characteristics of Perpetrators
Characteristics of Perpetrators

2008 National Institute of Justice Research

› Approx. 50% had prior criminal history
  • Approx. 25% prior case of domestic violence
  • 20% prior record for drug or alcohol related crime
  • 16% sentenced to prison for prior charge
  • 14% prior case for crime against a person (non-DV)
› 57% physical assault perpetrators were partners or spouses
› Over 1/3 were unemployed
› 40% were socially isolated


Characteristics of Perpetrators cont.

• Controlling
• Gatekeeper
• Isolating
• Overly involved
• Dismissive
• Financially dependent
• History of gambling and/or substance abuse addiction
• History of mental illness
• Unusual relationship with victim
How Ageism Fosters Elder Abuse
Example: Poughkeepsie, NY

› Dorothy Howie, 91, died at the hands of her 78-year-old niece, a retired nurse
  › Dorothy was yelled at, kicked and struck by her niece’s hand so many times the niece’s hand became swollen and purple
  › Dorothy was left on the bathroom floor, naked, bleeding and unconscious for 9 hours before 911 was called

› Not one person attended the trial of the niece on Dorothy’s behalf
Juxtapose Dorothy’s death with these cases...

- 2-year old child abused and killed
  - Outpouring of community grief
  - Massive reports of case in the media

- Dog savagely beaten and killed
  - Postings on social media helped ID the killer
  - Massive reports of case in the media

- No media outrage in Dorothy’s case....or much media coverage at all....**WHY?**
# Ageism: Discrimination and stereotyping based on age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overt</th>
<th>Subtle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Typical banter in media, popular culture is frequently negative towards older people</td>
<td>• Talking to the person accompanying someone to an appointment vs. the older person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Jokes on memory loss or other normal signs of aging</td>
<td>• Age is equated with incompetence; sadness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Boundless anti-aging products / messaging</td>
<td>• Ignoring older adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Too old” for haircut, clothes, etc.</td>
<td>• Language use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Wrinkles are ugly</td>
<td>• Having a “Senior moment”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Spoken to in condescending way as if speaking to a child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Internalized ageism: Extent in which older adults take on the social norms that devalue or marginalize older persons

› Shame and embarrassment at being old

› Don’t reveal true age

› Feel they don’t deserve help; believe they are a burden

› Ashamed to ask for help
The Old Bag You’ll Actually Love.
Ageism

› Way in which older adults become invisible, less relevant in the eyes of others

› Need to address ageist attitudes and biases in culture / ourselves
  › “Youth adoring” culture

› When older adult feels devalued, leads to physical and mental health problems

› If no value placed upon older person, then no qualms about taking advantage of them...thus, the connection between ageism and elder abuse
Strategies to Combat Ageism

1. Remove phrases like ‘I’m too old for that’ from your vocabulary

2. Embrace the age you are at!

3. De-segregate age separation - When older and younger are in close proximity, real relationships form and ageist stereotypes leave

4. Support phased-retirement programs which offer more flexible work arrangements for older employees – continue to contribute skills / knowledge to company and mentor younger employees

5. Talk to your legislators! Government funding of adult protective services needs to be equal to that of child protective services

https://thischairrocks.com
Strategies to Combat Ageism

6. Avoid ageist comments and jokes; Speak up against ageism

7. Don’t ignore older people

8. Call aging relatives, older friends and/or neighbors

9. Invite an older adult to do something i.e. tea, walk, event

10. Wear purple on June 15th – World Elder Abuse Awareness Day; Attend MEJC’s World Elder Abuse Awareness Day Conference June 5, 2019 - Minneapolis

https://thischairrocks.com
If You Suspect Someone is an Abuser
Reporting Abuse

› Share our suspicions, talk to someone!

› Make a report:
  › To emergency services – 9-1-1
  › To law enforcement
  › To adult protection
  › To an advocacy organization
MN Adult Abuse Reporting Center (MAARC)

1-844-880-1574

› 24-hour, toll free, state-wide

› MAARC routes to appropriate investigative agency

› Voluntary reports can be made anonymously
The Minnesota Elder Justice Center
www.elderjusticemn.org

Mobilizing communities to prevent and alleviate abuse, neglect and financial exploitation of older and vulnerable adults.

› Public Awareness
› Professional Education
› Public Policy
› Direct Service
Thank you!

“The moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; and those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly.”

Hubert Humphrey